

## CROSS-CULTURAL MUSICAL TRANSFORMATION: SHAPING CHINESE TRADITIONS

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### Summary

This article endeavors to thoroughly examine the processes of Western influence on Chinese musical culture, focusing on the perspectives of prominent figures within the Chinese composer-performer tradition. Specifically, it highlights the role of Westernization as a means of shaping musical concepts in the works of Fei Shi, Ou Man, Qing Zhu, and Zeng Zhizhi. Furthermore, it acknowledges that a substantial number of music scholars pursue education abroad with the intention of delving into Western musical experiences and engaging with the resources of Western musical culture and the arts. Upon their return, whether they adopt a “Westernized” or “reformed” approach, they are actively contributing to the practical development of their own musical culture and innovative musical ideas. It is revealed that the processes of Westernization primarily occurred through the efforts of individual representatives within the Chinese community. The article highlights their practical actions involving the adaptation and creation of contemporary styles and forms within Chinese musical culture.

**Key words:** Western influence, Chinese musical culture, Westernization, Prominent figures, Musical concepts.

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### 1. Introduction

**Statement of the issue.** In the contemporary era, China is actively engaging in communication with various countries across the globe, spanning a wide spectrum of economic, cultural, ideological, and political domains. This interaction extends to areas such as music and art. With shifts in its national policies, China has embraced greater openness to the world. A considerable number of Chinese students are pursuing education in foreign countries to gain exposure to new fields of science, fresh cultural perspectives, and novel ideas, with the aim of enriching their national outlook and contributing to the advancement of their nation. Simultaneously, in today's globalized society, a pertinent question emerges regarding the impact of Western musician on Easter musical culture.

**Research analysis.** Through a comprehensive examination and scrutiny of the contributions made by Chinese music pedagogues in historical contexts, a particular perspective has emerged among scholars. It posits that Chinese music culture and art exhibit distinctions in structural aspects compared to their Western counterparts. This article offers an alternative viewpoint. Drawing on the legacy of musical traditions handed down by predecessors, it substantiates that the evolution of Chinese music is marked by an eclectic developmental trajectory.

In the realm of musical artistry, the early 20th century witnessed a convergence of Chinese and Western musical influences, giving rise to innovative compositions and significant theoretical treatises (*Bian Mei, 1996: 34-37*). Concurrently, as Chinese students increasingly

pursued education abroad, Chinese music began assimilating external ideas, thereby fostering the growth of indigenous musical forms. This endeavor, propelled by extensive research undertaken by precursors, notably facilitated the assimilation and practical implementation of polyphonic choral music and fundamental music theory within China.

Subsequently, individuals garnered invaluable educational experiences. The pioneering foreign students who spearheaded the infusion of Western musical culture included Shen Xingun – who studied in Japan in 1902, Li Shutun – Japan, 1905; Zhen Zhixin – Japan, 1901; Gao Shaotian, Fen Yaxun – Japan, 1905 and others. “In the year 1840, the Opium War jolted ancient China from its slumber, a state in which it had been dreaming of the “Celestial Kingdom” (Terner, 1983: 56). Some Chinese began to recognize the power of their adversaries and the advanced weaponry and technology of the West. As their eyes opened to perceive the world, a group of insightful individuals sought to elevate the nation by learning from the “barbarians” in order to guide them for the salvation of their country. These forward-thinking individuals embarked on a mission to propel the nation to a new level. Wei Yuan's book “Illustrated Treatise on the Maritime Kingdoms” systematically introduced Western science and technology and advocated the idea of “learning from the barbarians to control the barbarians” (Tan, 2014: 56-59). Subsequently, the Westernization Movement transformed the concept of learning from the West into practical implementation within Chinese society.

**The purpose of this article** is to ascertain the influence of Western musical culture on the development of Chinese music by examining the insights and ideas put forth by Chinese musicians.

**The research methodology** involves the application of systematic-structural and analytical methods to identify the dynamics of changes in the context of the westernization of Chinese art. It also employs the functional method to investigate the transformations that have occurred in this process and the role of the traditional component within its structure.

According to this, the research tasks have been defined as follows: to conduct an analysis of the history of the Westernization of Chinese art, including music, taking into account key events, figures, and trends; to study the influence of Western music theory and practice on the development of Chinese musical tradition and compositional methods; to analyze the activities of individual artists in the context of the researched issue.

## 2. The influence of foreign musical currents

In the realm of music, Western musical culture began to proliferate in China alongside the expansion of Western churches during the era of colonialism. The missionary activities conducted by Christian churches in China, along with the establishment of missionary schools, served as pivotal means of disseminating Western music in the country. Chinese intellectuals recognized the advancement of Western music education and its culture (Bian Mei, 1996). In 1896, Emperor Guangxu sent a considerable number of foreign students to Japan. Subsequently, the number of foreign students studying in Japan sharply increased in the following years. Some historical documents record that the peak of education in Japan for Chinese students occurred in 1906 (Wang Yue, 2005). This period was viewed by the Chinese as a form of Western education in the East. During this period, after returning from their studies abroad, students utilized Japanese, European, or American melodies to blend with their own lyrics when composing songs. An illustrative example is the original “School Music Song”. The dissemination of “school music” compelled the widespread popularization of Western music theory in China as well (Lyan Khaydun, 2005).

Since then, the number of Chinese scholars traveling abroad has gradually increased. They engage in the interpretation of what they have seen, felt, and learned. Some scholars also exhibit a keen interest in foreign musical culture. They collect foreign documents, acquaint themselves with Western musicians, and delve into music theory from the West. Thus, the development of contemporary Chinese cultural policies has played a pivotal role in facilitating and expediting the process of modernizing Chinese musical culture.

At the outset, the musical concepts of Chinese musicians began to take shape predominantly during their educational experiences in Japan. During that period, musical education in Japan was heavily influenced by the adoption of advanced musical ideas from Europe and the United States. Consequently, Chinese musicians who studied in Japan initially experienced this influence indirectly, but gradually, Western musical ideas started to permeate China. Regardless of whether it pertained to music teaching methodologies, teacher training, the role of music, music theory, or other aspects, all absorbed the core principles of progressive Western music education.

Influence from the trends in music education in Europe and North America during the 18th and 19th centuries played a certain role, particularly in the ideological aspects, in shaping contemporary Chinese music educators (*Terner, 1983*).

In the 18th century, Europe was undergoing a gradual dismantling of the feudal, slave-based society, and concurrently, the Enlightenment movement was gaining momentum. The Enlightenment era involved a struggle against feudal serfdom and attempts to build a new capitalist system. As capitalist economics developed, there was a swift rise in people's demands for cultural and entertainment activities, including music, and a growing appreciation for musical education, which rapidly evolved during this period. During this epoch, European music progressed most rapidly and flourished in countries such as Great Britain, France, Germany, and Italy. Similarly, American musical education was also quite advanced and continued to develop during this era.

### **3. The new generation of Chinese musicians and their thoughts**

During the 18th and 19th centuries, European and American musical ideologies were at the forefront in terms of educational concepts, teaching methods, resources, and teacher training. This had an impact on certain Asian countries and, to some extent, influenced modern music education in China, especially among students who studied abroad, playing a pivotal role in the development of contemporary Chinese music and education.

Many Chinese students traveled to Japan to study music in both specialized music institutions and regular schools. After the establishment of the Republic of China, some of them ventured to Europe, the birthplace of Western music. Figures such as Xiao Yumei, Wang Guanci, Zhenzhu, Huang Ji, and others received comprehensive and systematic musical education in Europe and America. Whether in Japan, Europe, or the United States, Chinese scholars eagerly and tirelessly delved into Western musical art. During their studies, they made choices not only based on personal preferences and hobbies but also with the idea of grasping the current state of musical art, which could uplift national spirit and safeguard the country from potential threats. Most of them later became advocates and founders of compositional schools and music education in contemporary China, aligning with their initial goals and motivations for studying musical art. Here are some representatives of these new contemporary Chinese musicians.

#### 4. Westernization faction

Fei Shi, Ou Man, Qing Zhu, Zeng Zhizhi, and others believed that the central concept lay in pursuing full Westernization and creating universally beautiful music that could be understood worldwide.

Fei Shi, Chen Shi (1884–1959), published “The Theory of Perfecting Chinese Music” in 1903, an essay in which he strongly criticized the shortcomings of traditional Chinese music. He argued that traditional Chinese music was 'desperately devoid of the spirit of progress and asserted that both ancient and contemporary Chinese music had nothing to offer. He advocated for the complete adoption of Western music and Western music education in China, using the energetic implementation of Western music education in Japan after the Meiji Restoration as an example. He stated that Western music is beneficial, and it can promote the idea of national progress. “Fei Shi believed that both Japanese and European music should be fully embraced and incorporated. He emphasized, 'Only by uprooting the old can we introduce innovation, and only after music is fully Westernized can China's national character be improved’; for this reason, he firmly stressed, “so I must change my words regarding the issue of perfecting music, saying: “Western music is good, Western music is good!” (Berger & Hsiao, 1988: 53).

Chen Shi's musical theory, proposed in the early 20th century in the Chinese music industry, was dubbed as 'total Westernization.' The style and tone of his articles, which denigrated traditional Chinese music while praising Japanese and Western music, were highly intense and representative of the typical debates within the Westernization school at the time. It was a stance of “belonging to the minority, not the majority” (Bian Mei, 1996). He criticized China's feudal hierarchy based on the 'three, six, nine' system and believed that music should belong to the masses. Therefore, he advocated for the development of Western instruments that were 'simple but not simple,' meaning they had a complex appearance but were easy to play, and people could understand their sound on a profound level. Western music, in his view, had a positive spirit. Western music could alter a person's character.

Chen Shi's musical theory, introduced in the early 20th century within the Chinese music industry, can be described as “complete Westernization”. The style and tone of his articles were highly intense, denigrating traditional Chinese music while extolling Japanese and Western music. This approach typified the debates within the broader Westernization movement of that era. Chen Shi advocated for a position of “belonging to the minority, not the majority” (Bian Mei, 1996). He criticized China's feudal hierarchy, particularly the “three, six, nine” system, and argued that music should belong to the masses. As a result, he called for the development of Western instruments that were “simple but not simplistic”, meaning they would have a complex appearance but be easy to play, allowing people to grasp their sound deeply. Chen Shi believed that Western music had a positive spirit and the potential to influence a person's character.

Zeng Zhizhi (1879–1929), also known as Zelin, was a Chinese music educator and theorist. He was born and raised in Shanghai. During his studies in Japan in 1901, he became interested in the new Japanese music, leading him to enroll in the Tokyo Conservatory. Zeng Zhizhi was deeply influenced by the discursive environment of Japanese music education during the Meiji period. While in Japan, he actively participated in cultural activities and organized various music events. Upon his return to China in 1907, he focused on promoting Western music theory in China, making a significant contribution in this regard. Zeng Zhizhi founded an orchestra with nearly 40 members, becoming the first relatively comprehensive Western-style orchestra established by Chinese individuals in modern China. He emphasized the idea of “creating new music for China”. In his translation and publication of the “Preface to the Music Textbook” in

1904, which marked the initial stage of the “school music song” period, he proposed moral and intellectual education, aesthetic and parallel physical education, highlighting the educational function of music.

Zeng Zhizhi's musical ideas were mainly formed during his studies in Japan. He believed that music was all-powerful and played a positive role in advancing education, politics, family life, and the cultivation of human nature. Zeng Zhizhi argued that Western theory served as a prerequisite for the study of music, composition, instrumental music performance, and vocal singing. He was the first music educator in my country to propose the simultaneous development of moral, intellectual, physical, and aesthetic education.

## 5. Conclusions

Through the analysis and exploration of the personal thoughts and works of Chinese musicians, this article demonstrates that the development of Chinese music does not occur in isolation. This article also affirms this perspective. Since the emergence of religion, wars, and waves of studying abroad in China, Western music has had a subtle influence on the development of Chinese music, contributing to its growth and refinement, significantly enhancing the international presence of Chinese music.

The development of the musical culture of any nation, whether it is Eastern or Western musical culture, cannot be isolated; it forms and evolves gradually through repeated interactions, exchanges, and fusion over an extended period. Chinese musical culture in the new era must continue to inherit and deepen the materials of traditional musical culture while absorbing nourishment from global musical culture, primarily Western. All forms of musical compositions, performance styles, languages of musical art, and more are affected. A large number of musicology students studying abroad do so to learn from the musical experiences and artistic resources of Western musical culture. Upon returning from their studies, regardless of whether they are “Westernized” or “reformed,” they are on the path of practically developing their own musical culture and ideas. They are all influenced by the techniques of music creation based on Western music theory. Therefore, refining the concepts of Chinese musical thought and its cultural foundation provides enormous space for the development of Chinese music.

Under the influence of Western musical culture, contemporary Chinese music has not only retained its unique direction but has also risen to new heights by absorbing the advantages of Western music. In modern China, there is a complete practice of combining Chinese and Western music theory. For instance, the music theory used in college entrance examinations adopts the Western system of music theory, and Chinese compositions also appear in tonality analysis.

The development and integration of Chinese music with Western music theory have been beneficial, enriching the diversity and creativity of Chinese music. This blending of cultures continues to propel the evolution of Chinese music in the global context.

Chinese students have made a significant contribution to the exchange of music and culture. Upon their return from studying abroad, they brought back countless advanced and wonderful Western musical cultures. They closely linked these advanced cultures and new artistic expressions with traditional Chinese ones. The fusion of musical culture and art in our country has reached new heights, promoting the development of musicology in China. Thanks to them, we see how the dawn of the Chinese nation joins the global music stage.

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