THE 2007 HOEFE PRIZES

FOR EXCELLENCE IN UNDERGRADUATE WRITING

IN RECOGNITION OF WRITING ACHIEVEMENT IN THE
UNDERGRADUATE FIELD OF STUDY

STANFORD UNIVERSITY

MAY 23, 2007
Music in U.S.-China Diplomacy

CLAIRE LIU

History 256
History of U.S.-China Relations

GORDON H. CHANG
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
Music is often referred to as a universal language. Humans express their thoughts, emotions, and aspirations through various mediums of music. It serves to manifest both individual and collective identities and has united people. On this principle, music can also be telling of the differences that separate people. The power of music to unify and divide is nowhere more apparent than between the peoples of two countries striving to understand each other for over a century.

China and the United States have a lengthy musical history accompanying their diplomatic history. One could even argue that for most Chinese, exposure to Western music preceded encounters with Americans themselves. However, it is important to understand that China’s introduction to American music stems from a general introduction to Western culture and music by the Jesuits during the 16th and 17th centuries. Music was elemental in missionary education. As foreign powers defeated China in the first of three Opium Wars, the Treaty of Nanjing in 1842 forced China to surrender complete access to select treaty ports, one of which was Shanghai. ¹ Having unique geographic status and immunity to domestic Chinese policies, Shanghai became a hub for foreign economies, culture, and music to flourish. Shanghai developed a reputation for being the “Paris of the East.”

Meanwhile, the fall of the Qing dynasty to mark the end of imperialism and widespread social ferment led to the May 4, 1919 Movement to reform society and build a renewed nation-state.² Alongside the May 4th Movement was another one started by a new generation of musicians and educators, many of whom were trained in music schools

in Europe and Japan or had listened to western music. They aimed to build a modern infrastructure in China complete with western music education. This movement was largely shaped by influential figures, among them Xiao Youmei, Li Delun, and Tan Shuzhen.

Throughout history, music served different purposes for both Americans and Chinese. Some used it to spread religion. Some used it to express liberation while skirting on the edge of rebellion. Some deemed it a necessary component of reforming antiquated systems of education in a society that needed modernizing. Finally, some used music in conjunction with politics. A common theme between them is the controversy they created, polarizing those who believed in a modern, as opposed to traditional, identity for China. Consequently, music was prone to the ups and downs of politics in the 20th century.

This paper seeks to identify interactions between Americans and Chinese through music during the 20th century that carry significance for US-China relations. Three episodes are worth examining to highlight the function music played in exchange. They are the Chinese Jazz Age of the 20s and 30s, Chinese-American diplomacy through western music during the time of Nixon and Kissinger’s leadership, and cultural exchange after the US officially recognized Beijing. Though music and politics are vastly different means of discourse, these events reveal that they may be used for similar purposes. Moreover, as China and the United States grow politically and economically more dependent, music has also increasingly been used as an agent for promoting relations between the two nations.
Early Road to Jazz

One of the first direct musical encounters between Americans and Chinese was through the advent of quintessential American music, jazz. The Chinese Jazz Age resulted from unique internal and external influences in Shanghai during an opportune period. Domestically, the pressure by Chinese musicians to modernize coincided with political, intellectual, and social revolution spawned by the May 4th movement. Many elite musicians preferred western culture to the obsolete traditional doctrines of Chinese society. Among these elites was a man educated in Germany named Xiao Youmei. Xiao had an eclectic background. A native of Guangdong province in southern China, he was son to a respected Confucian scholar, grew up in the Portuguese colony of Macao, and became influenced by interesting friends and neighbors. They included a Portuguese minister who introduced him to classical music and Sun Yat-Sen, the revolutionary who introduced Xiao to politics and nationalism. With Sun Yat-sen’s help, Xiao received a scholarship to study piano and composition at the Leipzig Music Academy in 1912, ultimately returning to China in 1921 where he supported the May 4th movement.

Xiao Youmei believed that Chinese music was a stale product of ‘‘a thousand years of stagnation,’’ a tradition ‘at a standstill.” Mechanically, he defined the music in terms of what it lacked, which included a tempered scale, functional harmony, counterpoint, orchestration, standardized notation, and engineered instruments like the piano. These were all qualities of western music worth emulating. Western music, according to Xiao and his supporters, was the result of superior technology, better

---

5 Jones: 25
institutions, and higher standards for practice and performance. A select population was ready to embrace new sounds, especially foreign ones.

At the same time, musicians, intellectuals, and even Xiao himself, desired to preserve Chinese culture. They innovated by modernizing Chinese instruments using western technologies rather than replacing them with new instruments. Xiao believed that music served the most important objective of constructing a modern, national identity. Liang Qichao, a cautiously observing intellectual, considered music a means of “‘aesthetic education,’ a method by which the intellectuals and moral ‘quality of citizenry’ could be elevated to advance the nationalistic cause.”

When Chinese musicians listened to foreign music, they observed and favored polyphonies, functional harmonies, and orchestration of particular genres because it represented what they believed was “forward thinking.” This is how the American staple, jazz, became popular in modernizing China in the 1920s and 30s.

East Meets West through the Gramophone

Jazz first impressed China in Shanghai. As colonial commerce trafficked through the port during the 20th century, global migration followed. Russians, French, Germans, Italians, Japanese, and Americans carved out their territories and established businesses. A Frenchman named Labansat introduced the gramophone to the streets of Shanghai, earning money from passersby who paid for a listen sampling from the curious machine. In 1908 Labansat set up a recording company called Pathé Orient, a subsidiary of a multinational. Pioneering the record industry, Pathé Orient initially recorded Peking

---

operas for sale. The company quickly began recording and manufacturing a new genre of music in the popular song form. The recording industry helped incorporate music into a culture of decadent production and consumption. It turned music into a portable material object and offered an alternative context for music and musicians. This was the perfect medium for the rich sounds of jazz.

The recording industry allowed more accessibility to entertainment through sound and congregation. Following Pathé Orient, major recording companies such as RCA-Victor moved in and operated recording and manufacturing facilities in Shanghai. They then used Shanghai to distribute records throughout China and Southeast Asia. Mass music culture evolved as commercial department stores and street retailers played a wide range of songs from Chinese opera to modern songs and jazz. The private enterprises and exhibitions of bourgeois class mobility which others in China despised were thus unique to Shanghai and played a crucial role in exposing Chinese people to new-fangled ideas infused in music.

Li Jinhui’s Legacy

Credited for sinifying jazz, Li Jinhui is an icon of modern Chinese popular music. Born in 1891 into a distinguished and liberal gentry family, he loved Western music at an early age. In addition to studying and teaching music, he would listen to jazz on the gramophone, or the “talking box” (hua xiäizi). He experimented with blending the sounds in jazz with traditional folk tunes. Between 1927 and 1936 he recorded hundreds of “modern songs” for companies like Pathé-EMI (merged), RCA-Victor, and Greater China. He also composed screen songs for fifteen popular entertainment films and led the first

---

7 Jones: 53-54
all-Chinese jazz big band at a posh Shanghai nightclub when previous performers were foreigners. He had great intentions to enlighten the masses with this non-elitist music, likening it to the literature of the common people.\(^8\)

He was also highly patriotic. A fervent educator for national interests, particularly those of children, he published a series of children’s operas intended to promote aesthetic education, good citizenship, and Mandarin as the national language. He considered himself a strong supporter of the May 4\(^{th}\) movement.

Ironically, other intellectuals of the movement criticized Li for indulging in popular music, which they considered to be decadent and vulgar. During the Cultural Revolution he was blamed for spreading “yellow” or “pornographic” music which tarnished national identity. His case exemplifies the associations people attached to particular types of music and the implications they had.

Despite his persecution during the Cultural Revolution, Li Jinhui left an incredible legacy of introducing elements of American music to Shanghai audiences. On one hand he was enamored with world music, media, and the culture that jazz embodied, attempting to bring it to as many people as possible. On the other hand he believed in the May 4\(^{th}\) ideology that nationalism was the paramount concern for China’s future. Bridging these two passions, he allowed American music to influence the Chinese.

Though he was influential, Li Jinhui borrowed from a larger scene of early social encounters. The Chinese Jazz Age in Shanghai was particularly interesting because it was the result of two unconventional populations that appealed to one another. A potpourri of cultures assembled from colonialism, Shanghai was truly global in the sense that people

---

crossed oceans and continents to pursue economic opportunities. Residents of Shanghai needed to manifest their multicultural, capitalist qualities through progressive literature, music, and lifestyles.

Jazz music answered to these needs. At upscale nightclubs and dancehalls, American bands frequently performed live for the enjoyment of Shanghai residents, many of whom were Chinese. Created by African-Americans vocalizing their passage into modernity, jazz personified physical mobility and emotional liberation via the Underground Railroad and migration to the urban North. It was an active form of music which liberated its performers and listeners alike. Jazz represented creation, improvisation, and the individual voice. It animated ideals which spoke to Shanghai’s culture of modernity, capitalism, and globalization.

Just as jazz fed the desires of Shanghai residents, Chinese and European audiences in Shanghai also appreciated an inherent diversity in jazz which Hollywood and conservative Americans disregarded. The two had an intimate relationship resulting from policies. The poet Langston Hughes observed on his 1933 trip to Shanghai:

"[Shanghai] seemed to have a weakness for American negro performers. The sparkling Nora Holt had just completed a long engagement at the Little Club shortly before I arrived, singing and playing at the piano her intriguing versions of French and American songs. The younger radio singer, Midge Williams, and her dancing brothers had been in China that spring, too. Other performers that Shanghai loved were Valaida Snow, a kind of Josephine Bakeresque artist of stunning gowns and varied songs. Bob Hill’s band, Jack Carter’s band and Buck Clayton’s trumpet thrilled the international settlements…" \(^9\)

It is no surprise then that James Stanley, an American musician, lauded Shanghai for being a “Seventh Heaven for the Jazz musician.”

---

Early musical exchange between the two cultures began with the novelty of jazz. Jazz was capable of speaking to a movement seeking modernity, free expression, and industrial music consumption. Those who listened admired the Americans for the values they must have which were made tangible through their music. Though Shanghai during this time presented a limited depiction of China’s exposure to music, this episode would open the door to more Western music. At the same time, several individuals returned to China from their musical educations abroad with visions of western classical music thriving in China.

The Faces of Western Classical Music in China

Classical music was essential in American diplomacy with China. But the presence of classical music in China has a lengthy history that begins in Europe. After the Jesuits initiated missionary activity and began venturing to rural regions, they established schools where education became a vehicle for the spread of Western music. Children at the missionary schools learned to play western instruments like the piano and violin. They learned about legendary European composers and listened to classical music. Around the same time, other forms of Western music, such as marching bands, emerged. Some military officials implemented the militant qualities of band music into their academies, claiming that Western music had a stimulating effect on a military weakened by the lethargic character of Chinese music.10

A few individuals helped shape the western music terrain in China as it first developed. One was Xiao Youmei, who is previously mentioned. He believed that

reforming Chinese music was critical for China’s future. Music would connect the Chinese people to the foreign world and help them improve themselves. He admired the Western music ideal yet did not wish to abandon Chinese music altogether. His system of incorporating Chinese melodies into Western harmony and music forms would preserve Chinese spirit and emotions for a new form of music called “national music.”

To promote his beliefs, he founded the first conservatory of music with another prominent music education advocate, Cai Yuanpei, in Shanghai on November 27, 1927. Cai Yuanpei had been the Minister of Education under Sun Yat-sen and was president of Peking University during the May 4th Movement. Despite an initial dearth of professors, the initial team managed to hire a few outstanding and well-respected musicians of Xiao’s generation who were all educated overseas. Among them were Zhou Shuan, one of the first Chinese women to study in the US, and a young composer named Huang Zi. Like Li Jinhui, both were born into established elite families and wanted to bring Western music to help their homeland.

Huang Zi believed his interest in Western music began when his mother sang him lullabies as an infant. Formally, he began his music education as a teenager at the Tsinghua School. The Tsinghua School was established following the anti-foreign, anti-Christian Boxer Rebellion of 1900. As the Qing Dynasty troops fell to a coalition of eight foreign powers, they were forced to pay reparations. The United States, which was among the coalition of foreign nations, subsequently invested a sum of Beijing’s payment to establish the Tsinghua School (now known as Tsinghua University) with the benevolent intent to prepare Chinese students for higher education in the States. It was at

---

11 Nelson: 94
Tsinghua that Huang Zi fell in love with Western music.

Attaining an opportunity following Tsinghua to study abroad at Oberlin College, Huang Zi followed his dream after Tsinghua. Although majoring in psychology to appease his father, he pursued his passion for music independently at Oberlin, which had a respected music department. After graduation, he enrolled in the Oberlin Conservatory to study music theory and composition. He continued his composition studies at Yale from where he graduated in 1929 and completed his graduation composition, a piece titled *In Memoriam*, written in mid-nineteenth century style romanticism. The work was performed at Yale’s Woodsey Hall by members of the New Haven Symphony and the Yale Symphony on May 31, 1929. It was the first symphonic work by a Chinese composer ever performed by an American orchestra. Huang’s experience working with American musicians landed him a position at the elite Shanghai Conservatory.\(^\text{13}\)

Social unrest caused by WWII made it difficult for conservatories and other music institutions to function regularly. Security deteriorated in Shanghai. Xiao Youmei moved the school every few months to new sanctuaries. Many students and faculty fled Shanghai to safer areas at the request of their worried families. Huang Zi became ill with paratyphoid and passed away after seeking refuge and recovery in Hong Kong.

But at a sorry time for the country and for the music institutions, a young man named Li Delun enrolled at the Shanghai Conservatory in 1940. He came from a well-off Muslim family plagued with political scandal. Finding solace in Western classical music, he began taking piano lessons during his early teens in Beijing. He also seized every opportunity to attend concerts, see Hollywood movies, and listen to classical music spots on the radio stations intended for foreigners. Entering the Shanghai Conservatory, he

\(^{13}\) Nelson: 109
regularly attended Shanghai Municipal Orchestra concerts and invested time into studying conducting.

While Li Delun fortified his cultural education, China followed a different path. A decade later, Mao Zedong led the Communist Revolution to gain political control over the Nationalists. However, policy disasters like the Great Leap Forward and corrupt leaders like the Gang of Four resulted in political turmoil and international isolation for China during the 1950s. Deciding it was time to rid the country of “liberal bourgeoisie” who contaminated Communist thought and class struggle, Mao launched China into the Cultural Revolution, during which intellectuals, revolutionary elders, and artists—including musicians—were purged.14

The prospect of the Cultural Revolution’s impacts on music institutions was unfortunate. However, to effectively control the arts without destroying it entirely, the Communist Party, largely influenced by Jiang Qing, established a new socialist order which created the Hundred Flowers movement. It was based on the ironic concept that if you let a hundred flowers bloom, a hundred different ideas would exist—so long as they were compatible with Communist Thought. The Central Philharmonic Society was created in 1965 in response to Jiang Qing’s wishes for culture and arts education through the Party, and Li Delun was appointed its conductor due to his extensive conducting experience.15 Li Delun was strategically poised for music diplomacy. However, during China’s period of isolation lasting nearly two decades, communication between the People’s Republic of China and the United States dissolved. It was not until the early 1970s that the leaders of both nations envisioned re-building a relationship.

Real Music Diplomacy

Henry Kissinger and Richard Nixon began establishing diplomatic dialogue with Zhou Enlai and Mao Zedong in 1971 after a period of long frozen relations. In an October 5, 1970 article published by Time Magazine, Richard Nixon professed that he wanted to improve relations with Beijing. "Maybe that role won't be possible for five years, maybe not even ten years. But in 20 years it had better be, or the world is in mortal danger. If there is anything I want to do before I die, it is to go to China. If I don't, I want my children to."16 Nevertheless, it took more than political ambition to realize this dream, as Zhou Enlai’s warm reception of the American Ping Pong team at the World Table Tennis championship in Japan marked the beginning of “ping pong diplomacy.” Receiving a surprise invitation from the Premier for an all-expense paid visit to the PRC, the American Ping Pong team became the first American group allowed into the PRC since 1949.17 Sports, not politics, significantly paved the way for the first visit by an American president to Beijing.

In similar soft-power fashion, Zhou Enlai suggested to Li Delun that the Central Philharmonic should perform for Henry Kissinger on his second trip to Beijing in October 1971. Premier Zhou even suggested to Maestro Li, “Kissinger’s German. You should play Beethoven.”18 Zhou was eager to appeal to Kissinger’s tastes and hoped that playing a German composer’s work for the German-American Secretary of State would do the trick. He believed music could represent the common interest and values between the American and Chinese leaders.

16 "I Did Not Want the Hot Words of TV" TIME Magazine, Time Inc. Oct 5, 1970
Though the Central Philharmonic excelled at Beethoven’s *Fifth Symphony*, Jiang Qing and her musical advisor, Yu Huiyong, were opposed to the idea of its performance. Yu Huiyong, a graduate of Shanghai Conservatory, held posts as professor in the National Music department and head of Shanghai’s Culture Bureau. According to him, the doomed fatalist theme of the *Fifth* seemed inappropriate for Communist China. They further decided that the political insinuations surrounding Napoleon, the subject of the *Third*, was not an ideal selection either. Eventually the Central Philharmonic settled on Beethoven’s *Sixth Symphony* for reportedly being about land and nature, though Maestro Li considered adding that it was actually about landlord’s property.

Though Jiang Qing and Yu Huiyong preferred not having a performance of Beethoven at all, they acquiesced to Zhou’s eager wishes. However, determined not to give way completely to the Americans, Jiang Qing insisted on treating Kissinger to a Peking Opera performance. Kissinger later described the model opera as “an art form of truly stupefying boredom in which villains were the incarnation of evil and wore black, good guys wore red, and as far as I could make out the girl fell in love with a tractor.”

Nixon’s visit also called for a personalized repertoire selection. Since Nixon was not German, he was not treated to Beethoven, but a unique version of *Home on the Range* instead. He was also invited by Jiang Qing to an opera performance called *The Red Detachment of Women*. Though Nixon found Jiang Qing “abrasive and aggressive,” he enjoyed the performance. He was particularly impressed by “its dazzling technical and theatrical virtuosity. Jiang Qing had been undeniably successful in her attempt to create a

---

19 Nelson: 238
consciously propagandistic theater piece that would both entertain and inspire its audience.’’

It is apparent through these interactions that although this diplomatic exchange occurred cordially and with good intentions, Americans and Chinese still had much to learn about each other.

_Ushering in an Era of Music Diplomacy, Welcoming the Philadelphia Orchestra_

When the Shanghai Communiqué sealed Zhou and Kissinger’s diplomatic attempts, it laid the foundation for furthering “people-to-people contacts and exchanges in areas in such fields as science, technology, culture, sports, and journalism” that were mutually beneficial. Music would be no exception in this effort of opening up to the West. It was on the government’s agenda for modernization. Zhou Enlai, who was considered more progressive than Mao, advocated a series of measures promoting musical discourse.

In 1972, following the signing of the Communiqué, Zhou invited the American pianists Frances and Richard Hadden to perform in Beijing. Zhou covertly sympathized with these Americans because of their socialist connections years ago living in the city of Wuhan. Though the concert was not open to the public, it had significant meaning as the first classical music performance by foreigners after the Cultural Revolution. A few months later Premier Zhou granted permission to radio stations to play foreign music. These actions proved to be controversial, for they were met with criticism by Jiang Qing for their associations with the liberal qualities of the Western world. She disapproved,

---

22 “Joint Communiqué of the United States of America and the People's Republic of China.” February 27, 1972
saying that no one should ever assume that decadent sounds could be played on Chinese radio for diplomatic reasons.23

Following these events, foreign musical ensembles began visiting China concert halls. The London Philharmonic Orchestra and the Vienna Philharmonic, two of the world’s most renowned orchestras, toured and collaborated with members of the inner Chinese music circles. These international orchestras paved the path for Zhou’s ultimate goal, which was to improve diplomatic relations with the United States. The pinnacle of these encounters took place during September 1973 when the Philadelphia Orchestra, led by the legendary Eugene Ormandy, visited China. Zhou and Jiang Qing had remembered Eugene Ormandy’s support when he helped to raise money for the medical service of China’s Communist Eighth Route Army in a 1940 benefit.24 The tour drew immediate press attention from major news publications such as The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times, TIME Magazine and The Washington Post.

Li Delun planned a warm welcome for the American group. Approved by Zhou Enlai, the Central Philharmonic Chorus sang America the Beautiful – in English.25 The scene, as one can imagine, symbolized a momentous camaraderie which moved many Americans to tears. A generous gesture, it eased the lingering fears they had about visiting the intimidating Communist country. Music had such a magic that allowed the musicians, acting essentially as diplomats, to joke about fundamental differences between

---

24 Nelson: 268
25 Nelson: 268
the two nations. On one occasion, a group of musicians frivolously circled Maestro Li exclaiming that he was being ambushed by capitalism.26

The Tour itself included some sold out performances, four concerts in Beijing and two in Shanghai, and also a chance for the Philadelphia Orchestra to sit in during one of the Central Philharmonic’s rehearsals. The repertoire for the first two Beijing concerts comprised of symphonies by conventional classical composers as Mozart, Brahms, and the American composer Roy Harris. Tactfully chosen encores were the pieces *March of the Workers and Peasants*, a popular Chinese Revolutionary song suggested to Maestro Ormandy by Zhou Enlai, and John Philip Sousa’s *Stars and Stripes Forever.*27

Initial cultural adjustments aside, the orchestra members were thrilled to be in China during an optimistic period. When the Philadelphia Orchestra attended Li Delun’s rehearsal with the Central Philharmonic, the Philharmonic played a delightful folk piece *Moon Reflected on Erquan Spring* and the first movement of Beethoven’s *Fifth*. After the first movement, Mr. Li unexpectedly turned the baton over to Mr. Ormandy asking him if he would do the honors conducting the 2\textsuperscript{nd} movement. Paul Hume of *The Washington Post* commented, “Those who were listening to the rehearsal said that suddenly the Chinese orchestra began to take on some characteristics of the Philadelphia Orchestra,”28 as if to say the musicians of the Central Philharmonic had enormous potential, or that Mr. Ormandy had a commanding presence. Afterward the musicians exchanged exorbitant amounts of gifts in the form of music scores, instruments, and old record collections.

---

26 Nelson: 269
Then, Jiang Qing suddenly announced that she would attend the third Beijing concert. Thus changes in the program were made to accommodate her liking. The program included Beethoven’s *Sixth* to replace the *Fifth*, the *Yellow River Piano Concert* starring Yin Chengzong, and Respighi’s *Pines of Rome*, a wildly popular piece in the west. Li Delun noticed that Jiang Qing was dismayed by the latter piece. Under the assumption that it was about pine trees, she was appalled by the confrontational passages mimicking military march.29

The Orchestra was highly praised nevertheless. Harold Schonberg, who chronicled their 6-concert tour for *The New York Times*, wrote favorably of banquets and warm receptions after every concert. Much publicity was given to the “continual development of better understanding between China and the United States,” as quoted by Ling Ling, the vice president of the Friendship Association, and toasts “to friendship with China” over lavish 11-course Peking duck meals. Boris Sokoloff, the orchestra’s manager, remarked “The response has been overwhelming. The hospitality and friendship are unbelievable. The Chinese went all out for us. They are a warm, friendly, delightful people, no question about it.”31 Mr. Ormandy added that he considered this “the most significant trip that the Philadelphia Orchestra has ever made.”32

At the inaugural concert, the orchestra experienced what they thought was a “lukewarm” audience reception though Schonberg qualifies that “Chinese audiences are notoriously reserved.” Public reception otherwise was greatly favorable. Renmin Ribao, a

---

newspaper member of the Communist Party, received a review from a member of the Chinese Central Philharmonic Society who described the Respighi as “brilliant in variations of tone and color.”\textsuperscript{33} The final concert of the tour ended with an encore performance of \textit{Stars and Stripes Forever}, evoking “a few yells from the audience. Observers here said that this reaction was unheard of.”\textsuperscript{34}

Jiang Qing was less enthused by the music than her civilians. She was extremely opinionated against what she considered bourgeois music and refused to listen to any of it, let alone learn about great composers who lived in eras when the bourgeoisie rose to power. Great composers such as Tchaikovsky, Schumann, and Debussy were ruled out, as was \textit{Pines of Rome}.

At the root of the problem was perhaps that she was unwilling to defer to Zhou Enlai for inviting three major orchestras to China while she considered herself the cultural arm of the Communist Party. She decided to punish Zhou Enlai’s music diplomacy initiatives by proclaiming that from now on China should receive minimal visits from arts groups of capitalist countries. This broadened into a campaign against all bourgeois music. The music, often without specific titles such as “Sonata” or “Symphony,” was criticized for not serving a particular class, which she believed all music should do.

Jiang Qing further exercised her authority over music diplomacy when the American musicians sought to understand the Chinese musicians. The Philadelphia Orchestra wrote Li Delun in 1974 requesting more information about the piece \textit{Moon Reflected on Erquan Spring} so the ensemble could authentically perform the scores they

\textsuperscript{34} Schonberg, Harold C. “Philadelphians a ‘Big Success’ In Their First Concert in China.” \textit{The New York Times}; Sep 15, 1973
had been given on their tour one year ago. Li subsequently consulted Jiang. Although the Culture and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs decided that the Philadelphia Orchestra should be able to perform the piece without political or ideological barriers, Jiang consulted Yu Huiyong, who had a different opinion. Li was forced to inform Ormandy that the arranger of the piece felt uncomfortable having the piece performed (which was false). He added, against his will, that if such a performance were to take place, it would not improve the friendship of the Chinese and American people. China never heard back from the Philadelphia Orchestra.35

Washington Post correspondent Stanley Karnow interpreted the change as part of a “renewed xenophobic trend” in which the Soviet Union and the United States were once again seen as negative influences.36 The Communist Party seemed to develop a strong sensitivity to the Respighi a few months after its performance. In newly published articles, the daily newspaper, Renmin Ribao, denounced western music for its “empty talk about contrasts and emotions as attempts to gloss over the class content of music works so as to pull the wool over the eyes of the masses.”37 Furthermore, another reporter, Jonathan Sharp, wrote on January 15, 1974:

The [People's Daily Paper] described the western classics as 'bourgeois' and lacking a ‘class content’ and suggested that it will never gain wide acceptance in China. The paper said that in the main ‘bourgeois’ classical works ‘did not reflect the ideological feelings of the proletariat and have nothing in common with the socialist system under the proletarian dictatorship.’ The paper, in effect, blacklisted Ludwig von Beethoven and Franz Schubert for their ‘bourgeois and capitalist mentality.’38

Some took the politics of music too seriously. Or they happened to use music to fuel their power plays. Politics, unfortunately, played a double edged sword in the

government’s endeavor to establish positive relations with America. Initially, high hopes for improving understanding allowed relations to piggyback off musical exchange. But despite the fact that, as Sharp noted, the “western orchestras played to packed houses, and won warm applause not only from the audiences but also from Chinese critics, who described the music in markedly non-political terms,” powerful figures such as Jiang Qing and Yu Huiyong perceived music as a political threat and ended an era of musical diplomacy.

When Mao died in 1976, Jiang Qing’s manipulation faded, the Gang of Four was arrested, and the Cultural Revolution ended. Li Delun began rebuilding his Central Philharmonic. The orchestra successfully performed Beethoven’s *Fifth* on March 26, 1977. The rapturous performance not only served as a milestone but also ushered in a new movement with new instruments, educational outreach activities, and more foreign exchanges.

Seiji Ozawa and the Boston Symphony Orchestra first initiated more foreign exchange in May of 1978. Ozawa, who is Japanese, was born in China and wanted to return. He became close friends with Li Delun during a trip back to Beijing at the end of 1976, which aided him in gaining an invitation to guest lead the Central Philharmonic in May 1978 featuring Chinese, Japanese and Western music. Perhaps China was ready for another formal dialogue with America through music.40

*Isaac Stern Goes to China*

---

Isaac Stern significantly influenced Americans’ relationship with China through means of music. He had been interested in making a trip to China since rapprochement, knowing that relations between the two countries had momentous effect on the rest of the world. Echoing the curious sentiments and grand expectations of many, he personally requested in a written letter to Henry Kissinger:

I ask if it would be at all possible for you to help in a very long cherished desire on my part to visit mainland China and possibly play there. I have been intrigued by this land and its people for many years but the lack of diplomatic relations made direct requests impossible.

No one from the outside can know to what degree contacts of any kind are to be built up between the United States and China in the coming months, but were it possible for me to go, I would do everything to cooperate.41

In fact, even as a world class violinist, he was just like the majority of people in the United States who knew the bare minimum about China. Most of the impressions that people of Stern’s generation possessed about China were outdated by at least two decades. He later writes in his autobiography about his motivations:

I knew that China had one of the oldest cultures in the world, with ancient traditions in art, literature, and music; and that, despite the greatness of its culture, its people throughout the centuries had perished by the millions of starvation and at the hands of the warlords. Yet that country had somehow turned from bare subsistence into a land where everybody was clothed and housed and fed. It had gone from a country of misery and disunity to one of cohesion and direction, a singular accomplishment of Communist rule...That the destiny of so many hundreds of millions of people could be changed by a small band of believers fascinated me and made me want to see the country and meet the people.42

In 1979 following Beijing’s official recognition, he received an invitation to make a China tour, stopping through the Shanghai Conservatory.

Bringing with him a film crew to shoot the documentary *From Mao to Mozart*, Stern thanked the welcoming committee in Beijing. He carefully crafted the statement, “We have come here to meet with the Chinese people, to say hello through music, and as

musicians then friends.” He further writes in his book “I was using music as a kind of passport into the country.”

Initial footage shows beautiful lakes and mountains, imperial architectural treasures, and serene boating activity. Accompanied by traditional Chinese music, these scenes are particularly emotive to the American audience. They represent the dreamy landscape Americans have long associated with China, as well as the mystery surrounding modern China. They evoke images of a vast land which hold budding potential for American ideals per Henry Luce and his contemporaries.

Footage of the trip also includes fascinating clips with the Chinese orchestra playing *Oh, Susanna!* with traditional Chinese instruments such as the *erhu*, *pipa*, as well as western instruments like percussion drums. It reflected an effort on the part of the Chinese to please the Americans and to make them feel comfortable by playing familiar tunes but with their own instruments.

Stern spent a constructive portion of his trip giving master classes to students at the Shanghai conservatory. He noted the students’ playing, and possibly about the Chinese culture in general,

> Their approach to classical western music was somewhat limited. They were not accustomed to playing with passion and a variety of color. They had an old-fashioned, technical approach toward the manner in which they played their instruments, but with an almost instinct understanding and reaction to a given musical stimulus once they were shown what might be done.

The significance of this remark is two fold. It comments first on the education system and the fact that it is rooted in mechanical thought. The irony is that although

music is not intended to be mechanics, the Chinese precisely admired Western music for its technique and scientific advancement. Stern also makes note that with some prodding, the Chinese are fully capable of self expression the way Americans and Europeans are. He is sanguine about their future, and inherently justifies efforts by him and his fellow Americans to help them. “They had not had the experience of living with Western music for hundreds of years like we have.” “I was making them feel individually capable of accomplishing more than they were doing now,” he boasts.47

Stern’s trip highlighted other significant differences in thought between the Americans and Chinese. The Chinese seemed to associate music with economics and politics whereas Stern committed to his credo that music comes from the soul. At one point, Li Delun expressed his belief about the relationship between music and society.

It is my view that Mozart lived in an era when Europe was transferring from the feudal society into the modern industrial society. Capitalism already began to grow in the society at the time. He was a great musician, but because he already got rich from the feudal society and entered in the new state of social development which is capitalism.

To this Stern responded, “Well I’m not sure one could argue that the genius of Mozart had anything in particular to do with the economic and social development of that state of life at that time.”48

Yet, as Stern suggests, the Chinese have their specific means of expression. An erhu student taking a lesson with her teacher is thoroughly engaged in the lesson. Her teacher coaches her through the nuances of the melody, singing with varying facial expressions. They seem to have an innate understanding for traditional music which doesn’t apply to western music. Moreover, history does affect culture. When Stern’s crew

arrives in Shanghai, he distinguishes a “feeling of openness and informality in Shanghai that we associated with the atmosphere of a western city.” Stern was delighted to learn,

The audience in Shanghai had a longer tradition of attendance of concerts, and there was a kind of joyfulness that this was taking place. Once could feel it is a palpable force even during the performance. There was a give and take between us as we were playing and they were listening.

In his memoir, Stern writes, “To have visited China was to have experienced an entirely different world from the one we knew. But it was a world of human beings, toward whom we came to feel great warmth and with whom we ultimately shared a common language – the humanity of music.” Stern describes the Chinese as inquisitive, eager, and willing. He attributes enormous success to the concert with the Beijing orchestra. Toasts are offered in a series of banquets, reminiscent of the Philadelphia Orchestra’s trip not long ago. There is always a sense that music represents something greater than itself or the individual. People have used musical exchange to express their desire for friendship.

Music and culture are always entwined. Music embodies cultural values and directions of thought through sound and performance. Domestic politics and foreign relations are also intimately related as those in power continuously exercise it in interrelated ways. But the two spheres are often isolated from each other. We do not usually consider them mutually inclusive.

My investigation began as a search for perceptions of the other through music. From my findings, I have realized that music has actually played a much more active and noteworthy role in politics and exchange. Moreover, the role music has played in

connecting Americans with Chinese has grown. Over the course of the 20th century, it has become more accepted, more understood, and more appreciated for its ability to say what politics and economics cannot. Contemporary US-China relations are steeped in these hard structures, such as realism and capitalism that we often forget to consider the “softer” side of cross-cultural relations. History has shown that music relations are not only detached from political relations; they can be a large benefit.

The legacies of those like Xiao Youwei, Li Jinhui, the jazz musicians, Li Delun, and Isaac Stern are noticeable in present day relations. Orchestras regularly tour the other country, scholars exchange ideas, and young musicians are the next generation of cultural ambassadors. As music plays a greater role in US-China relations, Chinese and Americans will grow closer with understanding, giving homage to the pioneers who believed in the power of music from the beginning.

*   *   *

*   *   *
Bibliography


3. “I Did Not Want the Hot Words of TV.” TIME Magazine, Time Inc; Oct 5, 1970


6. People Column, TIME Magazine; July 23, 1973


