

# Past, Present, and Future: A Survey of Teaching and Scholarship on Western Music History in China

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## Past: The Reception and Study of Western Music in China to the 1970s

Changes in the understanding and reception of Western music by Chinese musicians and the Chinese general public parallel the modernization of Chinese society and culture. The introduction of Western music in China has a long history; the first stage dates back to the beginning of the seventeenth century or even earlier.<sup>1</sup> However, it was not until the end of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century that Western music actually became integrated with Chinese culture and had an effect upon China's musical life.

During the first half of the twentieth century, studies of Western music in China were mainly conducted on a rudimentary level of basic introductions to the music. Wang Guangqi (1891–1936), a pioneer of modern musicology and comparative musicology who studied and lived primarily in Germany, published a series of books in 1920s and 1930s about the history and culture of Western music in Chinese specifically for Chinese readers. He took advantage of his experience of living in Germany and his direct contact with the German musicological community in his writings, and thus he made great contributions to the theoretical and historical knowledge of Western music to Chinese people.<sup>2</sup> His monographs and articles on Western music provided not only a broad coverage of Western culture, but also demonstrated his

1. Tao Yabin, *Zhong Xi yinyue jiaoliu shigao* [A History of Musical Exchanges between China and Western Countries] (Beijing: Chinese Encyclopedia Press, 1994).

2. For example, *Ouzhou yinyue jinhualun* [The Evolution of European Music] (Shanghai: Chinese Book Press, 1924); *Xiyang yinyue yu shige* [Western Music and Poetry] (Shanghai: Chinese Book Press, 1924); *Dong Xi yuezhi zhi yanjiu* [Research on Music Systems of Eastern and Western Music] (Shanghai: Chinese Book Press, 1926); *Xiyang yueqi tiyao* [An Outline of Western Music Instruments] (Shanghai: Chinese Book Press, 1928); *Xiyang zhipuxue tiyao* [An Outline of Western Music Notation] (Shanghai: Chinese Book Press, 1929); and *Xiyang yinyueshi gangyao* [An Outline of Western Music History] (Shanghai: Chinese Book Press, 1937).

strong awareness of and reflections on musicological methodology. In addition to Wang, several Chinese scholars wrote popularizing essays and teaching treatises on Western music history, composers, and works to meet the needs of professional musical training and social education during the 1930s and 1940s. Among the most important of these were teachers and students in Shanghai National Academy of Music (later called the Shanghai Conservatory of Music), including Huang Zi (1904–1938), Qing Zhu (1893–1958), Liao Fushu (1907–2002), and Qian Renkang (b. 1914).

From the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 until the middle of 1960s, prior to the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, progress had been made on the study of Western music history in many aspects. Lectures and teaching programs conducted by experts from the Soviet Union and other socialist countries, including A. Kanjinsky from the Soviet Union, and Harry Goldschmidt from the Democratic Republic of Germany, were significant for Chinese scholars and students. Both of these scholars spent relatively long periods of time teaching in China. The contents of their lectures were transcribed, translated into Chinese, and published. Therefore they exerted a great influence on the reception and teaching of Western music history in China. These scholars generally used the perspectives and methodologies of Marxism and its ideological premises in their interpretations of music history, musical phenomena, and musical works.<sup>3</sup> As a result, they paid particular attention to the economic basis of music making, the social conditions in music history, and the class analysis of a musician's social identity.

Chinese scholars assimilated the scholarly achievements of the Eastern European socialist countries and other Western countries, and through professional teaching and scholarship by Chinese scholars, the teaching and study of Western music expanded and became firmly established in Chinese academic institutions. The faculty members in Central Conservatory of Music, Shanghai Conservatory of Music, Tianjin Conservatory of Music, and other conservatories were most important, among them are some celebrated professors with a thorough knowledge of both Western and traditional Chinese culture: Shen Zhibai (1904–1968), Miao Tianrui (1908–2009), Zhang Hongdao (b. 1913), Qian Renkang, and Xu Yongsan (1915–2000). Their writings, translations, and teaching practices were very influential for the next generations of Chinese teachers and scholars.

In the early 1960s, an important textbook on the history of Western music was written and edited by teachers in the Central Conservatory of Music under the direction of Zhang Hongdao. Formally published in 1983 under the

3. A. Kangjinsiji [Kanjinsky], *Xinyang yinyue tongshi, diyi ce, di'er ce* [A General History of Western Music, 2 vols.] (Beijing: Music Press, 1958, 1959) and H. Gedeshimite [Goldschmidt], *Deguo yinyue* [German Music] (Beijing: People's Music Press, 1959).

title *A History of European Music (Ouzhou yinyueshi)*,<sup>4</sup> it is a full-length, comprehensive history of music from ancient Greece to the early twentieth century. The book tried to apply a Marxist analysis of the development of human society for music history, and thus divided Western music history into periods such as “the ancient society of slavery,” “the feudalist society,” “the period of transition from the feudalist society to capitalist society,” and “the period of capitalism.” Western music after the turn of the twentieth century, however, was not included in the book.

Due to the radical political ideology of the period, various misunderstandings of and even attacks on Western music occurred during late 1950s and early 1960s. One of these was severe criticism of what was described as the corrupted tendencies in Debussy’s music and thoughts in 1963, after the Chinese edition of Debussy’s collected essays, *Monsieur Croche (Keluoshi Xiansheng)*, was published in Beijing.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, the attitude of rejection and hostility to Western music (especially music of the twentieth century) eventually reached an unhealthy level during the period of the Culture Revolution (1966–1976). During that period, Western music almost disappeared completely from the public eye in China and there was little significant teaching or scholarship on the subject.

#### **Present: Reform Since the late 1970s**

Since the late 1970s, which saw the reform and opening policy in China, the conditions for teaching and studying Western music history have improved, along with the recovery and progress of the discipline of musicology in China. The general developments in these fields during the last thirty years can be seen in three ways.

First, due to the normalization of the political and intellectual life in China, the development of culture, art, and scholarship has begun to free itself from explicit political and ideological interferences; research and discussion of Western music in China now can develop according to the inner needs of the discipline itself. Through introspection and discussion, the awareness of the independence of the discipline was strengthened and the direction and significance of teaching and promotion of Western music in the future seems secure.

Among the essential issues of discussion among the Chinese scholars of Western music history are the historical retrospectives and reflections on scholarship and teaching experiences of Western music history in China; the unique standpoints and perspectives adopted by Chinese scholars in their

4. (Beijing: People’s Music Press, 1983).

5. Chinese trans. Zhang Yuhe (Beijing: People’s Music Press, 1963).

reception of and writings on Western music; the continuing introduction of new methods and new thoughts, especially of new trends of musicology in Western countries; and the important debate on “musicological analysis” (a more comprehensive, music-analytical method which attempts to combine structural analysis and social-cultural interpretation) proposed by Yu Runyang (b. 1932), an eminent musicologist and the former president of the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing. In these discussions and conversations, the concept of “Western music” as the object of the discipline was widely adopted by the scholars instead of the former, somewhat vague concept of “foreign music.” Many scholars advocated that the content and methods of other sister disciplines, such as music analysis, music aesthetics, music sociology, and music psychology should be absorbed and integrated into the teachings and researches of Western music history.

Second, because of improvements in the academic environment, scholars and students of Western music in China are currently very productive in terms of publication and research. A large number of academic and popular books and papers have been written, translated, and published in the past thirty years; the quantity was more than that of the first eighty years of the twentieth century in total, and the breadth and depth of its coverage are more diverse than ever before.

Several books on the general history of Western music have been written by individual Chinese scholars:

Li Yinghua, a professor in the Central Conservatory of Music, *A Brief History of Western Music (Xiyang yinyue shilüe)*<sup>6</sup>

Qian Renkang, the famous eminent musicologist of the previous generation in Shanghai, *The Story of European Music (Ouzhou yinyue shihua)*<sup>7</sup> and *A Brief History of European Music (Ouzhou yinyue jianshi)*<sup>8</sup>

Liu Jingshu, a professor trained in Germany now based in Beijing, *Outline of History of Western Music (Jianming xifang yinyueshi)*<sup>9</sup>

Cai Liangyu, a research professor based in Beijing, *The Culture of Western Music (Xifang yinyue wenhua)*<sup>10</sup>

Shen Xuan, Gu Wenxian, and Tao Xin, faculty members of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, *A Concise History of Western Music (Xifang yinyueshi jianbian)*<sup>11</sup>

6. (Beijing: People’s Music Press, 1988).

7. (Beijing: Shanghai Music Press, 1989).

8. (Beijing: Higher Education Press, 1991).

9. (Beijing: People’s Music Press, 1991).

10. (Beijing: People’s Music Press, 1991).

11. (Shanghai: Shanghai Music Press, 1999).

Ye Songrong, a professor at the Fujian Normal University, *The History of European Music Culture—European Music in Chinese Perspective* (*Ouzhou yinyue wenhua shigao—Zhongguoren shiyezhong de Ouzhou yinyue*)<sup>12</sup>

Yu Runyang, a professor at the Central Conservatory of Music and editor of *A General History of Western Music* (*Xifang yinyue tongshi*)<sup>13</sup>

These books demonstrate a variety of viewpoints, diverse narrative structures, and different approaches for different audiences.

Besides the general and narrative history books, there are also some monographs on specific topics. Research and writing on Western music in the twentieth century are among of the most prominent aspects of these studies; they are a kind of “remedy” due to the previous neglect and ignorance about Western contemporary music in Chinese music composition and music life. Besides monographs like Zhong Zilin’s *An Outline of Western Contemporary Music* (*Xifang xiandai yinyue gaishu*)<sup>14</sup> and Song Jin’s *Western Music: From Modern to Postmodern* (*Xifang yinyue: Cong xiandai dao haoxiandai*),<sup>15</sup> there are also many articles and essays covering various topics such as composer studies, musical analyses, critiques of music phenomena, and studies on musical ideologies. Other notable monographs on specific subjects include two books written by Yao Yaping,<sup>16</sup> a professor at the Central Conservatory of Music, who gave a macroscopic interpretation and innovative account of the development of Western music history and the cultural reasons behind the development of Western polyphonic thinking. Also among important publications are comprehensive books on national music history of the United States of America and the Soviet Union,<sup>17</sup> an introductory book on Western music genres and forms,<sup>18</sup> and the present author’s collection of essays, *Humanistic Interpretations on Music* (*Yinyue de renwen quanshi*).<sup>19</sup>

12. (Fuzhou: People’s Press, 2001).

13. (Shanghai: Shanghai Music Press, 2001).

14. (Beijing: People’s Music Press, 1991).

15. (Shanghai: Shanghai Music Press, 2004).

16. Yao Yaping, *Xifang yinyue de guannian: Xifang yinyue lishi fazhangzhong de eryuan chongtu* [The Idea in Western Music: The Dualistic Conflict in the Development of Western Music History] (Beijing: Chinese Renmin University Press, 1999) and *Fudiao de chansheng* [The Arising of Polyphony] (Beijing: Central Conservatory of Music Press, 2009).

17. Cai Liangyu, *Meiguo zhuanye yinyue fazhan jianshi* [A Concise History of Professional Music in the United States] (Beijing: People’s Music Press, 1992) and *Huang Xiaohe, Sulian yinyueshi* [A History of Music in Soviet Union] (Fuzhou: Straits Press for Literature and Arts, 1998).

18. Qian Yiping, *Wang dandan, xiyang yinyue ticai ji xingshi de yanjin* [The Evolution of Genres and Forms in Western Music] (Shanghai: Shanghai Conservatory of Music Press, 2003).

19. (Shanghai: Shanghai Conservatory of Music Press, 2007).

Translation and publication of important books by Western scholars are another direct impetus for the development of the discipline, especially translations of writings which are of high academic quality and exert a significant influence on Chinese scholars, musicians, and general readers. Among the Chinese translations of Western musicology books are both textbooks and monographs on specific topics:

- Paul Henry Lang, *Music in Western Civilization*<sup>20</sup>  
 Donald J. Grout and Claude Palisca, *A History of Western Music* (the fourth and sixth editions)<sup>21</sup>  
 Gerald Abraham, *The Concise Oxford History of Music*<sup>22</sup>  
 Boris Schwarz, *Music and Music Life in Soviet Union*<sup>23</sup>  
 Bence Szabolcsi, *A History of Melody*<sup>24</sup>  
 Peter S. Hansen, *An Introduction to Twentieth Century Music*<sup>25</sup>  
 Hans Heinz Stuckenschmidt, *Twentieth Century Music*<sup>26</sup>  
 Reginald Smith Brindle, *New Music: The Avant-Garde Since 1945*<sup>27</sup>  
 Jeremy Yudkin, *Music in Medieval Europe*<sup>28</sup>  
 Hans Heinrich Eggbrecht, *Musik im Abendland*<sup>29</sup>  
 M. Arannovsky, *Russian Composers and 20th Century*<sup>30</sup>  
 Carl Dahlhaus, *Grundlagen der Musikgeschichte*<sup>31</sup> and *Musikästhetik*<sup>32</sup>  
 Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Music Works*<sup>33</sup>  
 Joseph Kerman, *Opera as Drama*<sup>34</sup>  
 Paul Robinson, *Opera and Ideas*<sup>35</sup>  
 Edward T. Cone, *The Composer's Voice*<sup>36</sup>

20. Chinese trans. Gu Lianli, Zhang Hongdao, Yang Yandi, and Tang Yating (Guiyang: Guizhou People's Press, 2001).

21. Chinese translation of the fourth edition by Wang Qizhang, Wu Peihua, and Gu Lianli (Beijing People's Music Press, 1996); the sixth edition translated by Yu Zhigang (Beijing People's Music Press, 2011).

22. Chinese trans. Gu Ben (Shanghai: Shanghai Music Press, 1999).

23. Chinese trans. Zhong Zilin et al. (Beijing: People's Music Press, 1979/1981).

24. Chinese trans. Situ Youwe (Beijing: People's Music Press, 1983).

25. Chinese trans. Meng Xianfu (Beijing: People's Music Press, 1981/1986).

26. Chinese trans. Tang Yating (Beijing: People's Music Press, 1992).

27. Chinese trans. Huang Zhenyu (Beijing: People's Music Press, 2001).

28. Chinese trans. Yu Zhigang (Beijing: Central Conservatory of Music Press, 2005).

29. Chinese trans. Liu Jingshu (Changsha: Hunan Press for Literature and Arts, 2005).

30. Originally Russian, Chinese trans. Zhang Hongmo (Beijing: Central Conservatory of Music, 2005).

31 Chinese trans. Yang Yandi (Shanghai: Shanghai Conservatory of Music Press, 2006).

32. Chinese trans. Yang Yandi (Shanghai: Shanghai Conservatory of Music Press, 2006).

33. Chinese trans. Luo Donghui (Shanghai: Shanghai Conservatory of Music Press, 2008).

34. Chinese trans. Yang Yandi (Shanghai: Shanghai Conservatory of Music Press, 2008).

35. Chinese trans. Zhou Bingbing (Shanghai: East China Normal University Press, 2008).

36. Chinese trans. He Xian (Shanghai: East China Normal University Press, 2011).

Third, the improvement of the general intellectual climate and academic achievement has resulted in the creation of increasingly important academic organizations and growing academic teams in teaching and research on Western music history in China. In conferences, scholars exchanged their perspectives and developed their ideas quite freely; such exchanges had positive impacts on the young generations of students. Since the 1980s, the most notable conferences have been:

- 1984: The first academic conference on “foreign music” was held in Beijing.
- 1986: An academic conference on American music was held in Tianjin, and the Society for American Music in China was established, whose chairman was the eminent composer-scholar Xu Yongsan.
- 1987: The Tianjin Conservatory hosted an academic conference on Soviet music, and the Society for Soviet Music was established there. The chairman of the society was the famous composer Wu Zuqiang, who studied in Moscow during 1950s.
- 1990: The second academic conference on “foreign music” was held in Beijing, in which there were intense discussions on the purpose and methods of Western music study in China.
- 1991: A special conference and reading report meeting was held in Beijing with a focus on the subject “The Impact of Christianity on Western Music.”
- 1998: The third academic conference of Western music was held in the Central Conservatory of Music. Key issues included methodologies of Western music study and other fundamental questions about interpreting music.
- 2003: Another academic conference on American music was held in Hangzhou Normal University. It is in this conference that the Society for Western Music in China was finally established after receiving permission by the musicology and theory division of Chinese Musicians Association. The society selected Yu Runyang as the Honorary Chairman, and Yang Yandi as the Chairman, Cai Liangyu, Yu Zhigang, Wang Pu as the Vice Chairmen. The foundation of the Society was of significant meaning to the promotion of the discipline in China. Since then, the discipline of Western music study in China and its academic organizations have entered a new age, with more solid institutional support and more regular exchanges of ideas.
- 2005: In March, the first formal convention of the Society for Western Music in China was held at the Shanghai Conservatory. The

theme of the conference was “Teaching Western Music History in China.”

2007: In April the second convention was held at the Xi’An, Conservatory of Music, and the main topic was “The Interpretation of Western Music Work: History, Analysis, Criticism, and Method.”

2010: In December the third convention was held at the Xinghai Conservatory of Music; the main subject was “The Integration and Comparison of Disciplines: The Opening Up in Western Music Studies.”

From the different subjects and key issues of these conventions we can see the ever-deepening progress of the discipline, as well as the significant diversity of approaches of Western music study in China now. In addition, the development and progress of the discipline can also be seen in the expanding members participating in these conferences, especially graduate students.

#### **Future: Prospects for Western Music Scholarship in China**

In summary, the teaching and scholarship of Western music in China have made significant progress in China during the past century—yet there is still room for the development of the discipline in the future. We as Chinese have often considered that Western music was a kind of “otherness” in the Chinese environment, with a somewhat “exotic,” unfamiliar cultural identity. Consequently the meaning and function of the research and teaching of this “other” object are continuously questioned. However, in China’s musical life and educational system, the existence of Western art music has become a reality that cannot be denied or ignored. As a result, the discipline of musicology as a brand of learning and the scholars of Western music should take the responsibility of explaining and interpreting the meaning and value of Western music to Chinese musicians, concert and opera goers, and the general public. I believe that the essential purpose of studying and teaching of Western music in China is the construction and development of a richer and healthier musical life for China itself. In addition, of course, Chinese musicologists should strive to contribute something new from our own perspectives to the international musicological community.

China now is booming as an economic entity and as a culturally developing giant. The world has witnessed that China is already producing first-class music performers such as Lang Lang and others, and we are excited about the growing population of music lovers now in the cities of China. Concert halls and theaters are constructed at amazing speed around China, especially in big cities. Since 2000, several hundred music departments and music schools have been established in various Chinese universities and colleges. Young people in



China are increasingly interested in Western classical music. So we might ask ourselves how to help the Chinese people understand and appreciate Western music more deeply in terms of the music's intellectual and cultural dimensions.

Therefore, I have two points concerning the future of Western music scholarship in China. First we must find our own positions and raise our own problems from the perspective of China's unique cultural and social backgrounds in the process of studying Western music. For instance, I am researching the problems of "modernity" in music, since I find that the quality and essences of "modernity" in Western music and Chinese music are totally different due to their respective cultural heritages and social circumstances.<sup>37</sup> Under my supervision, my postgraduate students chose comparative study topics for their dissertations, such as the comparative study of modern music's transformation in East Asia countries,<sup>38</sup> and a comparative study on the different social identities of Western musicians and Chinese musicians.<sup>39</sup>

Second, we should insist on the importance of introducing more Western musicological theories, thoughts, and ideas into Chinese musicology, which not only will promote the understanding and reception of Western music in China, but also will exert a positive impact on musicological study in China as a whole which will, in turn, have a healthy influence upon music life in China now and in the future. For example, we plan to translate all six books of the Norton Introduction to Music History series, and the volumes on the Classical period and on twentieth-century music will be published soon;<sup>40</sup> I am currently translating Charles Rosen's acclaimed book *The Classical Style*; Leo Treitler will be my co-editor for a Chinese edition of his selected essays.

Chinese scholars of Western music are looking forward to collaboration with Western and American colleagues and the international musicological community as we continue to develop our study of Western music and musicological traditions. We hope that in this open and healthy cultural climate, Chinese musicology and Chinese music life will sustain its diversity, energy, and creativity in the future.

37. Yang Yandi, "Yinyue de xiandaixing zhuanxing" [The Transformation of Modernity in Music], *Yinyue yishu* [Art of Music: Journal of Shanghai Conservatory of Music] 1 (2006): 57-64.

38. Liu Zhenyin, "Dongya sanguo de yinyue bianqian: Xiandaixing he minzuxing de suqiu" [Musical Change in China, Korea and Japan: The Claims of Modernity and Nationalism], PhD diss., Shanghai Conservatory, 2008.

39. Xia Yanzhou, "Xifang zuoqujia de shehui shenfen: Cong zhong shiji dao Beiduofen" [The Social Identity of Western Composers: From the Middle Ages to Beethoven], PhD diss., Shanghai Conservatory, 2008.

40. Chinese translations are organized and arranged by Shanghai Conservatory and Shanghai Music Press.