

Religious Music in China

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Abstract: This paper examines China's topology and the close relationships between its government and different religions, encompassing Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, manifested by music. Under the government's authority and guidance, these religions' music does not express political views or social transformations and instead seeks inner peacefulness and facilitates the fulfilment of religious or ritual purposes. The rise of Chinese Christian praise music in the recent two decades reflects a transformation that Christianity will likely continue to grow with more praise songs covered and created in China and enrich the diversity of Chinese religious music.

Keywords: music; religion; China's topology; Taoism; Buddhism; Confucianism; Christianity

1. Introduction

The enormous influence of the relationship between the state and the church in France on the development of church music reminds us that the interactions between politics and religion at the macro level have unavoidably direct or indirect impacts at the micro-level, including music ^[1]. Interestingly, though the Chinese government established its power in 1949 and claimed to embrace atheism, multiple religions have still widely existed and developed, encompassing traditional religions of Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, and the 'western' Christianity. It means that traditional religions had adopted suitable strategies for survival and development. Moreover, the Chinese Christian community, including Chinese mainlanders and Christians in Hong Kong and Taiwan, has witnessed growth from 4 million before 1949 to 67 million today, with an average annual growth rate of 7%. Deeply affected by its western religious root of praising God in songs, this community has strived for a certain level of independence and made more significant contributions to the creation of praise songs and performances under the atheist government's impact. Briefly, the religions in China have gotten along well with the government and made consistent efforts in the last decades.

Illuminated by the state-religion interaction (i.e., the division between the church and the secular Third Republic) in France, I deem that it will be intriguing to review the relations between the government and the religions as well as the expressions in religious music and explore the reasons behind that explain the mentalities of these social groups. Moreover, the social mechanism at the macro level and the musical productions at the micro-level can be valuable resources for manifestations. In this paper, we will examine China's geopolitical history in detail with tangible shreds of evidence, visualize the interactions, and build the micro-macro connections, which indicate the profound factor determining the nature of the government-religion relations. We hope to gain access to an in-depth insight into forecasting its further development and the impact and expression on the development of the music sector.

China has a long history of over 3000 years, forming the most enduring civilization with its unique political and economic system different from western countries. Due to the uniqueness of China's system, we will start our research by connecting China's geographical features and political system's characteristics and finding out the reason determining the long military history and the formation of its system. Next, we will put religions into our framework and examine their characteristics and relations with the central government. In detail, we will summarize their characteristics and rationalize the cause and effect between them and the social context. Afterward, we will scrutinize the religious music based on our understanding and check its variations in different historical periods. The macro-micro connections can effectively extract a logic line for understanding the relations between China's government and its religions from a new perspective.

2. Research methods of geographical determinism and the theory background

Frenkel investigated the early-twentieth-century development of the Panama Canal Zone from the perspective of environmental determinism [2], a set of ideas introduced into the mainstream of American geographical thought and practice by Ellen Semple [3]. Bruhnes was considered the creator of the famous theory of geographical determinism, and he argued that 'The land makes the man' [4]. Despite various versions of geographical determinism, it provided a means of celebrating the world's diversity and the popularization of geography to promote international understanding and tolerance [5]. The ideas can be used to analyze the countries, including the United States and Germany, France, Great Britain, Russia, Canada, Sweden, and Japan [6]. Here, we will introduce these ideas to view religious music in China.

3. China's topology

Brzezinski indicated that China has a history of national greatness with China's mindset as the natural center of the world and the country's centrality, conveyed by the Chinese word for China—Chung-Kuo, or the 'Middle Kingdom' [7].

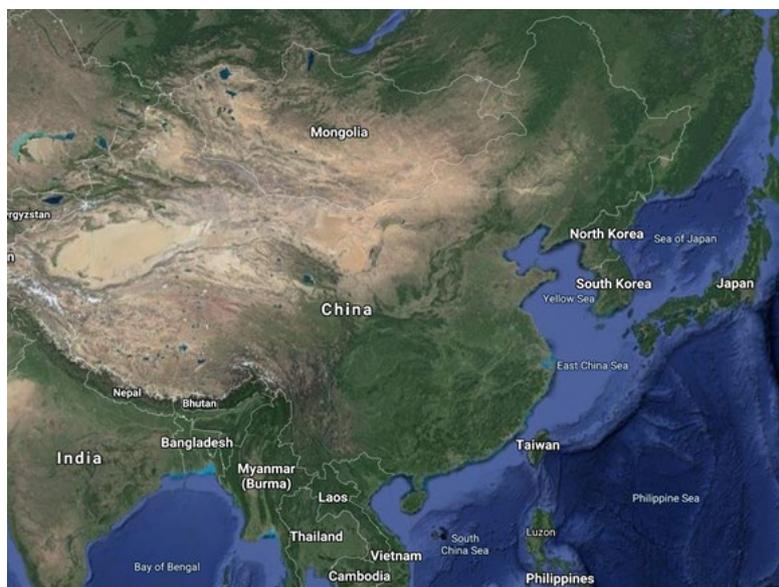


Figure 1: China's Satellite Map from Google Maps. Source: Google

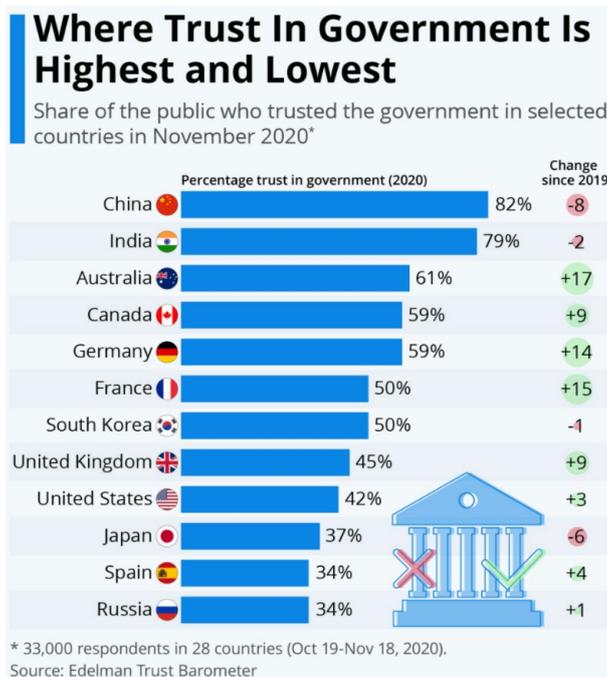
China's satellite map in Figure 1 [8] shows that most parts of China are mainly located on the eastern side of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau (i.e., the Himalayan Plateau in India), which has an average elevation of above 4,000 m [9]. Moreover, the line between the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau and Mongolia acts as the line separating China from other parts of Eurasia. China's geographical features are shown in Figure 2 and can be summarized as follows [10]: Topographically, the land surface ascends like a three-step staircase. The plains and lowlands in the east and southeast constitute the first step, occupying about 12 percent of the land. Two-thirds of the country's two higher steps are primarily mountains and high plateaus. These essential factors make China a relatively isolated civilization whose development has been mainly on its own.

The red arrow on the right-hand side of Figure 2 shows the decreasing altitude from the north to the south. Importantly, this decreasing altitude gives the northern military occupiers general military advantages over their southern enemies. Namely, if someone occupies the northwest, it will be easier for them to win a war. It is crucial for the general rule of China's military history that the north has immense military advantages. It has also been the cause of the southward expansion of the Han Dynasty, occupying today's southern China with assimilations [11]. Meanwhile, this geographical feature explains the construction of the Great Wall, the world's largest military defense structure located in northern China, that prevents invasions from the north



Figure 2: China's Geographical Features

Historically, it is a fundamental reason at the macro level why China formed its political center and experienced unification much more accessible than European countries. Consequently, the central government that controls military power has absolute authority domestically, which most people in this political system trust or obey. In detail, China's central government is more central than its western counterparts and has the dominating power. Moreover, it has been a cultural habit for Chinese people to rely on the government, as shown in the Figure 3 survey.



<https://www.statista.com/chart/12634/where-trust-in-government-is-highest-and-lowest/>

Figure 3: Where Trust in Government Is (Source: Edelman Trust Barometer)

We can see that the political scenario in China is rooted in its geographical features and quite different from France's. Most social departments in China have been under the central government's control. Some may think the leading cause for this phenomenon and Chinese people's obedience is the ideology of communism. We partially disagree because communism occurred about 150 years ago and was imported to China about 100 years ago, not long enough to profoundly influence Chinese people's traditionally cultural mindsets.

4. Taoism and Taoist Music

Taoism was founded by Lao Tzu, China's Librarian of Congress, around 2500 years ago. He considered all parts of the cosmos to be interconnected. He was deemed the pinnacle of China's philosophy, answering big and fundamental questions such as the rule of the world's formation and development. Taoism is the way of harmony with nature or the cosmos. Specifically, it is a philosophy profound and paradoxical and a way of life playful and practical. Taoism's primary text, Tao Te Ching, contains 81 chapters of the philosophy of living and thinking in harmony and balance. Some verses may seem self-contradicting. Considering that nature knows the best, Tao Te Ching provides readers and learners with Tao, the nature path, or the nature of things.

There are some classical ideas in Taoism, such as Chi and Yin-Yang. Chi means life force and life energy, while Yin-Yang means harmony of opposites. Some analogies in modern physics are energy and the opposite states of matter and anti-matter. Yin and Yang indicate passive and active states of energy, and their analogies in modern physics can be antiquark and quark, the typical of anti-matter and matter. In Taoism, the combination of opposites reflects the nature of things and events in the world. Things share the exact origin, which people can understand by learning Tao. Tao Te Ching addresses supernatural dimensions as it views the whole cosmos, visible and invisible, as an integration in which the energy flows in various directions. It discusses the nature of the cosmos, the philosophy of running a country, and how to live in the world, etc. Taoism considers that these are basically from the exact origin.

People can get close to nature by none-action, which means doing things in harmony with nature and not inharmoniously. Taoism also indicates that the human world and nature rules are different. Specifically, in nature, the one having more is averaged to the one having less, like the increase in entropy in modern physics. In the human world, having more will get more from the one having less, like the fact that human needs to decrease entropy by consistently doing work. Things are composed of Yin and Yang, and both sides can take over. Likewise, concepts of order and disorder are used for describing object states in physics. Tao Te Ching is philosophical, and its poetic writing leads it to be open to a wide range of interpretations.

Music and opera in France can express political opinions indicating a dangerous analog to the country's strained political situation (Walker, 2019). Differently, the traditional religious music of Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism in China usually does not carry solid political views or express significant social changes since these traditional religions are under the government's control and guidance in China. Instead, they are mainly soft for ritual and mediation purposes. A representative comment on Taoist music can be like this [12]: 'The Taoist's musical genre refers to the music played during palace ceremony. It is a part of traditional Chinese culture seeking to create a peaceful environment and instills in its listeners an inner harmony with nature.'



Figure 4: ErHu, Yangqin, and Ruan

Taoist music is essential for Taoist rituals. It sets off and plays up the religious atmosphere and enhances believers' yearning for and reverence for the immortals. Taoist music absorbs the essence of ancient Chinese court music and traditional folk music, infiltrates the characteristics of Taoist belief, forms the unique artistic style of Taoist music, and is also an essential part of Chinese traditional music.

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Taoist music is a kind of religious music with the characteristics of Chinese local music, which is manifested as the same melody in the same ritual, and the different tunes and melodic decorations in different places all have the characteristics of local music. The same word in the same ceremony, the local tone is used in different places. Taoist music is widely integrated with local tunes in folk, forming different styles of Taoist music in different places.

Typical Taoist music instruments include MuYu, a traditional Chinese percussion instrument (also known as 'wooden fish' made by hollowing out a rounded woodblock into a fish shape), and Dagu, a sizeable Chinese bass drum. Striking MuYu with a stick or mallet leads to sounds, and different sizes of MuYu produce various tones. Dagu's sound is similar to the standard Western-styled 22" kick drums used widely.

There are some priesthood ceremonies in the Taoist, where daoshi, the Taoist priests, adopted different kinds of instruments. Chinese cultural mysticism deeply affected the rite and movement tools that the main daoshi used. The combinations of the gestures mentioned above and magical instruments are employed during the Yang tone rites. As shown in Figure 4, there are some other instruments in Taoist music. The first one is called Erhu, a two-stringed bowed musical instrument, which can also be called a spike fiddle. The second one is the Yang Qing, an instrument made of bamboo and played with a pair of lightweight mallets. It is traditionally dampened at tips with silk or felt, one held in each hand. Each string course consists of five strings and represents one note alternately striking. Ruan is the name of this very ancient, fretted string instrument and has typically had an easily identifiable round-shaped body aesthetically metaphoric of the full moon.

5. Buddhism and Buddhist Music

Comparatively, Confucianism is more like a brochure telling people what and how to behave in daily life. Its founder was Confucius, who was Lao Tzu's student. The primary texts of Confucianism convey Ren, Yi, Li, Zhi, and Xin, giving people guiding principles of daily conduct. The meanings of Ren, Yi, Li, and Zhi are shown as follows,

Ren: Benevolence and Concerns for Others

Yi: Righteousness

Li: Etiquette and Appropriateness of Behavior

Zhi: Wisdom and Intelligence

Xin: Sincerity and Trust in the Society

Confucianism is easily understandable, and children can learn and recite it well. It is still prevalent in today's Chinese society. Broadly, Confucian notions on music are embodied in Chinese music and profoundly influence China and other Asian countries. Confucianism considers that humaneness can be reached through music. A musician must be virtuous, and high-quality musical works should regard virtues or impart humanity. A musical work without these aspects is, at best, only the sounds of instruments.

Confucius established the "Confucian" concept of music, while Xun Zi set its theoretical foundation. Later, the book of Yue Ji gave more specific explanations, examples, and treatises, presenting the philosophical interpretation of music and summarizing Confucian music ideas. The book of Yue Ji did not only present a developed view of musical aesthetics and also became classical and influential in various types of Chinese arts. As one of the forms of Confucian music, Yayue is a music type involving dancing performances at ancient China's royal court and temples. In the Confucian classical book of the Analects, Yayue was deemed elegant and joyful, with the main instruments encompassing the guzheng, the flute, and the xiao. The music is slow and monophonic with little rhythmic variety. Four to eight beats

per phrase can be closely related to the number of text words. Dances accompany the courtyard music, and the number of dancers is contingent on the patron's rank and social status.

Confucian musical traditions have impacted China's neighbors. For instance, Korea and Japan have absorbed Confucianism in their music. Korea has learned and practiced Confucian music for more than eight hundred years. In contemporary Korea, Confucian ceremonies are practiced and supported by the government. Japan's introduction of Confucianism merged with Buddhist chant music and formed the precursors of Japan's modern musical cultures.

6. Buddhism and Buddhist Music

Buddhism believes that suffering is unavoidable. People can end suffering by reaching Nirvana, the goal of the Buddhist path. There are eight-fold paths to reach Nirvana, encompassing right understanding, right thought, right action, right speech, right mindfulness, right livelihood, right effort, and right concentration. Moreover, karma and reincarnation are what Buddhists believe can affect their lives. Buddhism entered China in the first century AD during Han Dynasty. There were paths for spreading Buddhism, including the route into Tibet and another into southeastern Asia and southern China. 400-845 AD is called the 'Age of Buddhism' with a fast-growing number of Buddhists. Since a king destroyed Buddhist books and temples in Tang Dynasty, Buddhism realized the threat and continued to survive by blending with other religions in China. Buddhism has also spread to the United States. For example, His Lai Temple is a famous local religious group attracting Buddhists and tourists in California.

Buddhist music is an essential branch of the music system. It first arose in ancient India and was then introduced into China through the Western Regions, which incorporated some Chinese musical elements. At present, Buddhist music has become essential folk music in China, showing its unique characteristics. Buddhist music's origin and formation have been long as a music culture. With the continuous development and the cross-cultural innovation of contemporary Buddhist music, people can pay more attention to disseminating information.

Buddhist music can also cultivate sincere religious feelings. Buddhist music belongs to a particular form of sound art. Music art has a powerful artistic appeal, so listening to Buddhist music can make people feel the various information and emotions conveyed in Buddhist music. Buddhist music can spread Buddhist ideas to strengthen the connection between Buddhism and Buddhists. Although many Buddhists cannot understand the monk's various thirsty praise word of mouth, as long as the heart listens to the Buddhist music can rhyme with the Buddhist music and comprehend the thought of Buddhism. The Buddhist's devotion to the awakening, strengthening the emotion, allows the Buddhist to find the soul's owner through Buddhist music.

Buddhist activities are practical activities in the temple and unique temple culture. Buddhist music can promote the development of Buddhist activities. Buddhist music, such as the living Buddha residing in the temple with the temple music, accompanies various Buddhist activities in the temple. The temple music itself is to cooperate with multiple rituals in the temple.

Buddhist music in China comes from various sources, including exotic music, folk music, poetry, and court music. The formation and development of Buddhist music have gone through thousands of years. With society's continuous development and progress, Buddhist music is changing accordingly. Modern thoughts and social backgrounds are very different from those of the past. Thus, it is difficult for Buddhist music to constantly and strictly follow traditional Buddhist rules and regulations. Instead, it shows some modernization process, which is also the expression of the innovation of Buddhist music.

The expression forms of Buddhist music innovation mainly include the following three aspects:

1). Modern composition form

In the past, Buddhist music's lyrics and melodies were created from the perspective of monks' needs, mainly to reflect monks' artistic praise for Buddha and Bodhisattva. Therefore, monks often improvised the length and structure of the melody of Buddhist music. However, modern Buddhist music has formed specific rules and industry standards on which many of them are created. They are more beautiful and catchier in melody, which is also a change and innovation for disseminating Buddhist music.

2). The innovation of the content of lyrics

From the point of view of the lyric content, the lyrics of Buddhist music have also undergone tremendous changes. Previous Buddhist music lyrics mainly express a tribute to Buddha and Bodhisattva.

At this stage, the Buddhist music lyrics are more content-rich and focus on Buddhism through the songs that embody Buddhism's thoughts to understand Buddhist ideas better. It strengthens connections between Buddhists and Buddhism and is more conducive to spreading Buddhist music. The current Buddhist music lyrics content quantitatively fits the standards of the modern music industry so that the structure of the content of the lyrics is rigorous, and it can well convey Buddhist ideas, which is easier to sing. It increasingly plays a more powerful function in Buddhist cultural communication.

3). Modern singing skills

Buddhist music also has a significant change in singing skills. In the past, the singing of Buddhist music was mainly understood through recitation, which expressed the monks' praise to Buddha and Bodhisattva. Therefore, the content was emphasized, and the sense of melody was not strong. Buddhist music is produced by following specific industry standards at this stage, so the overall melodic sense is more robust, and singing skills can be used to sing. Modern Buddhist music is more like pop music (e.g., its singing skills).

4). Modernization of music arrangement

Contemporary Buddhist music is also more modern in its arrangements. In the past, Buddhist music was generally performed with a single arranger. The prominent arrangers included percussion, strumming, blowing, and plating. The participation of harmonic instruments was almost absent, and the acoustics were not satisfactory. Currently, Buddhist music arrangers are more modern and follow the music industry's standards.

In the creation of Buddhist music, the idea and spirit of Buddhism are integrated. The intercultural communication of Buddhist music is realized by promoting Buddhism to the outside world.

Today, there is much Chinese Contemporary Music in the form of pop songs. Interestingly, the music of traditional religions in China has nearly no fuse with popular music or classical music. However, in Chinese pop songs, there are two implicit religious concepts widely used: destiny and serendipity.

7. The Rise of Christianity and Its Music in China

The "Sinicization" of Christian music developed rapidly in the 20th century. In 1936, Yang Yinliu, chief editor of the Chinese Christian Church, and others edited and published the hymn "Ode to Heaven," which was widely used by the Chinese people. The book contains 512 poems, among which 72 are lyric poems, ancient Chinese folk songs, and hymns composed by Chinese Christians.

In 1978, China ushered in reform and opening up. Reform and opening-up brought good opportunities for China's economic development and made achievements in developing Christian music under such good circumstances. The hymn has 400 hymns in the book, 102 of which were written by Chinese Christians, composed songs, or adopted Chinese-style tunes. Of these 102 hymns, 56 are the latest compositions by Chinese Christians in recent years. The Jinling Theological Seminary publishes an anthology of Psalms in Nanjing, China, which publishes many new hymns by Chinese Christians. Under the favorable domestic music environment, Christian music in China has entered a new development period. The spread and development of Christian music in China have influenced Chinese folk music, a communication between western and Chinese culture, and the collision and integration of western and Chinese music.

Introducing Christian music provides a new way to inherit Chinese traditional music and promotes Chinese music education. In terms of curriculum setting, the original singing class has been extended to various forms such as chorus, instrumental performance, and ensemble, which enriches the curriculum content. The authentic single hymn singing has been expanded to the study of non-religious western music and various teaching content knowledge. The missionary school broke the traditional educational concept and provided China's music education and the upcoming school song. In creating school songs, hymn tunes to fill the lyrics have become an efficient way of creation. For example, Li Shutong's "No Clothes" is based on the hymn "Little Water Drop Song" by American composer Sarah Hart. Shen created "Spring Outings" and other works based on the psalms. Besides, Christianity also provided a new singing mode for Chinese music -- collective singing, which significantly impacted the development of modern Chinese music and was applied in practice in China, such as the choir singing in school music songs.

In the development of Christian hymn music in China, it is inevitable to take a road: take the existing Chinese tunes to fill in the Christian words. With the gradual spread of Christianity, the growing number of believers, and the requirements for the content of the faith, the demand of Chinese Christians for hymn

music has not been limited to the translation of foreign hymns and the composing of lyrics with foreign tunes. Subsequently, psalm music with Chinese national melody has become another need for Chinese Christians to export, and the sinicization of Christian music also started by using Chinese tunes to fill lyrics.

Chinese composers mainly use the following two ways to create Christian music:

1) Select excellent works of traditional Chinese classical music and rewrite them into new hymns.

Chinese church musicians adapt many hymns from Chinese Guqin and ancient music. The hymn "San Die Li Ge" was adapted by Mr. Yang Yinliu in 1934 from the Guqin Song "Yang Guan San Die." The lyrics are filled with three paragraphs to express the feelings of parting and blessing between believers. Because it is also the content of farewell writing and the original performance of the content of the same, the title of the original song was retained. The hymn "San Die Li Ge" inherits the basic structure of the original song in the work frame, changing the duple meter rhythm of the original song to a quadruple meter rhythm. Melodic changes on a small scale occurred. The more complex rhythm type in the original song changed into a more straightforward rhythm type in terms of rhythm.

2) Adapt and create from national and folk music.

China has many ethnic groups, each of which has its characteristics in language and culture. Therefore, folk songs, haozi, ditty, tunes, and other forms of folk music have been formed in music development. When adapting hymns for such musical works, one should pay attention to local conditions and customs, the national language, and characteristic musical instruments. The styles of the works created have their own characteristics. For example, "The Beautiful Name of Jesus" uses the structure and melody of "Mu Li Hua" entirely but expands the lyrics to four verses. The church composer used this well-known folk song to fill in the lyrics of Christian content so that Chinese believers, especially those with low education levels, could quickly learn a hymn and remember the contents of the lyrics, which is helpful for understanding Christian doctrines.

Christianity originated in Israel, but the glory of Christian music was in Europe. There is no denying that Christianity has made European music what it is today, and European music has greatly influenced the whole world's music. Christianity has grown fast in China. Council on Foreign Relations stated that 'China has witnessed a religious revival over the past four decades, in particular with a significant increase in Christian believers. The number of Chinese Protestants has grown by an average of 10 percent annually since 1979' [13]. Accordingly, the number of Christian praise songs has been increasing rapidly. Chinese Christian musicians cover Western praise songs and create new songs by learning from their western counterparts. It is worthy to note that the expressiveness of the Christian praise songs is different from that of China's traditional religions.

Music acts as the carrier of society's mentality. The macro-micro connections between a society's development and its musical works and education have been used as the methodology in previous literature [14][15]. Chinese Christian musicians cover praise songs from the west and make Chinese versions accordingly, including What a Friend We Have in Jesus [16], Amazing Grace [17], and How Great Thou Art [18]. The increasing number of bilingual cover songs reflects the trend of closer relationships between the two countries.

There is also a rocketing number of musical groups formed. A representative one is named Stream of Praises [19], creating pop praise songs and holding praise concerts in Chinese mainland, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the United States. One of their famous songs is how precious you are to Me [20]. The song's bilingual lyrics are shown as follows with the repetition and escalation parts. Another representative song is an English praised song named We Will Worship, produced in Hong Kong, China [21]. Jade Kwan, a Chinese Christian, is the singer and John Laudon is the composer.

How precious you are to me

Lyrics: Sandy Yu

Song: Grace Tseng

© 2004 Stream of Praise Music/BMI. CCLI: 4300430

[Pre-Chorus] (Repetition)

Because of your suffering, we have peace

Because of you being whipped, we are healed

Completely healed
[Chorus]
Thank Jesus, my savior
I have peace, I am healed
My Jesus, my beloved Lord
Your grace deeply touches my heart

8. Counterarguments and Limitations

Some recent analyses on China emphasize that what plagues contemporary global affairs is not a geopolitical competition but rather the frictions produced by the inability and unwillingness of states to come up with governance solutions [22]. In other words, geopolitics or geographical determinism does not always work or function to give a complete picture. In our analysis, we mainly consider the cause for the formation of the central government's authority from geographical determinism. It may not be comprehensive enough. We deem that there is much more to consider. Besides, this paper focuses on religious music in its current stage. There can be more investigations into the evolution of traditional religious music. Moreover, we plan to find more connections between Chinese religious music and traditional Chinese folk music and between religious music in the future.

9. Conclusions

We have researched China's geographical features and its consequence on the relations between the central government and the religious sector. The central government has the authority, and the religions are under the government's guidance. Thus, the music in traditional religions in China, including Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism, does not express political views or social transformations. Instead, traditional religious music seeks inner peacefulness and facilitates fulfilling religious or ritual purposes. After diplomatic ties between the United States and China were established in 1979, Christianity (protestant) has grown fast with its praise music. The Christian praise music is more expressive of Chinese traditional religious music. The rise of Christian praise music reflects a transformation that Christianity will likely continue to grow with more praise songs covered and created in China.

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