

China's Popular Music Development after 1949: An Understanding from a Social Change Perspective

Tingyu Yan^{1,a,*}, Jiajun Tang^{2,b}

¹*School of Music, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV 26506, USA*

²*Rossier School of Education, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA 90089, USA*

^a*ty00004@mix.wvu.edu*, ^b*jiajunta@usc.edu*

**Corresponding author*

Abstract: *This paper analyses the interactions between Chinese popular songs and their socio-political contexts in different historical periods after the establishment of the People's Republic of China, in 1949. Some of the songs considered include 'My Country', 'Path', 'Fang', 'Mojito', and 'Spice Girls'. We examine these songs as a faithful reflection of society's political and social contexts in various stages accordingly. The overall trajectory of change in musical compositions coheres and resonates with social development. In addition, it suggests a variation in Chinese society's mentality from an inward-looking sense of colonial victimhood to today's assertive patriotism and engagement with the world ('openness and inclusiveness') amid China's rising, globalised economy.*

Keywords: *China's popular music, music styles and development, social change, globalised economy*

1. Introduction

Social context is essential for the production of popular music. Popular music can be viewed as a field where various social forces are active in the production of cultural goods ^[1]. That is, music stands in the broader context of worldly and socio-political concerns, and music composition can, in turn, reflect these political and social contexts ^[2]. Thus, when considering the music of a given era and culture, it is essential to understand the dominant political powers and social contexts that can heavily affect it. After World War II, for instance, America's role in the world witnessed a rapid transformation from that of a country relatively isolated in the Western Hemisphere to that of one with unprecedented power and worldwide reach and grasp. This multinational and exceptional character of the American society has allowed America to universalize its hegemony without it appearing to be a strictly national one ^[3]. Like other elements of society, music and musicians in various countries and cultures have been affected by this hegemony. This close connection between music and social contexts has a long history. For example, the 'age of jazz' in countries, including the Philippines, Indonesia, and Japan, can be dated back to the 1920s ^{[4][5]}. Recently, rap has had a huge impact on the younger generation in China. This was manifested in The Rap of China, a highly successful Chinese online entertainment program aired recently, where Jin Au-Yeung, or MC Jin, the second-generation Chinese-American rapper and songwriter, under the alias of 'Hip Hop Man', was one of the most popular figures ^[6]. Modern mass media facilitates this dissemination of cultural influence through music.

Western imperialism's influence, beginning in the 19th century, pushed modernisation in East Asian society, which came to include a significant investment in Western classical music first by Japanese and later by other Asian families. Classical music has come to be seen as a universal language that transcends race, nationality, class, and culture; classical music identity can benefit Asian musicians and provide them with more professional choices and stability, while their perception of their Asian identity formed through various backgrounds can be quite different ^[7]. Molotov, a Mexican rock en español band and three-time Latin Grammy winner, adopts a mix of musicality (hip hop, punk, metal, rap, norteño, cumbia) and linguistic code-switching to express a caustic, boisterous spirit of rebellion and an anti-establishment position ^[8]. Corridos, a form of cultural storytelling through song, performed by Mexicans and Mexican-Americans, include 'ghost smuggling ballads' that depict the migrant journey in the US-Mexico transborder region and relay testimonies of transborder survival and miraculous intercession, manifesting their significance to the Mexican migrant community and their devotees ^[9]. Significantly, Aldama pointed out that the study of Latino music in a transnational context must transform 'traditional methodologies' that define music 'through discrete categories such as national identity and musical genre'

2. Historical Background

This political cartoon, titled "時局圖" (The Current Situation Map), depicts the territorial ambitions of foreign powers in China during the early 20th century. The map uses animal metaphors for different nations:

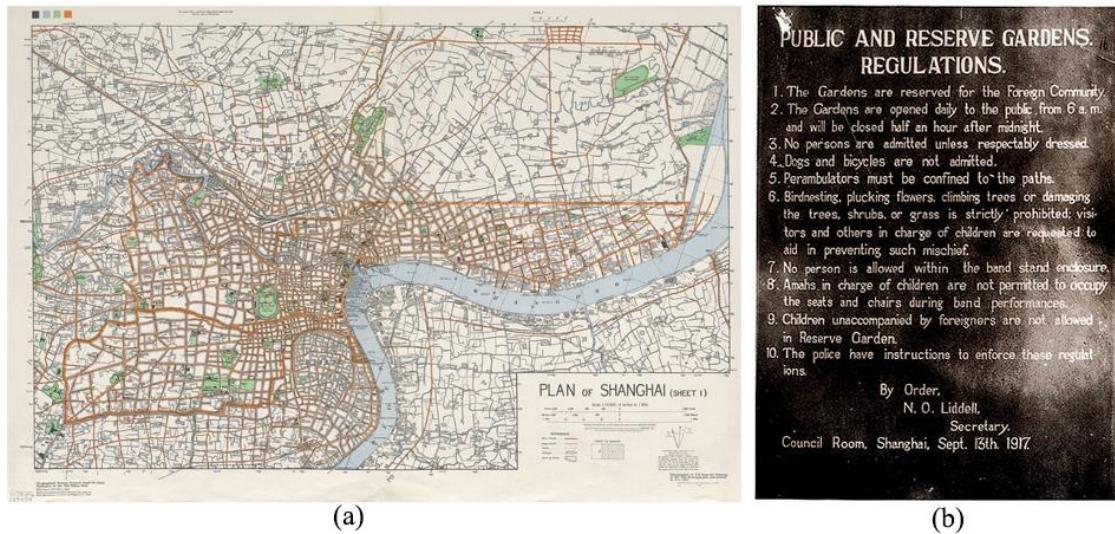
- Russia:** Represented by a massive black bear occupying Siberia and northern Manchuria.
- Japan:** Represented by a large orange tiger dominating the Korean peninsula and southern Manchuria.
- Germany:** Shown as a man in a military uniform standing over a small figure representing China's central government.
- France:** Depicted as a lioness in the southwestern region.
- Britain:** Represented by a green dragon in the south.
- America:** Shown as an eagle in the southeast.
- Italy:** Represented by a blue elephant in the southwest.

The cartoon illustrates how these powers were carving up China into spheres of influence, leaving the central government powerless. At the bottom, figures holding flags represent the revolutionary forces fighting against these imperialist incursions.

Figure 1: ‘The Situation in the Far East’, 1898.

Published by Francis Academic Press, UK

of ‘the Sick Man of East Asia’, a characteristic expression of prejudice, contempt, and even insult ^[11].



Source: (a) https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/e/eb/Shanghai_1935_S1_AMS-WO.jpg/1920px-Shanghai_1935_S1_AMS-WO.jpg; (b) <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/e9/HuangpuparkOld2.jpg>. Accessed 1 June 2022.

Figure 2: (a) Foreign concession in Shanghai in 1935; (b) Public and reserve garden regulations in 1917.

A famous political cartoon (Figure 1), ‘The Situation in the Far East’ by Tse, created in 1898, represented Western colonial dominance in China. The eagle, bear, bulldog-lion, and frog stand for the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, and France, respectively. Other powers, such as Japan, Germany, Portugal, and the Netherlands, were also represented. China was being carved up by these powers. The Chinese were being racially discriminated against on their own land, examples of which could be widely seen. For instance, in Shanghai, the wealthiest city in China in the 19th century, there were visible borders between the Foreign Concession in Shanghai — the Western enclave that Chinese people could not enter without permission — and other regions, as shown in Figure 2 (a). Signs such as ‘Areas Reserved Only for Foreign Community’ and ‘NO DOGS AND CHINESE ALLOWED’, as shown in Figure 2, indicated that Chinese people were considered inferior. The notorious juxtaposition of bans on dogs and Chinese remained for the first three decades of the 20th century ^[12]. China took a long time to get accustomed to this new environment dominated by Western European powers.

In sum, for China, the arrival of the West meant a collapse of traditional civilisation and its legacy of millenniums ^[13]. The traumatic experience of over 100 years, perceived as an unprecedented national humiliation and cultural loss ^[13], accompanied the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949.

After World War II, the Soviet Union and the United States emerged as the two globally dominant powers. Though China was in the communist camp and required development, the Soviet Union was unwilling to support China’s industrialisation by exporting its technologies without restriction. In 1950, US President Truman sent General MacArthur to command the United Nations forces, aiming to protect the newly established South Korea and to prevent the spread of communism in Asia. Meanwhile, Chinese leader and Communist Party of China Chairman, Mao, sent Chinese troops to help the North Koreans, mainly based on two considerations: 1. To prevent the United Nations from easily defeating the North Koreans and threatening China’s northeast border. 2. To prevent the Soviet Union from needing to send troops to confront the United States directly, as a confrontation between these two giants could lead to another world war. In 1950, China had a population of 552 million, just one-third of its current 1.4 billion; moreover, the country had just ended its long battle with Japan (1937–1945) and the civil war between the Kuomintang (Nationalists), led by Chiang Kai-shek, and Mao’s Communist Party (1945–1949). China was economically poor, and its people were exhausted. It was difficult for it to mobilise for the Korean War.

3. 'My Country'

As discussed above, music is a carrier of society's mentality. To persuade the people to support war with an enemy as strong as the United States, the Chinese government needed to utilise all available tools, including political lessons, movies, songs, and articles, in the 1950s. The Chinese leaders understood that wars are also won in movie houses and concert halls, not simply on the battlefield^[14]. 'My Country' is a famous song of the Chinese war movie *Shangganling*, produced in 1956. The song was written by Qiao Yu and composed by Liu Chi. 'My Country' is a representative movie theme song (Link). The movie, the *Shangganling Campaign* (also known as *Battle of Triangle Hill* or *Operation Showdown*), contains a scene depicting a female soldier singing and talking with other soldiers, who are wounded but still need to prepare for one of the most serious battles in the Korean war. She starts to sing about typical landscapes that are widely known in China. The lyrics clearly describe the everyday nature of these scenes (e.g., scenes of the Yellow and Yangtze Rivers), quickly winning audiences' hearts:

Song Title: My Country

Movie: The *Shangganling Campaign* (1956)

Composer: Liu Chi

Lyricist: Qiao Yu

Lyrics:

A big river with wide waves

Wind blows rice flowers with scents flying

My home is at the riverbank

Liking hearing the boatman's sounds

Liking seeing the white sailboat

This is my beautiful country

This is where I grew up

On this spacious land

Bright sunshine is everywhere.

'My Country' communicates emotion and love for China in a soft, motherly tone, paying tribute to the motherland; it reached a broad audience in China. After describing the typical scenes above in a soft tone, however, the tone becomes less friendly and more aggressive, as shown in the following lyrics:

If my friends come, there will be good wine

If the wolf comes, there will be hunting guns waiting for it

This is my powerful country, this is where I grew up

On this warm land, peaceful sunshine is everywhere.

Thus, the song rouses the people to defend the land and encourages them to continue fighting the strong enemy. This song profoundly influenced the Chinese generation born in the 1930s and 1940s. Other songs with similar impact can also be easily found. One of them is 'Crossing the Yalu River', a song popular even today, commemorating Sino-North Korean cooperation in the Korean War^[14].

In creating this work, to better combine with the film's plot, Qiao Yu composed three classic lyrics inspired by his experience of crossing the Yangtze River. Throughout the verse of the song, Qiao mainly starts by conveying people's sense of feeling, through visual words such as 'waves', and olfactory words such as 'rice flowers with scents'. He creates a beautiful picture of mountains and rivers. The chorus forms a great contrast with the verse. People instantly experience a strong patriotic passion through the song's praise of the motherland and its people.

'My Country' is in binary form and F major. Liu Chi combines the lyrics with the Chinese pentatonic mode and adopts the writing skills of counterpoint. For choice of rhythm, he does not use the march to evoke the image of soldiers. Instead, he breaks the convention and uses the lyrical 4/4 beat rhythm with the folk song 'Small Cattle' as the musical motif, leading the melody to be beautiful and pleasant, and the emotion to be real and delicate. The verse ends on a dominant note, allowing for a better connection

and inheritance between phrases.

In the chorus, there are many quick changes, and the intensity of the music is strengthened. The tempo and rhythm are elongated, and power is maintained. The chorus is the soldiers singing in unison. The imposing and heroic mood of the chorus sharply contrasts the tender spirit of the verse, more prominent volunteers of the comrade's passion and love for the motherland.

Although 'My Country' was created over half a century ago and may feel old-fashioned to younger Chinese generations, it is still capable of uniting Chinese people today. Five months after zero new coronavirus cases were achieved in Wuhan, in August 2020, people in the city held a flash choir performance of 'My Country' at the Wuhan Railway Station (Link). By doing so, they celebrated China's national day and created a strong resonance for Chinese people in China and overseas.

4. Russian Folk Songs Popular in China

After the Korean War (1950–1953), the Soviet Union's political alliance with China strengthened, and it agreed to export its advanced technologies and culture to China in the 1950s and 1960s^[15]. The so-called 156 Projects, an array of technologically advanced, large-scale, capital-intensive industrial facilities, exemplified the Sino-Soviet alliance. The new China leaned heavily on the Soviet Union for international strategic advice and domestic technological, industrial, and economic support^[16]. Chinese people became inclined to absorb Russian culture. During that period, Chinese people participated in numerous Russian classes and sang several Russian folk songs, including 'Path' and some other songs, such as 'Troika' and 'Night on the Moscow Outskirts'. Most of these Russian folk songs widely impacted the Chinese population, including Hu Jintao, the former President of the People's Republic of China, who sang 'Night on the Moscow Outskirts' (Link) to the public during a national gala. The same song was performed by Vitas, the reputed Russian-Ukrainian singer; Alla Gracheva, Vitas' daughter; and Li Yugang, a famous Chinese singer, in 2019 on China Central Television (Link), refreshing elder Chinese generations' memories and influencing younger ones to learn these Russian folk songs and their stories of origin.

As shown in Figure 3, 'Path' is a Russian folk love song that depicts a young girl who follows her lover to the battlefield. Its historical background is the Great Patriotic War (1941–1945) between the Soviet Union and Germany (part of the larger world war). Here is a lyric excerpt:

I will follow this tiny path

Follow my lover to the battlefield

Please lead me, my path. Follow my lover to the frontier.

1=D $\frac{2}{4}$ 沉思地 小路 (俄罗斯民歌) 前苏联卫国战争时期曲
J=68 (关牧村 演唱)

(5̇6 | 6. 54 | 3̇6 656 | 23 2 | 2 0 | 1̇6 54 | 1̇6 25 | 6 - | 0)

6. 1 | 3. 21 | 2 3 3 | 1 2 2 | 1 7 | 6 0 | 2. 6 2 3 | 4 5 4 3 2 |

一条小路 曲曲 弯弯 细又长, 一直通往 迷雾的远
(纷纷) 雪花 掩盖了他的 足迹, 没有脚步 也没有歌
(他在) 冒着 枪林 弹雨的危 险, 实在叫我 心中 挂
(在这) 大雪 纷纷 飞舞的早 晨, 战斗还在 残酷地进
(一条) 小路 曲曲 弯弯 细又长, 我的小路 伸向 远

1- | 05 1 | 6. 54 | 3 6 6 5 6 | 4 3 2 | 20 | 3 6 5 4 4 | 3 1 1 | 2 7 |

方, 我要 沿着 这条细长的小 路, 跟着我的 爱人 上战
声, 在那一片 宽广银色的 原野上, 只有一条 小路 孤零
单, 我要 变成 一只伶俐的小 鸟, 立刻 飞到 爱人的 身
行, 我要 勇敢地 为他包扎 伤口, 从那 炮火中 救他 出
方, 请你 带领 我把我的 小路呀, 跟着 爱人到 遥远的 边

6- | 05 1 | 6. 0 6 1 | 6 - | 0 (5̇6 | 6. 54 | 3̇6 656 | 23 2 | 2 - |

场。我要 场。纷纷
领。在那 零。
边。我要 边。在那
来。我要 来。
疆。请你

1̇6 54 | 1̇6 25 | 6 - | 0 6 1 | 6 - | 6 0 ||

2. 他在
4. 一条
疆。

Figure 3: The Chinese version of 'Path'.

This Chinese version of 'Path' is a Russian-folk-style vocal music work adapted by Hu Tingjiang. The lyrics are composed based on the original song. Still, the music, before the expansion, changes the one-part form initially to the simple ternary form, which makes it modern but consistent with the original music style. The adaptation of 'Path' includes a prelude. In Section A, after the song's original melody finishes, a new melody of the adapted version, which is a variation of the original melody, commences. In Section B, the rhythm accelerates, the continuous triplet appears. Section A begins with the rearranged melody, then returns to the song's original melody.

Section A of 'Path' is initiated by the accordion melody with Russian national characteristics, starting with the theme of #C minor. The beginning of the rhythm is lyrical and slow, and the melody is graceful. The use of the vocal region of the middle part tells a story by expressing the lingering before parting. Then, it responds with the beautiful melody of the violin, forming the introduction of echo.

Section B continues with the soothing melody in harmonic minor, extending Section A, and finally Section C arrives with the 'ah' and tempo changes. The rhythm begins to widen, like a drum resonant and robust, using accompaniment textures for quaver rest and chords for column, and creating the atmosphere of the cruel fighting scenes of the war. Therefore, the audience can experience the rapid rhythm of emotional excitement and tension, with the song reflecting the girl's yearning for love and desire to turn into a bird to fly to her lover. This section takes two measures as a unit, ascending the second sequence, accompanied by the characteristic fourth advance of the march, with harmonic minor to polish the scene of 'the lonely path'.

The theme melody of Section A' reaches the climax with a high-pitched voicing of 'To the frontier'. To better express the content and mood of the song, Section A' uses the technique of speed contrast so that the whole song changes from fast to slow and then to fast again. It better shapes the girl's musical image, anxiously waiting for her sweetheart and worrying about his safety on the battlefield.

三 套 车

1 = F $\frac{3}{4}$
♩ = 78 俄罗斯民歌

<p>3 : 6. 6 6 6 #5 6 7. #5 3 0 3 </p> <p>1. 冰 雪 遮 盖 着 伏 尔 加 河, 冰 2.(小) 伏 子 你 为 什 么 悲 伤, 为</p> <p>1 6 1 1 2 #2 3 - - 0 3 </p> <p>河 上 跑 着 三 套 车, 有 什 么 低 着 你 的 头, 是</p> <p>6. 7 1 7 6 5 4 3 2. 4 6 7 6 </p> <p>人 在 唱 着 忧 郁 的 歌, 唱 谁 让 你 这 样 伤 心, 问</p> <p>3. 4 3 2 7 1 6 - 6 0 0 3 : </p> <p>歌 的 是 那 赶 车 的 人。 小 他 的 是 那 乘 车 的</p> <p>6 - 6 0 0 3 6. 6 6 6 #5 6 </p> <p>人。 3. 你 看 吧 我 这 匹 可 怜 的</p>	<p>3. 2 1 7 0 7 1 6 1 1 2 #2 3 - 0 3 </p> <p>老 马, 它 跟 我 走 遍 天 涯, 可</p> <p>6. 7 1 7 6 5 4 3 2. 4 6 7 6 </p> <p>恨 那 财 主 要 把 它 买 了 去, 今</p> <p>3. 4 3 2 7 1 6 - 6 0 0 3 </p> <p>后 苦 难 在 等 着 它。 可</p> <p>6. 7 1 7 6 5 4 3 2. 4 6 7 6 </p> <p>恨 那 财 主 要 把 它 买 了 去, 今</p> <p>3. 4 3 2 7 1 6 - 6 0 0 3 </p> <p>后 苦 难 在 等 着 它。</p>
---	--

C-28

Figure 4: The Chinese Version of 'Troika'.

'Path' is one of the most famous Russian songs in China. Chinese students learn the Chinese version of this song in primary school, but most do not know its Russian origin. The song's melody is different from those of rich Chinese tradition. It is slower, seemingly tells a slow-motion story, in a sad and solemn mood. The Russian folk songs of that period served the aims of war or revolution; to make them more understandable, the songs progressed more slowly, allowing audiences to have enough time to 'feel the same way'. Other Russian songs popular in China have similar characteristics (e.g., 'Troika', 'Night on the Moscow Outskirts'). Importantly, these songs spent time describing the social background, directly or indirectly. For example, 'Night on the Moscow Outskirts' describes Moscow's surroundings in detail, creating a romanticised picture that audiences can look forward to visiting, while also gently promoting the Soviet Union. In 'Troika', shown in Figure 4, there was 'an old serving horse' who had served its master for a long time but was shamefully sold when it turned old. The horse serves as a metaphor for the contradictions between the bourgeoisie and working-class in Marxist theory. These Russian folk songs were popular for decades after the 1950s. Although musically tremendous and well-designed, in the last two decades, they have gradually lost younger audiences who do not live in a society with a heavy Russian orientation, like their grandparents and parents. Some remixed versions can still be heard at various music events today. However, they are not as politically vital as they used to be. In other words,

their function varied as the social context changed — similar to that of California punk, which expressed dissatisfaction with the status quo in the late 70s and early 80s, (e.g. bands like Dead Kennedys, calling out the America's failures and betrayals in its early stage in 1977–1983) ^[17], and witnessed a greater influx of political content post 9/11, as manifested by the song lyrics which focused more on specific political themes such as war, political corruption, America's two-party system, poverty, and America's global perception ^[18]. For instance, the political theme of 'During George W. Bush's presidency, punks were critical of various political and global problems, and did not want to be perceived as apathetic Americans' was evident by punks' lyrics which conveyed their critical oppositional perspectives such as 'I never looked around, never second-guessed. Then I read some Howard Zinn now I'm always depressed. And now I can't sleep from years of apathy all because I read a little Noam Chomsky' and 'Global warming, radio-active sites. Imperialistic wrongs and animal rights' in NOFX's 'Franco Un-American' ^[18].

5. Songs in the Cultural Revolution

The import of Soviet technologies laid the foundation for China's industrialisation, during which the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) was one of the most critical periods. The goal was to preserve Chinese communism by purging remnants of capitalist and traditional elements from Chinese society, thus benefiting society's advancement. During this period, songs were politicised and conveyed to most people in a simple, repeated way. This makes it easier for the masses to understand and accept. Songs had simple lyrics and rhythms, but they did serve as an excellent tool to send explicit messages. As China was still in the process of industrialisation, most Chinese people were not well educated. The literacy rate was <50% ^[19]. To better communicate the message, songs had to be in plain, repeated language, which served as a helpful communication tool. The characteristics of the plain language and simple images in these songs, such as 'The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution is Just Great' (Link) (see Figure 5) and 'Sailing in the Sea Depends on the Helmsman' (Link), could be widely seen.



全国的无产阶级文化大革命形势大好

1 = F $\frac{2}{4}$ 为毛主席语录谱曲

5 5-6 5 5 3 2 | 1-1 2 3 | 5 - | 6 · 5 | 1 2 |
全 国 的 无 产 阶 级 文 化 大 革 命 形 势 大 好，

3-3 2 5 | 3 - | 1-1 1 2 | 3 3 5 | 2-3 2 1 | 6 5 6 |
不 是 小 好。 整 个 形 势 比 以 往 任 何 时 候 都 好。

2 2 3 | 6-6 5 3 | 2 3 | 1 0 | 6-6 1 5 | 6 · 1 |
比 以 往 任 何 时 候 都 好。 形 势 大 好 的

2-3 2 1 | 6 · 5 | 1-1 1 2 | 3 2 1 | 2-2 5 6 | 5 - |
重 要 标 志 是 人 民 群 众 充 分 发 动 起 来 了。

6 6 6 | 5-6 5 3 | 2 2 3 | 2 1 6 | 1 - | 1 · 5 |
从 来 的 群 众 运 动 都 没 有 象 这 次 发 动 得

1-1 2 | 3 - | 5 · 3 | 5 7 | 6 - | 6 - |
这 么 广 泛， 这 么 深 入。

5 5-6 5 5 3 2 | 1-1 2 3 | 5 - | 1-5 1 2 | 3 0 |
全 国 的 无 产 阶 级 文 化 大 革 命 形 势 大 好，

2-2 5 | 5 0 | 6 · 3 | 5 6 | 1 - | 1 0 ||
形 势 大 好， 形 势 大 好。

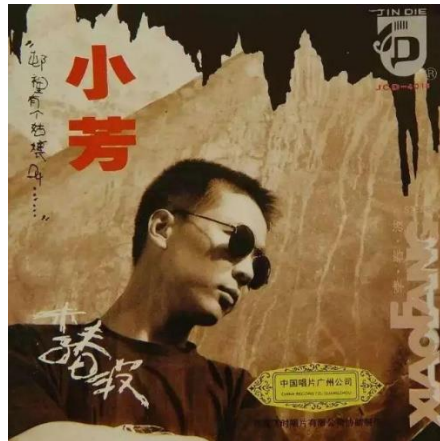
Source: <http://www.chuanboxue.org/uploads/201106/13074570725fVkt1Vx.jpg>. Accessed 1 June 2022.

Figure 5: The song and image of 'The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution is Just Great'.

These songs functioned to promote and reinforce Chairman Mao's ideas. The lyrics were so understandable that people, especially young people, were easily motivated by them. Some song lyrics may be considered oversimplified from today's perspective. For example, the 'The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution is Just Great' overemphasised the 'extremely good situation' by simple repetition but without enough layered details, and, the lyrics were even more simple in 'Sailing in the Sea Depends on the Helmsman', which just conveyed the message of 'following the leader Chairman Mao'. However, in that period, the goal was to turn China into a modern industrialised state quickly, and thus some traditional Chinese cultures and values were thought to be unimportant, and the songs acted as a convenient medium of conveying messages. Unlike 'My Country', the songs in this period seldom mentioned the country's landscape; instead, they acted as an information broadcaster to influence people effectively.

6. Songs after the Establishment of US–China Diplomatic Ties

President Nixon's 1972 visit and the establishment of diplomatic ties between the US and China in 1979 paved the road for the Chinese to learn from their Western counterparts for the first time. The Chinese music community has turned to different styles of music popular around the world, such as rock, jazz, blues, and Japanese and Korean popular music. 'Fang' ([Link](#)), composed in 1993 by Li Chunbo, is a love pop song in Mandarin with jazz elements, as shown in Figure 6. In the song, Fang is a young village girl, pursued by a young man who visits and sings for her every day. The direct way of expressing romantic love through a love ballad exposed Chinese musicians to the charm of Western music.



Source: Sohu News https://www.sohu.com/a/334689062_120127439. Accessed 1 June 2022.

Figure 6: Li Chunbo's album 'Fang', released in 1993.

Chinese musicians have learned Western music in various ways and achieved success. One example is Leehom Wang, the famous Chinese-American singer and songwriter, who went to Williams College, and Berklee College of Music in Boston, MA and sang a popular song, 'Light of My Life' ([Link](#)), in 1999 with Lara Fabian, one of the best-selling Belgian artists of all time. Another example is Gloria Tang, also known as G.E.M, a popular singer-songwriter, who covered Beyoncé's 'If I Were A Boy' ([Link](#)) and received good reviews.

Interestingly, there have also been crossovers in which Western singers have adapted or covered Chinese musicians' works. 'Still Here' ([Link](#)), by Lene Marlin, the famous Norwegian singer, adapted Wong Faye's 'I Am Willing' ([Link](#)). Marlin also added a slow guitar melody to the song, conveying her sense of love with the utmost serenity. Michael Learns to Rock, a Danish soft and pop-rock band, sang 'I Walk This Road Alone' ([Link](#)), an English cover version of Chinese rock giant Cui Jian's 'Nothing to Lose' ([Link](#)). To the best of our knowledge, in contrast, there have been no new Russian songs produced in translation in China since the 1980s.

The large-scale building of infrastructure has been a feature of China's rapid growth, which has led to it overtaking the United States as the largest manufacturer in 2010. With China's rising economy, its music has become more open to other music cultures, maintaining the internalisation trend. In addition, it is not surprising that China has started to display its folk culture and folk music to the world, which was unbelievable for older Chinese generations, who, deeply influenced by traumatic historical experiences, believed Chinese culture was not good enough to show to the West. Li Ziqi, a Chinese video blogger, is known for creating food and handicraft preparation videos using traditional Chinese

ingredients, from her rural hometown in Sichuan Province. She has more than 17 million subscribers on YouTube ([Link](#)), most of whom, perhaps surprisingly, are Westerners. Her videos contain extensive Chinese elements, such as colours, costumes, and background music. Interestingly, while most videos are in Standard Mandarin or local Sichuanese Mandarin and do not have English subtitles, Western audiences still seem to enjoy them, showing that Chinese folk culture is gaining popularity. In the music sector, Song Zuying, a traditional Chinese folk music singer, performed a solo concert at Vienna's Musikverein, in the 'Golden Hall', in 2003, and another solo concert at The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in 2006. She performed many Chinese folk songs for her mostly European and American audience, such as 'Jasmine Flower' ([Link](#)) and 'Spice Girls' ([Link](#)). The latter song is from Hunan Province, where people eat every meal with hot chilli; thus, girls from Hunan are called 'spice girls'. Song's successful concerts started a new page in the narrative of Chinese folk music.

Asian families had long made lasting investments in Western classical music due to Western imperialism's influence, beginning in the 19th century, and the push for modernisation in East Asian society ^[20]. Chinese folk music being presented in one of the world's most prestigious music halls indicates that China has begun to export its traditional culture to the world. As China maintains its economic growth, it is optimistic that Chinese culture exports may continue and become stronger. Moreover, as the interaction between Chinese music and music from other parts of the world becomes increasingly frequent, the boundaries blur, and more production mixing ensues. The mixed forms may help Chinese music survive and flourish around the world, like Irish music in the US and elsewhere, which continues to survive outside Ireland played by musicians who are not Irish descendants ^[21].

Very recently, Jay Chou, the Mandopop legend, released a song 'Mojito' ([Link](#)), which features Latin food culture, Cuban musical elements (e.g., Spanish guitar, percussion, and horns), and Havana street scenes, which aired on MTV. The lyrics are:

Please give my lover a glass of mojito
I like reading her eyes when she's slightly drunk
And don't put too much
Sugar in my coffee,
'Coz the world is oversweet for her.

It also gained immense popularity, with more than eight multilingual cover versions (e.g., English, Spanish, German, Italian, and Cantonese) from multiple singers around the world ([Link](#)). Here, the mojito, a traditional highball, becomes a new starting-point for Chinese musicians to cross-cultural and language borders, and appreciate the beauty of the Latin music world. In another relevant case, Jessica Ellen Cornish, or Jessie J, a famous English singer-songwriter, performed more than ten English pop songs including Killing Me Softly with His Song ([Link](#)), My Heart Will Go On ([Link](#)), and I Will Always Love You ([Link](#)), in Singer 2018 aired on Hunan Mango TV, gaining great popularity in China. Jay Chou's Mojito and Jessie J's performance hint that the boundaries between Chinese pop music and other music cultures are becoming more and more blurred, and Chinese pop music is expected to be more open and inclusive in the future.

7. Conclusions

By summarising the songs' and society's socioeconomic characteristics in different periods after the establishment of the People's Republic of China, we can see the correlation between these characteristics and many representative songs. Embracing Russian and Western music, in turn, followed Chinese society's political agenda, leading to a rapid crossover that fulfilled its socioeconomic purposes in various periods. Meanwhile, we find that Chinese music significantly internalised elements of the Russian and Western musical traditions it interacted with. The Russian folk songs 'Troika', 'Path', and others were translated into Chinese but kept their own stories and rhythms. In 'Fang' and 'Light of My Life', Chinese musicians actively mix in Eastern musical elements to narrate their own stories. 'Mojito' represents a well-designed Chinese-Latino musical combination that might hint at the new cooperation of two music cultures. In 'Jasmine Flower' and 'Spice Girls', Chinese folk music shows its charm to the world. Briefly, Chinese music has become increasingly internationalised and open and is actively absorbing musical nutrition from different global regions to enrich its musical productions and show its beauty to the world. Besides, China is expected to provide more opportunities to Western musicians such as Jessie J.

Since its establishment in 1949, the People's Republic of China has been striving for a higher level

of political and economic independence, to minimise the colonial influence. Music has served as a recorder of this process, reflecting variations in society's mentality, as reflected by the musical works analysed in the historical timeline. Chinese music currently appears to be in a fast-developing period, partly due to frequent interactions with counterparts in the rest of the world. By absorbing these influences, Chinese music is growing more robust, and redefining itself in this new century. We can foresee much more high-quality Chinese music output.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Acknowledgements

We appreciate professional advices from Prof. Hope Koehler at School of Music, West Virginia University, Prof. Tianjun Yang and Prof. Hong Yu at School of Music, South China Normal University.

References

- [1] Ho, W. (2016) 'Popular songs and social change: East meets West in Shanghai, China', in *Trends in Music Information Seeking, Behavior, and Retrieval for Creativity*, ed. P. Kostagiolas, K. Martzoukou and C. Lavranos (Hershey, PA), 58-77
- [2] Norris, C. (ed.). (1989) *Music and Politics of Culture* (London)
- [3] Brzezinski, Z. (2016) *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and its Geostrategic Imperatives* (New York).
- [4] Keppy, P. (2013) 'Southeast Asia in the age of jazz: locating popular culture in the colonial Philippines and Indonesia', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 44(3), 444-64
- [5] Hosokawa, S. (1994) 'East of Honolulu: Hawaiian music In Japan from the 1920s to the 1940s', *Perfect Beat*, 2(1), 51-67
- [6] Flew, T., M. Ryan and C. Su. (2019) 'Culture, communication and hybridity: the case of The Rap of China', *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, 14(2), 93-106
- [7] Yoshihara, M. (2008) *Musicians from a Different Shore: Asians and Asian Americans in Classical Music* (Philadelphia)
- [8] Aldama, A. J. (2012) 'No somos criminales: crossing borders in contemporary Latina and Latino music', in *Performing the US Latina and Latino Borderlands*, ed. A. J. Aldama, C. Sandoval and P. J. Garc á (Bloomington, IN), 365-81
- [9] Lozano, T. D. (2020) 'Corridos for the Holy Coyote: ghost smuggling ballads and the undocumented migrant journey', *Americas: A Hemispheric Music Journal*, 29(1), 24-51.
- [10] Lovell, J. (2015) *The Opium War: Drugs, Dreams, and the Making of Modern China* (New York)
- [11] Hu, Y. (2013) 'The double meaning of "the sick man of East Asia" and China's politics', in *Rural Health Care Delivery* (Berlin), 3-9
- [12] Bickers, R. A. and J. N. Wasserstrom. (1995) 'Shanghai's "Dogs and Chinese Not Admitted" sign: legend, history and contemporary symbol', *The China Quarterly*, 142, 444-66
- [13] Croizier, R. (1990) 'World history in the People's Republic of China', *Journal of World History*, 1(2), 151-69
- [14] Cathcart, A. (2010) 'Japanese devils and American wolves: Chinese communist songs from the war of liberation and the Korean War', *Popular Music and Society*, 33(2), 203-18
- [15] Giorcelli, M. and B. Li. (2022) 'Technology transfer and early industrial development: evidence from the Sino-Soviet alliance', *National Bureau of Economic Research*, 29455. <http://www.nber.org/papers/w29455>
- [16] Chen, L. L. (2020) 'Cultural imagining of the cold war: an introduction', *China Perspectives*, 1(1), 3-6
- [17] Brown, P. R. (2020) 'The center at the margins: American exceptionalism in California punk, ca. 1977-1983', *Popular Music and Society*, 44(4), 1-21
- [18] Leonardini, A. (2019) 'California punk rock: a content analysis of political themes in song lyrics pre and post 9/11', M.A. thesis, Sacramento State University
- [19] Peterson, G. (1998) *The Power of Words: Literacy and Revolution in South China, 1949-95*, Vol. 1 (Vancouver)
- [20] Yoshihara, M. (2008) *Musicians from a Different Shore: Asians and Asian Americans in Classical Music* (Philadelphia)
- [21] Rapuano, D. L. (2001) 'Becoming Irish or becoming Irish music? Boundary construction in Irish music communities', *Journal of American Culture*, 24(1-2), 103-13