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- 1 This timely volume edited by Paul Clark, Laikwan Pang, and Tsan-Huang Tsai marks the fiftieth anniversary of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (hereafter the CR) of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Traceable to August 1966 at Beijing University, the CR was first a student-led movement, but workers, peasants, and people from all walks of life later joined in, and the campus campaign escalated into a nation-wide 'revolution' involving an enormous number of participants.¹ While the origins of the CR are complex, culture was its core, and also the pretext for power struggles in social, ideological, and political conflicts among different factions of society.² Radical cultural rhetoric such as "smashing the four olds" – old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits – legitimized outlandish behavior, resulting in massive disruption to and destruction of the nation's economy, education system, tradition, knowledge, let alone properties, artifacts, and human lives.
- 2 While many prior studies have examined the political, social, and economic dimensions of the CR, this volume has culture, particularly the CR soundscape, as its focus, following the seminal works of Paul Clark's *The Chinese Cultural Revolution: A History*

(Cambridge University Press, 2008) and Barbara Mittler's *A Continuous Revolution: Making Sense of Cultural Revolution Culture* (Harvard University Asia Center, 2012).³ As the editors of this volume have pointed out, *yangbanxi* (*yangban* means 'model' and *xi* 'theatrical works') is CR's backbone (Introduction, p. 2). Since the majority of *yangbanxi* are Peking operas, the term is often translated as 'model opera'. But *yangbanxi* consists of not only Peking operas but also ballets such as *The White-Haired Girl* and *The Red Detachment of Women*, as well as the symphonic music *Shajiabang*. The term is thus sometimes also translated as 'model works' even though the use of 'work' does not quite reflect the Chinese word 'xi'. Opera is a type of 'xi', and so is a movie, or any other event that engages spectatorship. In that regard, the translation of 'xi' in this volume as 'performance' extends *yangbanxi*'s basic connotation to entail a larger scope of cultural productions, re-productions, mediations, and re-mediations rendered in different forms and formats during and after the CR.

- 3 The emergence of *yangbanxi* in CR is generally attributed to Mao Zedong's wife Jiang Qing. But in reality, a good number of *yangbanxi* examples existed prior to the onset of the CR. For example, the three Peking operas *The Red Lantern*, *Shajiabang*, and *Raid on the White Tiger Regiment* were products of prior operatic reforms showcased at the Modern Peking Opera Festival in 1964 (Chapter 1, p. 11). The first reference to the existence of *yangbanxi* is traceable to the news report dated 6 December 1966 in the *People's Daily* entitled "Carrying out Chairman Mao's Line on Literature and Art: Brilliant Models", in which eight works were sanctified as models to follow for other cultural workers.⁴ These eight works, reworked or retouched under Jiang Qing's supervision, were finally released in Beijing in May 1967 to commemorate the 25th anniversary of Mao's *Talk at the Yan'an Forum*,⁵ and they received high publicity, including a detailed report in *People's Daily* (May 24). A news release on 16 July 1967 by Xinhua News Agency (*Xinhuashe*) further affirmed the sanctified status of this repertoire as "edifying Mao's revolutionary line on art and literature, serving workers, peasants, and soldiers, as well as proletarian politics."⁶ But as pointed out by DAI Jiafang in the first chapter of the volume, these eight works constituted only the first batch of *yangbanxi*, the second and the third together amounting to a total of nineteen officially sanctified works (p. 11).
- 4 While *Yangbanxi* is propagandistic in nature, one of its fascinating features is the way it has inspired many 'revolutionary' musical attempts in the nation's capital and other parts of China at professional as well as amateur levels. As articulated by John Winzenburg in Chapter 9, "[...] the experimentation of the *yangbanxi* is part of a larger trajectory beyond Peking opera alone" (p. 189). Likewise, Nancy Rao also points out in Chapter 10 that "many salient features of the *yangbanxi* cultural synthesis remain significant to contemporary Chinese composers, whose sonic imaginary was well steeped in the synthesis" (p. 232). The current proliferation of propaganda music remediations, which is the focus of the concluding chapter by Barbara Mittler, attests to the cultural legacy of the CR.
- 5 *Yangbanxi* outputs are 'revolutionary' on two counts: their format as well as their subject matter, which are distinct from Chinese indigenous musical forms. On a musical level, the operatic works were to introduce changes to local operatic genres (*difangxi*) and to demonstrate the possibility of synthesizing Western and Chinese elements in this new form. On an ideological level, all works carried a clear objective to propagate socialist ideology so as to counteract the themes found in traditional operas, which

were criticized by Jiang Qing because they were “only about emperors and generals, literati and beauty, that of feudalism and capitalism.”⁷

- 6 The objective of *Listening to China's Cultural Revolution* is not only to examine the musical characteristics of the *yangbanxi*, but also to unravel these works' musical and political meanings as they were deployed to deliver political messages and consumed as such, they being the embodiment of how arts, politics, and ideology were entwined. As the three editors explain in the volume's Introduction:
- 7 [W]e are not here to explain how music was used as a transparent tool to carry political messages, but to emphasize that there were necessarily mistranslations and ambiguities. Through this analysis, we can further explore the meanings of the Cultural Revolution, a historical project that was meant to change the “soul” of the people, through drastic destruction and construction. This book aims to illustrate both the musical and the political meanings of this musical culture by exploring their interactions and mutual translations before, during, and after the Cultural Revolution (p. 2).
- 8 The volume's eleven chapters are divided into three parts: 1) “Temporality: Continuity and Change in Cultural Revolution Music”; 2) “Geography: Transplantation and the Making of Regional”; 3) “Lineages and Legacies: Cultural Revolution Soundscapes beyond the Mao Era”. As the volume is the product of a symposium held in 2013, this tri-partite structure befittingly weaves together, in a coherent and meaningful manner, chapters of which otherwise diverse subject matters.
- 9 The five chapters constituting the first part of the volume offer a wide spectrum of the CR soundscape. The first chapter, written by Jiafang Dai, an established scholar of the PRC, and translated into English by Sze Wing Lau, is the only essay devoted to the *yangbanxi* and their musical features. It analyzes the musical-stylistic ‘revolution’ inaugurated by this genre, which can be summarized as follows: 1) it employed appropriate styles to delineate the characters' personalities disregarding the traditional practice of attaching character types to specific musical formulas; 2) it developed standard metric types that unify the composition/performance of the operatic works; 3) it expanded the accompaniment format to include Western instruments and put emphasis on how music contributes to enhancing the drama and characterization; 4) it used leading motives to delineate the leading characters and folk song of different regions to contextualize the locale. These innovations were ironically the embodiment of Western operatic aesthetics even though Western music was under attack and most of its repertoire banned at the time.
- 10 The second chapter written by Tsan-Hung Tsai adopts a somewhat different focus that covers the quintessential Chinese instrument *guqin* (seven-string zither) and its players' experiences during the CR. Tsai reveals the intricate links between music and politics, i.e. how the instrument and its players fell out of favor and came back in favor, and how the shift was politically motivated. The third chapter by Laurence Coderre examines the meaning of amateur performances, regarding them as a form of remediation of their time. The author shows how the self was (re-)constructed in relation to the roles of the *yangbanxi* heroes and villains, how images were entwined with imaginations, and how ideologies were intertwined with bodily politics. In so doing, she argues that “the *yangbanxi* villain is perhaps a better saboteur than we normally give him credit for, undermining the (re)production of ‘real life’ heroes

through performance by casting doubt on the feasibility of a perfect correspondence between appearance and essence, body and person” (p. 80).

- 11 Chapter Four and Five by Ban Wang and Paul Clark respectively are devoted to the CR films. Yet each approaches the subject matter differently and comes to different conclusions. Placing the CR films in the context of geopolitics and social movements in the Cold War era, Wang treats them as (a) social text, a prism that reflects the Third World development. Taking the filmed Beijing opera *On the Docks* and the North Korean film *The Season of the Apple Harvest* as case studies, he unravels the internationalism embedded in the former and the nation’s social-economic aspiration in the latter. Both challenges the neoliberal myth of development since, as he points out, they both “raise once again the questions around alternative development that takes seriously the values of community, the egalitarian spirit, political participation, and above all, the effort to forge a popular, democratic culture” (p. 105). Clark’s chapter is a well informed survey of films and film songs widely transmitted in the PRC prior to, during, and after the CR, through which he illustrates the intertextual nature of films and their music. In particular, the songs in these films as well as the tunes, he proposes, “are repeated and become elaborated in new styles in later films, on radio and loudspeaker, in classrooms and work places, in performances, and in quiet resistance” (p. 107). Clark argues that the music of the films not only illustrates the propagation of *yangbanxi* but also shows the continuation of prior trends established decades earlier (p. 122), a point also echoed in other chapters of the volume.
- 12 The second part of the volume features three chapters focusing on musicians’ efforts to adapt *yangbanxi* for local/regional usage, rendering them in local musical forms such as Cantonese opera, Uyghur *muqam* and Korean *ch’anguk*. This work, known as ‘yizhi’ in Chinese (meaning ‘transplantation’ in English), was one of the policies implemented by the Chinese central government in order to encourage regional performing organizations to follow the models established (p. 130). The three chapters in this part share a number of common features, including their combining of in-depth ethnography with careful archival research, and their findings unanimously pointing to the complexities of musical creativity during the CR. The musicians’ testimonies and the almost entirely overlooked adapted works of *yangbanxi* (known as ‘transplants’) recovered from their research illustrate the challenges faced by musicians at the time. As Pang affirms in the sixth chapter, the presence of regional musical features and the reliance upon local dialects in these transplanted works reveal “the core political mechanism of the Cultural Revolution’s cultural program, which features a complicated infiltration and diffusion process” (p. 130). Interestingly, even though transplanted works were meant to be transitional as regional music and dialects were to be phased out in the long run, musicians’ efforts were not necessarily coerced (p. 130). In fact, the process of transplantation, aside from being testimony to the infiltration of political control, also documented the common tensions in any kind of compositional/adaptation processes, i.e. the struggle between (the) fidelity (the will to remain faithful?) to the original and the aesthetic quality of the adapted work (p. 130). In a broader context, the tension between original and adapted works reflected the struggle between the national and the local; for instance, the Peking opera sonority, melodic and rhythmic formula negotiating with those of Cantonese opera, etc.
- 13 In Chapter Six, Pang uses three Cantonese opera works from Guangzhou (Canton) of southern China to illustrate the intricacies and even irony in the ‘transplantation’

process. For instance, a very successful work like the *Storm in the Countryside* – though not a direct transplant of *yangbanxi* – was condemned officially due to its regionalism (p. 137). The Cantonese opera transplant of *Shajiabang*, despite its being very loyal to the original, was criticized by musicians as being “nice to watch but hard to listen to” due to its musical awkwardness. (p. 138). Ironically, an aesthetically and musically successful work came about as a result of musicians’ losing faith in the policy and used a good deal of newly composed music in the transplantation process as in the case of the Cantonese opera transplant of *Azalea Mountain*.

- 14 Wong’s Chapter Seven not only provides an overview of Uyghur musical activities during the CR, but it also focuses on *Qizil Chiragh*, a transplant of *The Red Lantern*, by examining the musical-adaptive process. By way of this case study, Wong concludes that the work is a continuation and an on-going definition of the new sonic attributes of Uyghur music featuring hybrid sources, “ranging from Chinese and European operas to pre-modern Uyghur genres and post-1950s compositions, which speak to a self-assured indigenization that has characterized much of modern performance in the twentieth century” (p. 161).
- 15 In Chapter Eight, Rowan Pease examines the musical activities in Yanbian, a Chinese-Korean border minority region in northeast China, as well as the dissemination of the *yangbanxi* in the region with a focus on the transplantation of the *Song of the Dragon River* known as *Ryonggangsong* in Korean. Just as with all the other transplantation attempts, local musicians had to negotiate a great number of issues ranging from political infiltrations to aesthetic and musical choices. Here, one of the informants articulates the reality of state-sponsored composition, perhaps even more strongly than in any other examples cited in this section of the volume. He states that they could not express their opinion freely and admits, for example, that they were actually very fond of the original *yangbanxi* and may have even appreciate it more than the transplanted work (p. 180). Even though the work was a failure and quickly fell into oblivion as the CR was coming to an end. Pease sees the positive in such an attempt as “it drew upon the experiences of composers and writers in the late 1950s and the early 1960s to update Korean sung drama to serve modern audience.” Even though the efforts of these musicians were not acknowledged publically, they were shown in the more successful *Arirang*, a work produced by the Yanbian Song-and-Dance Troupe in 1989, which was built on *Ryonggangsong*.
- 16 The last part of the volume measures the impact of the CR with three very imaginative but also well argued chapters, two of which (Chapters Nine and Ten) entailed some detailed music analyses and music examples. Chapter Nine by John Winzenburg examines the musical dramatic work *The Great Wall*, composed by the Russian-Jewish émigré composer Aaron Avshalomov in 1946. Avshalomov was then residing in Shanghai, only two decades prior to the emergence of *yangbanxi*. The conceptual parallels that can be drawn between *The Great Wall* and *yangbanxi*, such as their experimentation in generic and musical blending of Chinese and Western elements and their connections to nationalism, politics, ideology, and factionalism, are carefully presented. Winzenburg thus argues that both “reflects politically motivated aesthetic process in China’s experimentation of new musical and dramatic forms” and that Peking opera, though quite central as a national theatrical symbol, “does not completely represent the scale of reform that China has experienced over the past century” (p. 209).

- 17 Winzenburg's argument, in a way, is further substantiated in Chapter Ten by Nancy Rao, in which she traces the impact of *yangbanxi* to a group of well established Chinese composers who grew up during the CR, namely Tan Dun, Chen Yi, Bright Sheng, Zhou Long, Chen Qigang, Guo Wenjing, etc. Seeing *yangbanxi* as the "embodied musical experience" of these composers, Rao argues that many of these composers' musical treatments in their contemporary Western-format works could be traced back to their familiarity with the soundscape of *yangbanxi*. For instance, the use of percussion patterns in Tan Dun's opera *Last Emperor* have some parallel with the treatments in *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*. This link allows Rao to address the long lasting impact of *yangbanxi*, regarded as a national sonic imagery by the public even decades later.
- 18 Rao's argument paves the way to the final chapter by Barbara Mittler, which examines the recent remediation of CR music and the reason behind its popularity. At the same time, it also serves as a conclusion to the volume by weaving part of its discussions with issues brought forth in other chapters of the volume. By drawing on the oral history of interviewees that she collected in the early 2000s, Mittler argues that, despite the restrictions put on the types of music officially permitted, "it turns out that there was a substantive difference between what was officially endorsed and what was actually available. People remember the Cultural Revolution soundscape in many different, often contradictory, ways." She emphasizes that understanding the aural experience of the CR "may help us explain its social lives and continuing vibrant repercussions in the present" (p. 250).
- 19 In conclusion, there is no doubt that the volume has delivered what it set out to do. The eleven chapters offer well-grounded research and succinctly written prose by very established scholars of diverse fields: Asian studies, ethno/musicology, music theory, and cultural studies, with research data from archival work, ethnography, music analyses as well as interpretations informed by social, political, aesthetical and cultural studies. The approaches adopted are truly interdisciplinary. The volume breaks the myth that there was no culture or music during the CR other than the eight *yangbanxi*. As illustrated in all these chapters, the CR soundscape was quite varied and championed a considerable repertoire of different types of music that included revolutionary music, regional opera, guqin as well as banned classical music. People's lives and musical experiences also shaped the CR soundscape and vice versa. Most important of all, the volume takes a look into the CR's legacy, revealing the impact of the CR's soundscape on musical activities and creativities even decades after it came to an end.
- 20 Chapters in this volume have successfully challenged a uniformed and single-dimensional discourse on the CR soundscape. It is thus a very valuable addition to the CR and *yangbanxi* literature, particularly for readers who are already familiar with the subject matter. But since *yangbanxi* is an art form entwined with a decade of atrocities, how it was/is 'heard' differed and still differs greatly from one individual to another. Perhaps what also needs to be 'heard' are the many tragedies which happened to the musicians. In 1966, seventeen faculty members of the Shanghai Conservatory committed suicide one after another and likewise, the voices of Chinese scholars, are still under-represented in the current volume. In that regard, *yangbanxi* and music of the CR are still an emerging area of historical, ethnographic, and analytical pursuit with room for new studies and outputs. Until then, our understanding of the CR approximates the Chinese saying: "the blind trying to figure out the elephant with his/

her hands". There is no doubt that *Listening to China's Cultural Revolution* has already made a big step forward in decoding the elephant.

NOTES

1. For a brief summary of the origins of the CR, see CUSHING, Lincoln and TOMPKINS, Ann, *Chinese Posters: Art from the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution*, San Francisco, Chronicle Books, 2007.
2. For discussion on what caused the CR, see WANG, Shaoguang "The Structural Sources of the Cultural Revolution", in LAW, Kam-ye (ed.), *The Chinese Cultural Revolution Reconsidered*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, p. 58-91.
3. Both Clark and Mittler are contributors to the volume.
4. These eight works entail five Beijing operas: *Shajiabang*, *The Red Lantern*, *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, *On the Docks*, *Raid on the White Tiger Regiment*; two ballets: *The White-Haired Girl*, *The Red Detachment of Women*, and the symphony *Shajiabang*. For detailed musical analyses of these works, see YANBING, Hui, *Yangbanxi yanjiu [A Study on Model Works]*, Beijing, Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2010.
5. Mao's talk served as cultural directives until the country underwent an economic reform after the CR. For the translation of the text, see ZEDONG, Mao, "Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art": A Translation of the 1943 Text with Commentary, by McDOUGALL, Bonnie S., *Michigan Papers in Chinese Studies*, Vol. 39, Ann Arbor, Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1980. For more information on music as propaganda in the PRC, see PERRIS, Arnold, "Music as Propaganda: Art at the Command of Doctrine in the People's Republic of China", *Ethnomusicology: Journal of the Society for Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 27, N° 1, 1983, p. 1-28 ; McDOUGALL, Bonnie S. (ed.), *Popular Chinese literature and performing arts in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1984.
6. Mentioned in BAI Di, "Feminism in the Revolutionary Model Ballets *The White-Haired Girl* and *The Red Detachment of Women*", in KIND Richard (ed.), *Art in Turmoil: the Chinese Cultural Revolution 1966-76*, Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 2010, p. 188.
7. The translation is mine. Jiang Qing, "Tan Jiangju geming: 1964 nian 7 yue zai jiangju xiandaixi guanmuo yanchu renyuan zuotanhui shang de jianghua" [About Beijing Opera revolution: a talk presented at the symposium for performers of contemporary Beijing opera festival held in July 1964]. The talk was referred to in *Renmin ribao* [People's Daily] (10 May 1967).

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Hon-Lun Yang is professor of music at Hong Kong Baptist University. Her recent articles appear in such volumes as *The Oxford Handbook of Music Censorship* (2015), *Music and Protest in 1968* (CUP, 2013), and *Music and Politics* (Ashgate, 2013) as well as in journals such as *International Review of Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* (2011) and *Asian Music* (2010), etc. Her co-edited volume *China and the West: Music, Representation, and Reception* (with Michael Saffle) will be released by the University of Michigan Press in December 2016. She is the lead author of *Networking the Russian Musical Diaspora in Shanghai* (co-authored with Simo Mikkonen and John Winzenburg and contracted by the University of Hawaii Press).