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Music After The Cultural Revolution: Transnational Precarity For China's One-Child Generation

Abstract

This dissertation studies the intergenerational effects of the Chinese Cultural Revolution and the transnational careers of Chinese musicians born and raised during the one-child policy. Bridging scholarship in ethnomusicology and musicology with work in cultural anthropology, East Asian studies, Asian American studies, and literature studies, I examine the palpable memories and traumas from the Cultural Revolution and show that they continually frame individual and collective engagements with music in the People's Republic of China and the Chinese diaspora. At the core of this research are extensive multi-sited ethnography conducted in the PRC, Taiwan, Canada, and the United States, and archival sources. Using these interdisciplinary methodologies, I address Chinese music-making practices in relation to personal and familial desires, and national transformations. I argue that although some Chinese musicians have achieved the highest levels of institutional success through conservatory training and international performances, they are continually motivated by anxieties of socio-economic precarity and desires for redress from parents who lost musical ambitions during the Cultural Revolution. As a result, Chinese musicians use what I term "strategic citizenship" to create transnational opportunities and seek stable futures for themselves while navigating neoliberal systems that impact their educational pathways and possibilities for new residency in countries such as Canada and the United States.

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MUSIC AFTER THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION: TRANSNATIONAL PRECARITY

FOR CHINA'S ONE-CHILD GENERATION

Shelley Sha Zhang

A DISSERTATION

in

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Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania

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Chi-ming Yang, Associate Professor of English

Lei X. Ouyang, Associate Professor of Music, Swarthmore College

This dissertation is dedicated to the Deng family, to those who searched for their own histories in textbooks, but could not find them, and to all who lost dreams and loved ones during the Cultural Revolution and one-child policy.

It is also in memory of Tessa Sunnasy (1990-2007), Courtney Brown (1984-2016), Boris Lysenko (1930-2017), and Robert Zhang (1984-2018).

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Building an interdisciplinary project leads to certain challenges, but also to many fruitful conversations with those in other fields and buildings. Mien-Hwa Chiang in East Asian Languages and Civilizations, Deborah Thomas in Anthropology, and Gavin Steingo at Princeton's Department of Music have left indelible marks in my intellectual development; and the librarians Lynne Farrington, John Pollack, and Liza Vick have been wonderful collaborators. So much was learned on the fourth and sixth floors of Van Pelt Library!

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These past seven years of doctoral studies and nine years of graduate studies were full of a lifetime of experiences. I could not have enjoyed or persisted through them without the many people mentioned here. It truly takes a village.

ABSTRACT

MUSIC AFTER THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION: TRANSNATIONAL PRECARITY FOR CHINA'S ONE-CHILD GENERATION

Shelley Zhang

Jim Sykes

This dissertation studies the intergenerational effects of the Chinese Cultural Revolution and the transnational careers of Chinese musicians born and raised during the one-child policy. Bridging scholarship in ethnomusicology and musicology with work in cultural anthropology, East Asian studies, Asian American studies, and literature studies, I examine the palpable memories and traumas from the Cultural Revolution and show that they continually frame individual and collective engagements with music in the People's Republic of China and the Chinese diaspora. At the core of this research are extensive multi-sited ethnography conducted in the PRC, Taiwan, Canada, and the United States, and archival sources. Using these interdisciplinary methodologies, I address Chinese music-making practices in relation to personal and familial desires, and national transformations. I argue that although some Chinese musicians have achieved the highest levels of institutional success through conservatory training and international performances, they are continually motivated by anxieties of socio-economic precarity and desires for redress from parents who lost musical ambitions during the Cultural Revolution. As a result, Chinese musicians use what I term "strategic citizenship" to create transnational opportunities and seek stable futures for themselves while navigating neoliberal systems that impact their educational

pathways and possibilities for new residency in countries such as Canada and the United States.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Transnational Precarity, Racialization, and Strategic Citizenship for Chinese Musicians

“I actually started violin when I was three years old ... my father tried to be a professional musician, but because of the Cultural Revolution, he couldn’t ... So basically, when I was born, he just gave me the baby-sized violin when I was almost three. You know, big enough to hold [it]. So I started violin with my dad ... I didn’t have a choice ... I was basically practicing six, seven hours a day when I was three. But I am not the only one. My generation, they all had to learn something, either music, art, sports, something, you know. They must learn something.”

–Lin, Beijing’s Central Conservatory of Music and Curtis Institute of Music graduate, current Principal in an American orchestra

“I went to Beijing [for piano] when I was eight and since then, my parents were separated. I [still] feel really, really bad because [at that time,] my dad stayed in our hometown, working. Beijing is an expensive, really expensive place The three of us—I’m the only child—the three of us only reunited once a year, during New Year’s celebration. I saw what both my parents had to go through, and that’s when I realized, me learning piano cost us so much. There was one point where I thought of giving up ...”

–Fei, Beijing’s Central Conservatory of Music, Curtis Institute of Music, and The Juilliard School graduate

“My mom moved to Beijing with me when I was thirteen, but she needed to work. So she went back to my hometown. So basically I lived on my own from [the age of] thirteen ‘til now ... it’s really kind of a different experience: I have to cook by myself, I have to rent an apartment by myself, and I have to clean everything by myself. So yeah, a different perspective in some way ...”

–Eli, Beijing’s Central Conservatory of Music, Curtis Institute of Music, and Yale School of Music graduate

Since the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) and the institution of the one-child policy (1980-2015) in Mainland China, the world has seen an incredible surge of Chinese performers of Western art music. One need only look at orchestras or concert bulletins around the world to witness their presence and success. Some believe Chinese and other East Asian performers are simply incredibly talented—predisposed to classical music

success. Some state that although they possess technical virtuosity, they play with no heart. And still others might view them as a threat, yet another iteration of the Yellow Peril that might take over, or infect, the Western world. This dissertation addresses these and other preconceptions about Chinese musicians, particularly those in Western art (or classical) music.¹ In order to understand the contemporary phenomenon of Chinese involvement in Western art music, I study the socio-cultural context during the Cultural Revolution and one-child policy while grappling with issues of precarity, race, intergenerational memory, and what I term in this dissertation “strategic citizenship.” Drawing from and expanding conversations on citizenship (Goldman & Perry 2002; Lowe 1996; Ong 1999), precarity (Chu 2019; Povinelli 2011; Tsing 2015), and transnationalism (Dufoix 2008; Eiichiro 2005; Lowe 2015), I define strategic citizenship as a process to create forms of mobility in response to socio-economic precarity and the inflexibility of certain governments. The advent of many Chinese instrumentalists entering elite conservatories and orchestras and dominating the international concert circuit is not born out of a vacuum. Rather, I argue that it comes from a desire, even a desperation, amongst many Chinese families to fulfill musical ambitions lost during the Cultural Revolution, to negotiate memories and traumas inherited from previous generations, and to use strategic citizenship to acquire socio-economic stability. Present in these actions is the anxiety that there is no other choice: only children must succeed in order to care for their families.

After Mao Zedong became the People’s Republic of China’s (PRC’s) first Chairman in 1949, censorship was increasingly applied to music and the arts, with the Cultural

¹ I use “Western art music” instead of “Western classical music” for purposes of clarity, as the latter may be easily confused with Classical music, the era (c. 1750-1825).

Revolution demarcating one of the severest eras of authoritarian governance. During this time, Western art music and other forms of artistic life were outlawed since they were deemed elitist and associated with capitalism or feudalism. Yet this stringent censorship did not mean that desire for this musical sound was absent. In 1977, one year after the Cultural Revolution ended, an astounding 18,000 applications were made to Beijing's Central Conservatory of Music for a coveted 100 positions (Melvin & Cai 2004: 292). Demand for Western music education has continued to increase since that time. In 2014, an estimated forty million children were studying piano in Mainland China (Montefiore 2014). In 2016, the Philadelphia Orchestra announced a five-year partnership with the PRC's National Centre for the Performing Arts along with a bilateral touring schedule. In 2019, The Juilliard School opened a new campus in the northeast Chinese city of Tianjin. Many of the top graduates from Beijing's Central Conservatory of Music also continue their studies at The Juilliard School and/or the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, which is arguably the top conservatory in the world. On the surface, it may be hard to believe that fifty years ago, China was a closed nation that outlawed Western art music and these transnational exchanges would have been impossible. Yet I argue that one reason this musical practice is pursued so ardently amongst those born during the one-child policy is precisely because of this memory and silencing.

As the opening quotations from my interlocutors show, many Chinese children practiced at least six hours a day before earning a position in Beijing's Central Conservatory of Music, the most competitive and prestigious music school in the nation.² A year before

² Most names in this dissertation have been changed to protect interlocutors' privacy. Real names will include first and last names, whereas pseudonyms will only be a given name. Chinese names will typically provide the surname first, followed by the given name unless

auditioning, children often moved to Beijing with a guardian in order to build relationships with a Central Conservatory professor. This *guanxi* 关系, or connection, is vital to securing a position in the school, which accepts children as young as nine. Throughout their studies, many children witness their families make incredible sacrifices in order to enable their careers, pouring their limited finances into one child who will have to care for their parents and grandparents in later years, in addition to their own families. From my multi-sited fieldwork in the PRC, Canada, and the United States, I learned that in spite of some students achieving the highest forms of institutional success, failure is always a threat and motivating factor. In the 1980s and '90s, it was incredibly difficult, some say impossible, for a student to transition out of a music conservatory and back into a public school since the curricula were too disparate. Consequently, entering a conservatory at the age of nine could determine, and limit, a child's life.³ But in later years, how many students can be accepted into a music undergraduate program? How many can win positions in a graduate degree? How many Chinese students can be accepted into schools and orchestras abroad, and how long can they remain on international visas? And ultimately, how can they one day support their aging parents? The adjusted policies in post-socialist China meant that many, especially non-working seniors, would be left without adequate health and financial resources. Irrespective of talent or prior success, Chinese musicians are continually negotiating the precarity of their professions, international visas, and filial piety; that is, the responsibility to care for and

the individual has adopted the Western practice of providing the given name first. In most cases, Chinese surnames are one syllable whereas given names may be one or two syllables.
³ Children as young as nine years old can audition for and be accepted at Beijing's Central Conservatory of Music, but they must be ten years old when they matriculate into the program.

honor their parents and elders even as their musical skills lead them further from home, moving every few years to an elite music institution in a different city, country, perhaps even continent. Their remarkable talents are honed through many years of hard work and sacrifice, most of which are unperceived or unimaginable for those outside of these musical networks. Their talents are also shaped out of a necessity to succeed because failure cannot be an option; there is too much at stake for entire families.

In response to these incredible pressures, Chinese musicians utilize what I term “strategic citizenship” to maximize the potentials of their PRC household registration status (*hukou* 户口), student visas, and potential permanent residencies and new citizenships in other countries. Since 1980, most families could have only one child. What choices then follow in order for this child and their families to have secure, meaningful lives in post-socialist China? How do strategies of citizenship and musical practice expand limited options and create choice for those forced into realities they did not initially desire? And in transnational journeys to North America and Europe, how do Chinese musicians negotiate notions of success with the different forms of Orientalism they encounter and their gradual alienation from Mainland Chinese society? This dissertation sheds light on the complicated place of Western art music in Mainland China and Chinese transnational communities, the many forms of loss families experienced during the one-child policy, and the palpable memories and traumas from the Cultural Revolution that continually frame individual and collective engagements with music in the PRC today.

Western Art Music and Orientalism in North America

I use the term “Western art music” to refer to what is more commonly phrased “Western classical music,” a genre of high art musical composition in various European traditions. I employ the former phrase for clarity, since the latter may be easily confused with Classical music, the stylistic period (c. 1750-1825). Moreover, “art” indexes a greater musical range than “classical,” which implies tradition and canonicity that is often characterized by the styles of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven (the most heralded composers of the Classical period).

The limited extant research that addresses Western art music in China has been foundational to my work and provides crucial historical context (Melvin & Cai 2004; Mittler 1997; Kraus 1989, 2004).⁴ Other scholarship on genres such as jazz and popular musics inform my knowledge of twentieth-century China and the various sounds that comprised official and countercultural spheres of listening (Baranovitch 2003; Jones 2001; Moskowitz 2010). Inversely, there are texts that center their studies of East Asian musical practices in the United States (Yoshihara 2007; Zheng 2010).⁵ My work draws from these and asks, can

⁴ Writer Sheila Melvin and conductor Jindong Cai’s *Rhapsody in Red: How Classical Music Became Chinese* (2004) outlines the history of Western art music in China starting in 1600 until the end of the twentieth century. Their sophomore book looks specifically at Beethoven’s legacy in China (2015). Both are trade books that provide much useful information as initial forays into these topics. Historian Barbara Mittler’s *Dangerous Tunes: The Politics of Chinese Music in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the People’s Republic of China Since 1949* (1997) investigates music compositions from these three territories, albeit without rigorous interrogation of the geo-political terms or the political frames within which Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the PRC exist. The work is a detailed historical study of composers and their works, and invites scholars to further grapple with the antagonisms of this era. Political scientist Richard Kraus’s texts, *Pianos and Politics in China: Middle-Class Ambitions and the Struggle over Western Music* (1989) and *The Party and the Arty in China: The New Politics of Culture* (2004), are critical of Chinese engagements with music and artistic culture. I proffer that the affective textures that contextualize these complicated engagements could be afforded more attention in order to cultivate deeper and more varied understandings of music and politics in the PRC.

⁵ Two significant outliers are the interdisciplinary works *A Critical History of New Music in China* (Liu 2010) and *China and the West: Music, Representation, and Reception* (H Yang and Saffle

we consider the lived experiences of Chinese peoples *in dialogue with* questions of transnational mobility and identity, Western imperialism, and impacts of memory and multi-generational trauma, all of which continue to influence contemporary Chinese life in the PRC and diaspora? Can we consider “Chinese” as *concurrently* in the PRC and also in “the West”, thus bridging existing conversations and forging a new one? To this end, I argue that there is a need for more scholarship that engages in a sustained way with the contested meanings of Western art music for a range of Chinese people. Since 2013, I have engaged in extensive ethnographic fieldwork that has included Beijing, Zhengzhou, Changsha, and Chenzhou, PRC; Taipei, Taiwan; Toronto, Canada; and Philadelphia and New York City, USA. I have spoken to professional musicians at various stages of their careers as well as amateur musicians, music lovers, members of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), individuals living quotidian lives in the PRC, and relatives of musicians in transnational movement. Drawing on this breadth of perspectives, this dissertation focuses on Chinese musicians in Mainland China and North America who were born during the one-child policy and who must balance the pressures of filial piety, intergenerational trauma, and socio-economic precarity as they pursue professional music careers transnationally.

In order to pursue this research, I consider both the meanings of being a Chinese performer in the West, primarily in the USA and Canada, and a Chinese performer in the PRC. What is contemporary Orientalism as it is enacted towards Chinese musicians on stage in North America, where they suddenly become “*Asian*” and weaved into legacies of

2017), both of which consider, to an extent, transnational journeys for musicians. Much more can be done, however, to engage with this issue. Another helpful text is Frederick Lau’s *Music in China: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture* (2008), which is a short primer on different musics in China, including Western art music.

indentured labor, the Yellow Peril, and institutional exclusion? What is the reality of precarity in the PRC for Chinese performers, particularly given the history of the Chinese empire and the turmoil of the twentieth century? In these politico-geographies, issues of race and discrimination are operating in different ways in tandem with governmentality and disciplinary power. In the case of Chinese musicians in the West today, I argue that many are still Orientalized as objects of trade, as transnational performing bodies who can impress and satisfy audiences on the musical stage, but who are also foreign, forever originating from *elsewhere*.⁶ As some musicians have said to me, North American and European audiences are largely receptive to East Asian soloists, whose abilities on instruments such as piano and violin have been so remarkable, they have created new musical stereotypes. Yet these soloists also receive much criticism, and they struggle with longevity on the performance circuit because audiences often forget their East Asian names.⁷ Forgettability often leads to replaceability, as there is less audience demand for a particular soloist who is consequently

⁶ Literature scholar Chi-ming Yang notes in her monograph, *Performing China: Virtue, Commerce, and Orientalism in Eighteenth-Century England, 1660-1760* (2011), that the Chinese empire's trade relationship with Britain, particularly regarding porcelain, conflated British imaginations of China as Far East exotic empire with notions of China/china as an item of purchasability, beauty, virtue, spectacle, and breakability. Building off of Edward Said's seminal text, *Orientalism* (1978), and the work of economic historians such as Kenneth Pomeranz (2000), Andre Gunder Frank (1998), R. Bin Wong (1997), and Giovanni Arrighi (2008), Yang illustrates that the foundations of Western Orientalizations of China were built upon objects of commerce during the early decades of the British empire. For more on the intellectual history of Orientalism from Said (1978) to contemporary conversations, see the above as well as Raymond Schwab (1984), Edward Said (1985), Lisa Lowe (1991, 2015), Homi Bhabha (1994), Arif Dirlik (1996), Andrew Jones and Nikhil Singh (2003), Bill Mullen (2004), Shu-mei Shih (2007, 2008), Debra Johanyak and Walter S. H. Lim (2010), and Teemu Ruskola (2013).

⁷ In addition to Mainland Chinese, South Koreans and Taiwanese significantly contribute to the demographic of East Asians in elite Western conservatories. Although various East Asians share similar experiences of Orientalization, my study focuses on the experience of Mainland musicians who are operating in the context of the one-child policy after the Cultural Revolution.

deemed less marketable. Names can, without a doubt, be strongly tied to notions of identity, history, and belonging. To enjoy and even desire a person's music but to forget their name is to slot their personhood into Orientalized spectacle and entertainment.

This forgettability is tied to broader racializations of East Asians in the West as perpetually foreign and a Yellow Peril that is an economic, health, and moral threat.⁸ In the 1800s, hundreds of thousands of Asian "coolies" were imported to the Americas (Jung 2005). After the transatlantic slave trade was banned in 1807, European and American colonialists began transporting Asian "coolies," who were indentured laborers from various parts of South, Southeast, and East Asia, with the majority originating from South China.⁹ The practice was at its height in the mid-nineteenth century due to multiple factors: slavery ended in the British empire in the 1830s, waves of emancipation from enslavement occurred throughout the Americas, European colonization restructured many regions in Asia, and the Opium Wars (1839-42, 1856-60) ravaged China. Coolies were a replacement and supplement for African-descended enslaved peoples in the Americas and British colonies. As interdisciplinary scholar Lisa Lowe notes, although the coolie system was espoused as free labor under the pretense of liberty and advancement from slavery, the Chinese coolie was in fact caught between slavery and free labor (Lowe 2015: 27). Some were kidnapped from China, transported in the same slave ships that crossed the Atlantic, and subjected to the same conditions as African-descended peoples as they labored alongside African, other

⁸ My interrogations of Orientalism in this dissertation are tied to forms of Othering specific to China and East Asians in the Western gaze. As explained previously, the work of Edward Said has been foundational to these studies and many conversations have since developed. My use of the terms "racism" and "racialization" index broader actions of discrimination that include and go beyond Orientalist tropes.

⁹ For more, see Lisa Lowe's *The Intimacy of Four Continents* (2015) and Mae Ngai's *The Chinese Question: The Gold Rushes and Global Politics* (2021).

Asian, and Indigenous peoples (Lowe 2015: 28). Historian Moon-Ho Jung adds that many died from overwork, flogging, illness, starvation, and suicide (Jung 2005). In this transnational regime of biopolitics, which saw the coordinated involvement of British, American, French, and Spanish colonialists, the first great diasporic wave of Asians arrived in the Americas during the nineteenth century and became associated with intensive labor, disease, foreignness, and heathen threat.

These associations continue today and intensified at various points in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with institutionalized exclusion, the “Yellow Peril,” and popular media. In 1875, the U.S. passed the Page Law, in 1882 the Chinese Exclusion Act, in 1917 the Asiatic Barred Zone Act, in 1924 the Immigration Act, and in 1934 the Tydings-McDuffie Act, all of which systemically restricted various Asian immigrants as part of a “Yellow Peril” that threatened to economically and culturally displace white European immigrants (Lowe 1996: 4-11). Canadian laws echoed American ones: in 1885 Canada passed the Chinese Immigration Act immediately after the Canadian Pacific Railway was completed with Chinese labor, in 1908 instituted the Continuous Journey Law and partnered with the U.S. in finalizing the Gentlemen’s Agreements, in 1923 effected the Chinese Exclusion Act, and concurrently used exorbitant head taxes to keep out poor migrants fleeing the ravages of colonialism in Asia (E Lee 2007; Lowe 1996: 4-7; McRae 2020). The U.S. repealed these laws between 1943 and 1952 (Lowe 1996: 11). Canada repealed the Chinese Exclusion act in 1947, when it signed the United Nations’ Charter of Human Rights (UBC Library N.d.). It did not, however, rework its immigration system until 1967 (McRae 2020), while the American Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 initiated more specifications and

impositions against Asian immigrants (Lowe 1996: 9).¹⁰ Today, we see the continuation of these acts during the COVID-19 pandemic, with the 2020 ban against Chinese travelers to the U.S. and widespread anti-Asian sentiment and assaults in the U.S. and Canada.

Popular media has echoed and reinforced these stereotypes through films such as *Broken Blossoms* (Griffith 1919), literature such as Thomas Burke's *Limehouse Nights* (1917), and music such as the song, "Chinatown, My Chinatown" (1906), which was incorporated into the musical *Up and Down Broadway* (1910) and became an American national hit in 1915. As musicologist Charles Hiroshi Garrett notes, a seemingly innocuous Tin Pan Alley tune such as "Chinatown, My Chinatown" can tell us much about how the distribution and circulation of sheet music historically helped shape narratives of racial difference and (un)belonging (Garrett 2018). In these many ways, the Orientalization and racialization of Asian-descended peoples in the West is tied to histories of colonization, indentured labor, poverty, xenophobia, and popular ridicule.

As Chinese musicians travel to North America for studies, they become subsumed into the broad category of "Asian." Interlocutors state that they try not to think about how others might perceive them racially, yet they are always aware of this reality. Although their identities in China may have been attached to their hometowns, provinces, and ethnic minorities, they lose those markers in transnational movement and enter into narratives in

¹⁰ In addition, the creation of Chinatowns accompanied the importation of and laws against Asian laborers. Although these spaces are now heralded as cultural heritage sites, it is important to remember that they were initially enclaves for migrants and associated with disease, opium addiction, prostitution, and vice (Berglund 2005; Craddock 1999). Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, these physical spaces have been threatened, gentrified, and/or made smaller by city projects in places such as L.A., San Francisco, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, New York City, Vancouver, Toronto, and London (Acolin & Vitiello 2018).

North America characterized by discrimination and struggle. As English scholar David Eng and psychoanalyst Shinhee Han state in their co-written *Racial Melancholia, Racial Dissociation: On the Social and Psychic Lives of Asian Americans*, “a long history of discrimination is what binds Asian Americans together as a collective, and the adoption of a coalitional Asian American identity is often a conscious, politicized choice” (2019: 2). While inclusion may be a heartening thing, it is particularly alienating for international students who speak with an accent and who bear historical traumas that may be illegible in North American contexts. For Chinese musicians, many are motivated by desires for redress for/from their parents and relatives who lost musical ambitions during the Cultural Revolution, a traumatic socio-political event unique to the PRC. As the first generation of musicians born after the Cultural Revolution and during the one-child policy and post-socialist era, many are still grappling with the intergenerational memories passed onto them. They are largely unaware of the history of Asian Americans during the twentieth century, yet are ascribed elements of this identity and inherit “Yellow Peril” discriminations in which they are seen as usurping the economic, educational, and artistic opportunities of white Canadians and Americans.

Moreover, Chinese musicians are woven into the model minority narrative in ways that attack their musicianship and artistic voice. The myth stereotypes Asian Americans as “nerdy automatons, technically gifted ... continuously working, compliant, wealthy, and exempt from discrimination,” despite the fact that Asian Americans have the highest poverty rate in New York City and great income disparities in many locales (Eng & Han 2019: 2). Chinese musicians are often noted to be technically proficient, having extremely dexterous fingers that can play incredibly fast, but convey little emotion. An acclaimed East-Asian American violinist, not of Chinese descent, has stated that the existence of her soul has been

questioned numerous times by music critics who concurrently praise her mechanics, hyper-sexualize her Asian femaleness, and misidentify her as Chinese. These comments are no coincidence: historically, East Asians have been viewed by Western audiences as both spectacle and heathen, exotic and fascinating while a moral threat (C Yang 2011). Although East Asians are no longer considered heathens, the legacy of this Orientalization contributes to the common criticism that these musicians are soul-less technicians. Moreover, as interdisciplinary scholar Anne Cheng notes, Orientalism leads East Asian women to be persistently hyper-sexualized as aesthetic projects and loci for the Western male gaze and fantasy (Cheng 2019).¹¹ In all these ways, East Asian performers continue to be racialized as fascinating, exotic, and lacking in humanity. To assume a performer of East Asian heritage is Chinese also shows the strong relationship in the Western psyche between Chineseness and these judgments.

In addition to being pejoratively stereotyped as technicians, Chinese musicians are also expected to be compliant, conforming, and voiceless. The social world of classical music is not known to be divergent from tradition and canonicity; in fact, this musical practice is built on the prioritization of these concepts. It can be even more restrictive for women, performers of color, and Chinese musicians who are expected to be model minorities who “just play” without sharing their unique musical interpretations, expressing dissent to racialized practices (such as the continued use of yellow face in opera productions), or

¹¹ Anne Cheng argues that the yellow woman is an aesthetic being whose femininity is ornamental, read as a surface layering on a portable object. While yellow women are “persistently sexualized,” they are also “barred from sexuality, simultaneously made and unmade by the aesthetic project” (2018: 415; 2019).

exhibiting individual personality.¹² Pianists such as Lang Lang and Yuja Wang achieved fame, newspaper headlines, and criticism because in addition to their incredible artistry, they challenged stereotypes of Chinese musicians. Lang Lang, a Chinese national who exploded onto the North American and European music scene at the age of seventeen, was unconventional in his performance style: instead of calmly sitting at the piano, Lang Lang was known for swaying dramatically, tossing his head and flipping his hair, and making many facial expressions. Critics and audiences were astounded at his playing and actions on stage.

In a similar vein, Yuja Wang, commonly described as one of the world's greatest living pianists (Fisher 2019; Macdonald 2020), became famous during her late teens for her extraordinary musicianship. Her choice of clothing and shoes, however, were regularly commented upon alongside her playing and judged by some as too revealing, sexy, or "attention-seeking" (Lebrecht 2020). In February 2020, during the COVID-19 crisis and prior to a solo recital, Yuja Wang was detained and harassed by authorities at Vancouver International Airport due to anti-Chinese xenophobia. Although she is a Chinese national, she has lived mostly in North America since she was fourteen years old, first in Alberta, then Philadelphia and New York City. Wang stated on her social media accounts that the experience in Vancouver was "humiliating and deeply upsetting," and chose to wear dark sunglasses during her recital to hide her "visibly red and swollen eyes" since she had spent hours crying after the encounter (Wang 2020). Most other performers would have cancelled a performance after such a troubling event. Some critics and audience members, unaware of the harassment Wang received at the airport, gave unsympathetic reviews. They attacked her

¹² As legal scholar Frank H. Wu notes in his study of Asian Americans, "To be polite is to know your place," and speaks to the troubling etiquette in racial politics in the United States (F Wu 2013: 327).

professionalism and moral character for wearing sunglasses and claimed she was “unfriendly,” “ungrateful,” or “curt” towards her audience while on stage (Lebrecht 2020; Roberts 2020; Swed 2020). Other audience feedback and photos from her recital challenged the veracity of such judgments, noting she gave an outstanding recital and smiled at her audience (Roberts 2020). Even in these positive reviews, the gender and racial dynamics are fraught, as the fact that a female Chinese musician *smiled* at her audience is emphasized to demonstrate proper behavior and cultural awareness. Moreover, the harsh criticisms levied against Wang were not for the quality of her performance, but due to the fact that she had not performed according to expectations: she wore sunglasses, did not give an encore (which is never required of a performer), and supposedly was not *friendly* enough while on stage as a concert pianist.

Lang Lang and Yuja Wang are two examples of the many Chinese artists who are received as fascinating spectacles and are expected to impress audiences with stellar performances. However, when these musicians perform out of bounds or out of the limits of the model minority stereotype and show individuality, audiences and critics are often unforgiving and aggressive in their criticisms. As the politics of silencing, of diminishing an individual’s voice and subjectivity, imply biopolitics of domination, recognition, and negation (Ochoa Gautier 2015: 183-186), we see Chinese musicians racialized as musical commodities that are expected to entertain according to the standards of white patronage. In the transnational journey to North America, Chinese musicians become “Asian” and are expected to perform as such: politely, stereotypically, and without challenging the status quo. In my study of Chinese Western art musicians, I argue that we must continually bear in mind and interrogate who is human/Human (Scott & Wynter 2000) on the Western concert stage

and what histories of racialization, consumer practices, and Orientalism structure how Chinese musicians must *perform* in circumscribed ways consistent with Western imaginations of the Other.¹³

Sea Turtles: Millennial Chinese, the One-Child Policy, and Strategic Citizenship

“China” itself is a complicated term that refers to the idea of a nation that has experienced many political transformations and shifting borders. I use “China” (without immediate interrogation) to refer to the historical understanding of the regions governed under the dynasties and kingdoms since the third century BCE. Where possible, I specify the area and/or city to which I refer (ex. Mainland China, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Hunan). I also capitalize Mainland China as a proper noun because it signifies a politico-geography with its own identity. Although part of Hong Kong is technically on the mainland, it is not part of what various Chinese and East-Asian peoples call “Mainland China,” or *guonei* 国内. One can be “from the Mainland,” “*in* the Mainland,” and “a Mainlander.” At times, “China” is even omitted as “the Mainland” is a clear signifier in itself. As this dissertation is an ethnographic study, I acknowledge the colloquial uses of “Mainland” and employ it with the socio-political indexes it carries.

Within Mainland China, the stakes for Chinese musicians are different as they live within the palpable legacy of the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) and are subsumed into a

¹³ I think with Sylvia Wynter’s formulations of man/Man as that which is perceived and treated as object versus what is perceived and respected as Person. These differences have historically been determined by white/non-white binaries; that is, of the White Man constituting Human and Person with subjectivity and soul, whereas the non-white man is the Other (Scott & Wynter 2000).

nationalism that, to an extent, reinforces a socio-cultural homogeneity of Han Chineseness. The Cultural Revolution was a traumatic socio-political event that tore apart the fabric of Chinese social lives, cultural practices, and political expectations.¹⁴ During the movement, Mao Zedong, the PRC's first Chairman, labeled Western art music as bourgeois, decadent, and elitist, and inflicted severe consequences on many practicing it. Mao's disapproval of Western art music was rooted in his belief, stated in his 1942 *Yanan Talks*, that "to be good, art and literature must bring benefit to the masses" (Melvin & Cai 2004: 163). Mao and his followers associated Western art music with the music's colonial legacy, class and racial associations, and esotericism, ideas that plagued China after encounters with Western imperialism and betrayal in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. At the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, the only musical pieces permitted for nation-wide public performance were eight model works. These were large-scale propagandistic pieces that combined Western opera, French ballet, and Beijing opera. By the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, eighteen model works were allowed (Mittler 2012: 36).¹⁵ Music and arts were stringently controlled, resulting in many individuals losing careers and some, their lives.

¹⁴ For a history of the Cultural Revolution, see Frank Dikötter's *The Cultural Revolution: A People's History, 1962-1976* (2016), Andrew Walder's *China Under Mao: A Revolution Derailed* (2015), and Yiching Wu's, *The Cultural Revolution at the Margins: Chinese Socialism in Crisis* (2014).

¹⁵ I use the phrase "model works" instead of the popular "model operas" since the former is a more accurate translation of *yangbanxi* 样板戏. As Sinologist Barbara Mittler notes, the Chinese characters 样板戏 make no mention of 'opera' and the repertoire included non-operatic works, such as ballets (Mittler 2012). Ethnomusicologist Lei X. Ouyang rightfully notes that in addition to the model works, other propagandistic songs were allowed in various regions during the Cultural Revolution. Censorship was not evenly applied throughout the country and what was favored or denounced changed unpredictably. The eighteen model works, however, were consistently allowed for public performance throughout the decade-long upheaval. For more, see Ouyang's *Music as Mao's Weapon: Remembering the Cultural Revolution* (2022).

After Mao's death in 1976, the Cultural Revolution ended and Deng Xiaoping's socio-economic reforms brought swift policy changes. Western art music was again permitted and many who lost musical ambitions gave those to their young children. As my interlocutor Lin stated, his father taught him violin when he was three years old in the hopes that he would become a professional, as his father once dreamed of becoming. Lang Lang's parents also aspired to be professional musicians, but were unable to. When Lang Lang's musical talent was noticed at a young age, his father became fanatic about practice schedules since, similar to Lin's father, he saw in his only son the possibility of realizing his own unachieved aspirations (Lang & Ritz 2008). These stories are common amongst Chinese millennials who were born during the one-child policy and achieved high levels of musical proficiency at young ages.

The one-child policy was institutionalized in 1980 as a response to the unsustainable population growth the PRC was experiencing. During Mao's tenure as Chairman (1949-76), he encouraged large families, believing that more people would equate more laborers who could realize the country's economic goals for mass production. However, the country was unable to support the exponential population increase, as several agricultural reforms also failed and led to widespread famine. Tens of millions of people died from starvation, poverty-related health issues, and during the Cultural Revolution, political punishment as well (Walder 2015: 169). As families transitioned to a one-child structure, they also carried trauma from the previous decades and the anxiety of more death, political punishment, and economic failure. Consequently, only children were given an incredible amount of responsibility from a young age to succeed. Unlike in the West, music careers are not viewed as risky since becoming a teacher is highly respected in Chinese society. Moreover, teaching

is often a reliable, stable profession. Thus, many families turned to music studies not only to fulfill lost ambitions, but also as a means to negotiate socio-economic precarity.

In tandem with a strict program of population control, the Chinese Communist Party also instills a Han Chinese bias in the multi-ethnic empire. Although there are 56 recognized ethnicities in the nation-state and many dialects, Han Chinese is the predominant culture and Mandarin is enforced in schools and official spheres.¹⁶ One's ability to speak Mandarin with a northern Chinese accent is a barometer of one's learnedness.¹⁷ As historian Peter Perdue notes, the territorial conquests by China's last empire, the Qing, continue today in the CCP's nation building and sustaining project (Perdue 2005). Although some of my interlocutors identify as ethnic minorities whose communities have different musical and cultural traditions, they are acculturated into a national ethos that subsumes many cultures into a "China" that both protects and claims possession over various lands, cultures, and traditions. The pianist Fei comes from a musical family of the Korean ethnic minority in northeast China. The guitarist Eli grew up in a musical environment in southwest China and is of the Bai ethnic minority. While they are incorporated into a broader "Asian" classification in North America and subject to the model minority myth, they are governed into a Chineseness in Mainland China that includes ethnic minorities, so long as they are obedient minorities.¹⁸

¹⁶ Some Chinese dialects are unintelligible to others and many individuals from older generations do not speak Mandarin, making it incredibly difficult to communicate with those outside of their locales. The notion of a uniform "Chinese" culture or language is strongly tied to politics of governance.

¹⁷ The favoring of a northern Mandarin accent is tied to the fact that Beijing, the PRC's capital, is located in the north whereas Nanjing, the former capital under the Nationalist government of the Republic of China, was in the south.

¹⁸ During the 2008 Beijing Olympics, the PRC made international news for their reaction to Tibetan protests for independence. Today, the PRC has an increasingly aggressive campaign

Within the co-existing contexts of racialization in North America and in the Mainland, Chinese musicians utilize what I phrase “strategic citizenship” to negotiate transnational socio-economic precarity. Drawing on anthropologist Aihwa Ong’s work on “flexible citizenship” (Ong 1999), I argue that strategic citizenship is a process in which individuals and families are motivated by anxieties of socio-economic failure and a “stuckness” that hearkens memories of the Cultural Revolution, which most citizens could not escape. For parents, it is the fear of having no options, of inflexibility for an only child who struggles to support themselves, their parents, and future children in post-socialist China, where individuals are no longer guaranteed healthcare, livable pensions, or affordable, competitive education. As musicians pursue strategic citizenship and opportunities for mobility in and out of Mainland China, they often find themselves in a liminal space, in-between their home culture and where they are seeking additional residency. For some, this liminality is long lasting; for others, it is transitory in their musical journeys.

As some interlocutors caught in this liminality admit, a career in music is not as they imagined: it is extremely difficult and has led them to feel unsettled in both North America and the PRC. The pianist Fei entered Beijing’s Central Conservatory of Music at the age of 10 after her talent was noticed and encouraged by her piano teacher in her hometown. At the age of 14, she successfully auditioned for Philadelphia’s Curtis Institute of Music and moved there for high school with her mother. At the age of 18, she graduated into Curtis’s Bachelor of Music program and her mother returned to Mainland China. At the age of 22, she gained a full scholarship to Juilliard’s Master of Piano Performance program. Having

against Muslim minorities in the northwest. See Patrice Taddonio (2020) and The Washington Post Editorial Board (2020).

spent the majority of her life moving away from her hometown and nearly half of her life in the United States, Fei feels a certain alienation from PRC social and professional life. As she considers next steps in her career, she is concerned that her considerable time abroad limits her potential for a career back home with her parents, who do not have the transnational flexibility that she possesses as an accomplished pianist. Although her international credentials would make her appealing as a faculty member at any PRC conservatory, her network in the Mainland is not as strong as a musician's who has spent more years there. As noted earlier, *guanxi* or relationships are incredibly important in Chinese professional life. Having spent all her adult years abroad with other international students, Fei has realized a strategic citizenship and a piano career many dream of. Yet her absence from Mainland Chinese social and professional life leads to uncertainty about her ability to secure a well-paid position there; her nationality as a PRC citizen on a student visa in the U.S. leads to uncertainty about her ability to secure a stable job in this region, as international students are in increasingly precarious positions and work visas are harder to obtain.

Eli, however, faces different challenges mainly related to his instrument: guitar. As he frequently says to me, how many full-time jobs are available for classical guitarists? Even top-tier professors are usually hired only part-time and have to juggle other jobs and freelance in order to make ends meet. The possibility of being an adjunct professor of guitar in the U.S. is unappealing, if not impossible, to him: the pay would be low and it would be very difficult to secure a work visa with such a position. In contrast to Fei, Eli entered the Central Conservatory and Curtis Institute of Music at later stages: he began guitar at 12 years old and within a year was accepted into the Central Conservatory. At 19 years old, he entered Curtis for a Bachelor of Music; at 23 years old, he turned down a full scholarship to Juilliard

to attend Yale's School of Music; at 25 years old, he commenced a Doctor of Musical Arts at Manhattan School of Music. Having left Mainland China later and with relatives working in the education sector, Eli is keen to return to the Mainland for better employment prospects. While full-time job opportunities for any musician in North America are limited, classical pianists have more options as tenure-track university professors, members of orchestras, and if they are fortunate, solo careers in addition to professorships. Classical guitarists are much more limited, as the instrument is less popular and does not lead to a solo career as piano might. In the PRC and East Asia, however, classical guitar is a burgeoning field and Eli could capitalize on his existing *guanxi*/connections in the Mainland, his international credentials, and his undeniable skills to be a pedagogical leader of classical guitar studies in the East Asian region. As an individual of Bai heritage, Eli was born and raised in a region with many ethnic minorities and which is less developed than other metropolitan areas. Most of Eli's family has left that region, assimilating themselves into Han Chinese culture and society in order to realize better economic potentials. He has used strategic citizenship to move his household registration status to a larger city and achieve stellar credentials abroad, while maintaining and building his professional network in Mainland China in the hopes of returning there for work and to be with family.

These are but two examples of how different musicians use strategies of citizenship to negotiate precarity and navigate various stages of their careers. If Eli returns to China, he would be part of a demographic of millennial overseas returnees, colloquially referred to as *Sea Turtles*/*haigui* 海归 in the Mainland. A clever homophone, the Chinese characters of *haigui* 海归 literally translate as “overseas returnee” and sound identical to *haigui* 海龟, which means “sea turtle.” Much like actual sea turtles, these young adults return to where they were

born, in this case Mainland China, when they have matured and are ready to start their own families. In music as well as general academic studies, significant numbers of Mainland students have travelled abroad, mostly to the United States, Canada, and Europe, for high school and post-secondary studies. Many return to Mainland China in the hopes of better employment prospects and to settle down, tired by their experiences of precarity and racism abroad. Sea Turtles are often incredibly strategic with their citizenship: with the options afforded them by the post-socialist era and the familial pressures to succeed as an only child, they transfer their Chinese household registration status (*hukou* 户口) to larger cities, obtain permanent residencies in other countries, and move transnationally in the hopes of realizing a better socio-economic future for their families and themselves.¹⁹

Similar to Sea Turtles in academic studies, musicians rely on evaluations such as exams to gain admittance to overseas institutions. Unlike general students, musicians also rely on their ability to perform and are scouted by other schools, such as Curtis Institute of Music, which holds annual auditions in Beijing and Shanghai. If musicians win international competitions, they may also be valued by the PRC state as cultural representatives, similar to athletes who represent their nations on the international stage. Unlike athletes, however, Western art musicians seek training outside of their home country and may choose to settle in North America or Europe, where there are also performance opportunities.²⁰ In these

¹⁹ Sea Turtles' foreign credentials often come at high costs for families who invest hundreds of thousands of Chinese yuan in order to financially support their child. Moving one's household registration status/*hukou* in Mainland China is also not a simple task, but requires effort, time, and finances.

²⁰ Also dissimilar to athletes, musicians often maintain strong family relationships. In the PRC, particularly in the decades immediately following the Cultural Revolution, many elite athletes were orphans or children whose parents could not financially support them, and so sent them to training centers that would feed, clothe, and raise them. As some interlocutors

ways, Chinese Western art musicians are unique: their skills allow a transnational mobility many in Mainland China envy. Yet the anxieties of socio-economic precarity and the strictures of PRC nationality and Orientalism in the West accompany them, and continually inform their transpacific journeys.

It is necessary to note that, although many Mainland families' incomes increased considerably from the 1990s onwards, the generation from the '80s and early '90s operated from a place of financial need, which further motivated young children to excel at music. Their families did not have the economic means for them to switch career paths, to hire tutors, or perhaps even to cover school fees and living costs. They had to compete for scholarships in order to continue their education. Even for those born later in the '90s, the currency exchange rate between China and Western countries leads to continued pressure on families to earn considerable capital. Thus, across income brackets, the experience of precarity remains, as do struggles with racialization and Orientalism. As noted in the literature on parachute children and in psychology (Eng & Han 2019; Mok 2015), this transnationalism at young ages often leads to mental health issues due to stress, feelings of alienation, homesickness, socio-linguistic barriers, and strained family relations.²¹ As Chinese

said to me, "What parents would want their child to train so arduously and risk physical injury like athletes do? Why would I want my only child to train like an Olympian when I can support them and spend time with them at home? Only those who can't support their child would let them go through that." The situation has changed in the Mainland, however, and those with economic means will also send their children to intensive training facilities to learn discipline and gain physical strength. Moreover, although many parents aspired to be professional musicians and then gave these dreams to their child, it is my understanding that fewer people from previous generations held similar aspirations of becoming professional athletes.

²¹ Today, the term "parachute kids" is most commonly applied to teenagers from the PRC studying in the U.S. who are "dropped off" at boarding schools or universities, often without a guardian. They are thus sometimes also referred to as "unaccompanied minors" or "little overseas students" (Mok 2015). This term is not specific to music students and applies

musicians attempt to realize musical ambitions, which are often passed down from their parents who survived the Cultural Revolution, they use strategic citizenship because much is at stake and much needs to be sacrificed in order to realize better futures for themselves and their families.

Ethnography in Transnational Uncertainty

This project first germinated in 2012, when I was preparing to graduate from my Bachelor of Music in classical piano with a specialization in music history and theory. I was beginning to seriously question why, considering all the East Asians in music schools, on concert stages, and in audiences, there was such a paucity of writing on East Asian contributions to Western classical music. Why were we not in the history books? Western music had been in China for hundreds of years and the transnational networks had become strong, tied with history, and a life source for North American institutions today. After completing fieldwork in Hungary (where I was heavily racialized) and my undergraduate thesis on the Austro-Hungarian composer Arnold Schoenberg, his Twelve-Tone Technique for composition, and his transatlantic journey as a Jewish refugee during the Holocaust, I began to comb libraries for books on Chinese and East-Asian involvement in Western art

more to those seeking general academic degrees. Other situations include Taiwanese, Hong Kong, and South Korean youth studying in other countries. Families typically pay tens of thousands of USD (which equals to hundreds of thousands of Chinese *renminbi*) to an intermediary agency that arranges these transfers with American schools (Larmer 2017). This is fueled by the belief in the benefits of overseas education. A small but growing body of literature (mainly in psychology) reflects the concerning psychological effects of this transpacific movement (Eng & Han 2019; H Lee & Friedlander 2014; J Lee & Zhou 2004; Mok 2015; Zhou 2009).

music. I began to share my questions with friends and learned of the similarities in many people's musical journeys. I also learned of our shared desire to read our histories in books, to have our presence in and contributions to Western art music be acknowledged. In 2012, I found myself compiling a reading list of not just the limited books available, but books I wish existed.

Thus began my research for this doctoral project. In 2013, I started multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork that has, over the years, come to include Toronto, Canada; Philadelphia and New York City, USA; Beijing, Zhengzhou, Changsha, and Chenzhou, PRC; and Taipei, Taiwan. As a pianist from Toronto and a Chinese Canadian, I have been able to establish close interlocutors and form new networks due to my musical and linguistic abilities, and cultural bearings as a Canadian of Chinese-descent. My musical networks have been most significantly tied to musicians at the University of Toronto's Faculty of Music, Beijing's Central Conservatory of Music, and Philadelphia's Curtis Institute of Music—three of the most pre-eminent music schools in their respective countries. As the majority of musicians in top-tier institutions lead transnational lives, my ethnographic research reflected these paths and required me to travel between Mainland China, Canada, and the United States. Through these travels, I spoke with professional and amateur musicians, music students, pedagogues, orchestra members, and relatives of musicians. I also spoke with members of the Chinese Communist Party and individuals living quotidian lives, some of whom loved music and others who felt that the music world excluded them because of their socio-economic background. This breadth of perspectives and multi-sited fieldwork greatly informed my research and understanding of contemporary Chinese and musical life.

From September 2018 to early August 2019, I was based in Beijing, with a six-week stay in Toronto during Lunar New Year and a three-week stay in Taipei, Taiwan for further fieldwork. During this year, I interviewed, practiced music with, and lived life with both Western art and Chinese traditional and folk musicians. More specifically, in Beijing, I spoke with musicians in the China National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA) Orchestra, many of whom were Sea Turtles who had completed music degrees abroad. I also spoke with NCPA Orchestra members who were expatriate musicians that had found better employment in Beijing than in their home countries. Concurrently to building these relationships, I was a regular attendee of a Beijing opera club at Beijing Language and Culture University (BLCU), where I was undertaking intensive Mandarin studies to improve my reading skills. Similar to many 1.5th- and 2nd-generation immigrants, my spoken Mandarin abilities outweighed my reading. Through the BLCU Beijing opera club, I began *erhu* lessons with Teacher Cao, a multi-instrumentalist in his 80s.²² Apart from myself, the members of the Beijing opera club were retirees, aged 55 to 91 at that time. Most were retired language professors or held other posts within the CCP. I learned a great deal from their many life experiences and all that they have witnessed.

Through existing contacts in North America, I was able to connect with other Western classical musicians in Beijing. Successful music pedagogues and chamber musicians often echoed similar sentiments: life in China today is hard, really hard. Some musicians have enjoyed remarkable success: professorships at the top conservatories, well-attended concerts, status as one of the leading ensembles in the country, respect from musicians and non-

²² The *erhu* is a two-stringed folk instrument that is often compared to the Western violin due to its pitch register and melodic abilities.

musicians alike. Yet all noted how *difficult* it was to obtain and sustain their success, to maintain a middle-class life that could support themselves, their parents, and their child or children. Although the PRC now allows, even encourages, families to bear two children, most only want one. Many say that it is too tiring, stressful, and expensive to raise more than one child—most struggle to handle the demands of one. The cost of life in Beijing and other cities demands that both parents work, *and* in-laws help with housing and child-rearing costs. Maternity and paternity leaves are short and dependent on individuals' type of work, company structures, and subjective decisions of superiors. Children must also attend many extracurriculars and additional academic classes after school and on weekends. These are expensive, but needed for children to succeed in school examinations, which determine a child's ability to continue their education. In addition, parents are expected to buy their sons a house and car before they are able to get married while simultaneously caring for aging grandparents. These are the expectations for Chinese middle-class life, in which a great percentage of people find themselves. Some musicians said to me, "My first child is a boy. How can I have a second one, in case it is also a boy? How can I afford two houses and cars for them in the future?" Thus, despite the PRC's move from a one-child policy to a two-child policy due to concerns over the large ageing population and desire for continual economic growth (Phillips 2015), many women resist having a second child. Although my interlocutors and I spoke much about music, institutions, concerts, and the business of musical life, these other elements of Chinese life inevitably also featured strongly in our conversations, as artistic practices are intimately tied with familial responsibilities and the socio-economic frameworks within which people exist.

In 2019, I expanded my *erhu* studies and knowledge of Chinese traditional and folk music. I began lessons with an *erhu* performance student at China Conservatory, the PRC's preeminent school for Chinese musics. The *erhu* is a two-stringed folk instrument that one positions on one's leg and plays with a bow. Often compared to the Western violin, the *erhu* is also a melodic instrument with a higher pitch register. Through my piano and musicology studies at the University of Toronto's Faculty of Music, I became connected with students at Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, who then connected me to students and pedagogues at China Conservatory. Through these new contacts, I became acquainted with Huicui Leping Musical Instrument 荟萃乐平乐器, a world-class instrument manufacturer through whom I purchased an excellent *erhu*. My ethnographic routes showed that transnational music networks are closely knit, especially at the higher levels, regardless of genre delineations such as Western art music or Chinese musics since many students live life together in the same conservatory.

In addition to the new contacts I made in Beijing from 2018 to 2019, I spent time with interlocutors from Toronto, Philadelphia, and New York who sojourned back to the Mainland for short visits. It deepened our relationships to extend our conversations in North America to Beijing, where I was able to witness and participate in other facets of their musical life, such as concerts in Mandarin, reconnections with old conservatory friends, and potential professional opportunities in the PRC. I have been working with some of these interlocutors since 2013, others since 2015. In North America, we speak in both Mandarin and English about life in the U.S. or Canada, and about *Zhongguo*/China. In Mandarin, one says, "*huiguo* 回国," to mean visiting China. The verb *hui* 回, however, is not "to visit" or

even “to go (to),” but rather, “to return.” One *returns* to the nation, *guo* 国. Notions of home, origin, and destination are always linguistically and affectively directed towards Mainland China, regardless of whether or not one was born there, raised abroad, or left for professional opportunities. Moreover, to return to a place implies a fulfilment of a journey, even if one sets out once again across the Pacific or other oceans. Connecting with my interlocutors in Beijing allowed us to speak at a deeper affective level about our relationships to both North America and the PRC, and notions of nationhood and personhood.

Although the genres and histories of Western art music and Chinese musics may seem discrete, their networks are often deeply entangled across continents. More often than not in Mainland China, students of Western art and Chinese musics are educated at the same school. In the case of conservatories such as the Central Conservatory in Beijing, the most competitive or “talented” students are admitted at young ages, as children. Those practicing Western music will aim to graduate into international music programs in the U.S. or Europe, while those in Chinese musics will remain in the Mainland or the Asiatic region, usually joining a Chinese traditional ensemble and teaching extensively. While these students are receiving their education in various musical styles, they are also growing up together. Many left their hometowns, childhood friends, and families while in elementary school. Others left during middle or high school. Through their competitive music studies, they become friends and forge strong networks, even as they move transnationally. In North America, many individuals playing Chinese traditional and folk music also received training in Western art music. It is no secret that the professional music world is demanding, highly competitive, and taxing on individuals. Thus friendships and comradery are needed, resulting in musical

networks determined not so much by genre or style, but more so by institution, location, personality traits, and musical abilities.

Throughout my years of ethnographic fieldwork, I have spoken to card-carrying members of the Chinese Communist Party in addition to performing musicians, music editors and publishers, and educators. Although members of the CCP are often envisioned as enactors of the country's authoritarianism, it is often forgotten that they are also individuals with families, communities, responsibilities, and fears. It is also often disregarded that the CCP is an extremely large apparatus that funds all public service positions in Mainland China. This includes, but is not limited to, public school teachers of all levels in education, human resources employees, administrative staff, engineers, health and safety regulators, drivers, and custodians. It is a diverse apparatus with many functions and opportunities for individuals of various backgrounds. The Politburo Standing Committee (PSC) of the Communist Party of China is the highest form of governance within the CCP, and the attitudes and methods of its leaders do not consistently reflect those of employees in the broader CCP apparatus and individuals in Mainland China. All CCP employees must, however, be card-carrying members of the Communist Party. Due to my position as a Chinese Canadian with ongoing kinship ties to Mainland China, I have been able to speak to an incredible breadth of individuals, which inevitably meant that I spoke to some members of the Communist Party, including higher ranked officials. In these moments, I was careful with my speech and what I revealed of my own politics and research interests. But many times, I was surprised by these individuals' frankness about contemporary China's challenges, their opinions about useful policy changes, and their own worries for their children and families. Some issues we discussed included, how do members of the CCP raise

their children in the PRC's competitive market? What do they desire for their children's musical and other artistic studies? Do they want their children to study abroad? How do they explain family history to their children, considering the previous generations' experiences in the Cultural Revolution and the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945)? Do they even talk about the histories preceding the PRC's socio-economic reforms in the late '70s, after Mao's death, considering these topics are usually censored in Chinese public life? These are pertinent questions that plague the minds of CCP members and non-members alike.

Although my ethnographic research has included conversations with various individuals on a wide range of topics, it is necessary to note that there have also been many uncomfortable silences and moments of "ethnographic refusal" (Simpson 2007; Stevenson 2014). This "refusal" refers to the countless times interlocutors have deftly avoided questions, spoken about certain subjects while ignoring others, resisted vocalizing certain words and used facial expressions and gestures to communicate that to which they were referring, or simply became silent with heavy memories. I do not consider these omissions as "gaps" in research, but rather absences that speak quite clearly of my interlocutors' opinions, socio-cultural contexts, and techniques of self-protection. As anthropologist Lisa Stevenson notes in her study of the suicide epidemic amongst Inuit in Canada, "Fieldwork in uncertainty would be less about collecting facts than about paying attention to the moments when the facts falter" (2014: 2). In studying life in contemporary China after the Cultural Revolution, my ethnography included "habits of restraint and care" (Tsing 2004: xii) as I attended to moments when the facts, and/or words, faltered in individuals' memories of loss and pain. In writing about musical practices, I also allow performance and expressive

behavior to communicate that which institutional archives may omit (Taylor 2003), particularly in an authoritarian regime such as in the PRC.

Moreover, for individuals such as myself whose field sites include locales tied to kinship, the stakes of our research feel different and ever-present as our families bear the legacies of war, colonization, Orientalism and racism, and revolutions. I benefit from being a researcher of Chinese descent. I also benefit immensely from being a Canadian citizen, studying at an American Ivy League institution. And I benefit from being a musician, whose existing network led to broader musical ties. In these ways, I have been very well positioned to conduct this research. I also know intimately the precarity involved in contemporary Mainland life, the demands of a professional music career, and the intergenerational memories of the Cultural Revolution. By shedding light on the realities of music careers initiated after the Cultural Revolution in post-socialist, authoritarian China, this dissertation attends to a precarious and shifting moment in Chinese history. As my interlocutors navigate different stages of their careers and attend to uncertainties on both sides of the Pacific, the music they practice becomes the most consistent element in their lives as they use strategic citizenship to move transnationally and seek socio-economic security for themselves and their families.

Chapter Summaries

In addition to “[Chapter 1 | Introduction](#),” this dissertation contains three more chapters and an epilogue. “[Chapter 2 | The Cultural Revolution: Memories, Silences, and Traumas](#)” briefly summarizes the history and racialization of Western art music in China, laying the ground for proceeding chapters by describing how this music became associated

with issues of new nationalisms, class, and nostalgia. I focus on the era of the Cultural Revolution and the contributions of Chinese musicians Li Delun (1917-2001) and Li Jue (1924-2014), two Communist revolutionaries who led the development of Western art music during the PRC's twentieth century. They helped create a "red orchestra" during the later years of the Chinese Civil War (1927-49), which led to the Communist Revolution (1949). This revolutionary ensemble boosted morale amongst other revolutionaries, introduced people in the countryside to Western music and instruments, and eventually developed into the Central Philharmonic, which Li Delun conducted. During the Cultural Revolution, Li Delun was vital to the success of the Philadelphia Orchestra's 1973 China tour. This chapter draws upon my interview with Li Jue, Li Delun's wife, in 2013; my archival work with photographs of Li Delun with the Philadelphia Orchestra, which I discovered in Penn's Kislak Center for Special Collections as part of Ms. Coll. 330, "Eugene Ormandy photographs, 1880-1992"; conversations I have had with Li Delun's family based in Canada; and further theorizations of ethnographic refusal in relation to conversations with other Chinese individuals who lived through the Cultural Revolution and who were sent to the countryside to labor. This chapter shows some of the many experiences different people had during the Cultural Revolution, and various ways in which people remember this time and do or do not speak of it. This chapter closes and leads into the next by examining the years immediately after the upheaval, prior to the socio-economic reforms in the late '70s.

"Chapter 3 | The Post-Socialist Shift: The One-Child Policy and Conservatory Pathways" focuses on how the one-child policy (1980-2015) and the post-socialist era impacted the musical development and transnationalism of young Chinese musicians of Western art music. I provide historical and ethnographic background on the one-child

policy, addressing Chinese people's thoughts and attitudes about the 2016 change to a two-child policy. I follow that with four case studies of Chinese, American, and Canadian conservatories: Beijing's Central Conservatory of Music, Philadelphia's Curtis Institute of Music, New York's The Juilliard School, and the University of Toronto's Faculty of Music. I argue that these educational institutions are also pathways for global migration, influenced by intergenerational trauma, population policies of the PRC, and neoliberal financial changes. I complement the data on these conservatories with ethnographic moments shared with Chinese musicians who have studied in North America, such as Lin and Ang. In the era following the Cultural Revolution, Chinese families invested heavily in their only child's musical talent and success, as the youngest generation in a sense fulfilled lost musical desires. This generation of musicians also transformed the international landscape of Western art music performance, with Mainland Chinese musicians entering the most prestigious Western institutions and orchestras, most noticeably since the '90s.

"Chapter 4 | The Strategic Citizenship of Chinese Musicians" builds on the aforementioned issues and circumstances to focus on strategic citizenship, transnationalism, precarity, and potential immigration. I delve into *hukou*, the household registration system in China that determines where an individual can study, buy property, access healthcare, and, in some situations, work. Drawing heavily on ethnographic research, I confront questions many maturing musicians face, such as, "What do musical desires and ambitions lead to? What even are the desires for adult musicians? Do students return to China or stay abroad?" As economies change and the requirements and privileges for citizenship, visas, and residency permits also change in Mainland China, Canada, and the U.S., musicians must strategize where to live, where to study, and what type of careers to pursue in order to craft a

life that can also support their aging family members. Included in this are the constant struggles with living abroad and the Orientalism Chinese students face in North America and Europe. Many must ask, “Is it worth being a musician abroad, which used to be the marker of the highest level of success? Is it even worth being a musician in the end?”

Although Western art music becomes the most consistent element in many of my interlocutors’ lives, many are choosing career paths based on strategies related to residency status, citizenship, and family responsibilities. In this penultimate chapter, I share ethnographies of Fei, Eli, and Ang, graduates of the Central Conservatory who have continued studies at different North American institutions. Through their ethnographies, I tackle what success looks like and tie together the themes of precarity, intergenerational memory, and desires for musicians raised during China’s post-socialist, one-child policy era.

The “Epilogue | ‘We Are One Generation’” closes the dissertation with ethnographic fragments that further show how key interlocutors, ages 25 to 40 and living between the PRC, Canada, and the United States, are navigating the different stages of their careers and the unprecedented global pandemic. As this dissertation sheds light on the realities of music careers initiated after the Cultural Revolution and post-socialist reforms, this dissertation is studying a mercurial moment in Chinese history. At present, most of my interlocutors have few answers as to what their lives should and will look like. Older interlocutors have more concrete opinions, but each of their lives have been profoundly impacted by the pandemic. Moreover, none can predict what changes the Chinese Communist Party will enforce in coming years and how those may affect their lives and those of their family members. But they have each remained committed to their musical practice. Although some may not have chosen to study music as children but began learning because of their parents, they have

each come to love Western art music as a deeply personal practice that they want to continue.

CHAPTER 2

The Cultural Revolution: Memories, Silences, and Traumas

We never could have imagined what it [the Cultural Revolution] became. It was never supposed to be like that.

– Li Jue (1924–2014), former Communist revolutionary, violinist, and influential figure in the arts

Historical memory cannot be “recovered” like data in a computer file; by its very nature, memory is a shape-shifter, morphing once an analytical gaze is brought to bear upon it. Instead, memory’s recovery is, fundamentally, about power.

– Kirsten Weld, *Paper Cadavers: The Archives of Dictatorship in Guatemala* (2014: 19)

How does one pursue a history of the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966-76), a traumatic socio-political upheaval whose details have been censored, edited, and fragmented in archives, by the Chinese Communist Party, and by those who survived that era? As historian Kirsten Weld notes, the recovery of memory speaks loudly about the power structures within which the memories exist, both historically and in the present (2014: 9). The recollection of memory also speaks to an individual’s and/or a community’s present political positionalities and the flexibilities those may grant or deny. Growing up as a Chinese Canadian in Toronto, I heard many unfinished sentences from my mother and others in the Chinese diaspora: “We didn’t go to school then...”; “You can’t imagine how poor we were...”; “A lot of people suffered...”; “We did fine, we survived...” In diaspora, some memories could be gestured toward, perhaps even articulated since people had moved an ocean away from the sites of trauma. But even then self-censorship may be present. As traumatic memories may cause unexpected erasures in speech and thought, they also cause awkward silences that leave listeners curious, confused, and strained to know more.

The Cultural Revolution was, in the words of cultural anthropologist Yiching Wu, “arguably the most profound crisis that socialist China had ever undergone” (Wu 2014: xv). Led by Chairman Mao Zedong (1893–1976), the Chinese Communist Party reacted to “100 years of humiliation” by transforming the PRC into a closed nation, rid of foreigners such as Western and Japanese imperialists. “100 years of humiliation [百年耻辱]” refers to the period between the start of the First Opium War in 1839 and the start of the PRC in 1949, during which China suffered multiple defeats by European, American, and Japanese empires (Peerenboom 2010; H Wang 2015; Z Wang 2008, 2012). The memories from this time motivated the strict governance exercised by the CCP starting in the 1950s, as revolution in every sector of Chinese life was deemed necessary to strengthen the nation and regain independence from foreign oppression. As noted by East Asianist Andrew Jones, the CCP radically reorganized musical life in Mainland China through the nationalization of the production, performance, and distribution of all forms of music (Jones 1992: 13). These severe practices, which reached an apex during the Cultural Revolution, left many nostalgic for banned forms of artistic practice, such as Western art music.

By the end of the Cultural Revolution, as few as eighteen musical pieces were permitted for nation-wide public performance (Mittler 2012: 36).²³ These were model works 样板戏 [*yangbanxi*], created under the direction of Jiang Qing (1914–1991), or Madame Mao, that served as propaganda and attacked Chiang Kai-Shek’s Nationalists, Western powers, the Japanese, and “class enemies” who supported capitalism or any of these antagonists. Model

²³ Lei X. Ouyang notes that there were also many revolutionary songs that were permitted in different regions and at different times (2022: 5). However, these could also unexpectedly fall out of political favor with Jiang Qing (2022: 39). The only musical pieces that were consistently allowed throughout the country were Jiang’s model works.

works were large-scale compositions that drew from European opera, Beijing opera, and French ballet. Arias from model works were lyrical compositions that also featured repetition and were played ubiquitously on loudspeakers, radios, and stages during the Cultural Revolution.²⁴ As musical texts they first circulated as music scores, magnetic tape recordings, and records.²⁵ As propaganda, they framed Mao, the Communist Party, and the new PRC as the saving hope for China. They became emblems of a new nation that had reclaimed its sovereignty after a century of partial colonization by Western and Japanese empires. During that century, practices of Western art music had developed inland and in coastal areas governed by foreign powers, which caused it to become heavily associated with class, prestige, Western imperialism and racial exclusion, and notions of modernity. These greatly impacted the events of the Cultural Revolution, such as the torture of many Western art musicians and the politicization of music and arts.

Yet many Chinese who had been exposed to and/or learned Western art music before this era of censorship held onto musical aspirations, even though they were unable to pursue their own ambitions. Many of my interlocutors began musical training as toddlers or young children, learning from parents who were unable to become professional musicians during the Mao era and so passed on their musical dreams to their only child.²⁶ Others began music because their parents did not have the opportunity to learn themselves, and thus

²⁴ For more, see Jie Li's, "Revolutionary Echoes: Radios and Loudspeakers in the Mao Era" (2020a).

²⁵ For more on Jiang Qing, see the work of Mei Li Inouye (2020). For more on model works, see Barbara Mittler (2012) and Tuo Wang (2014). For more on the dissemination of Maoist propaganda through recorded sound, specifically, see Andreas Steen (2017) and Chuan Xu's (2019) work.

²⁶ The Mao era refers to the period between 1949, when the PRC was established with Mao as Chairman, and 1978, when the PRC transitioned to the post-socialist era two years after his death.

desired that their child would do so as Western art music was still associated with notions of class and respectability politics. Taking seriously the politics of memory, nostalgia, and trauma in national psyche and individual and familial choices, this dissertation explores practices of Western art music in relation to personal and familial desires, and national transformation. That exploration rests on the premise that practices of Western art music by individuals during and after the Cultural Revolution were strongly impacted by the intergenerational trauma and cultural violence that took place during China's turbulent twentieth century, when the nation reorganized multiple times and experienced wars, famine, and revolutions.

This chapter shows that practices of Western art music were tied to notions of national modernization in a new Chinese nation-state that experimented with artistic forms. Individuals remember and speak of this era differently, depending on their prior and current socio-political circumstances. In thinking about the nationalization of Western art music during the revolutionary era, I also explore “ethnographic refusals” as theorized by scholars in Indigenous studies, which will be further explained below. I include ethnographic vignettes with Li Jue 李珏 (1924-2014), a highly influential musician who was married to Li Delun 李德伦 (1917-2001), the conductor of the Central Philharmonic. Both held high positions in the government as arts workers who advocated for the promotion and protection of Western art music and musicians during the Mao era. In contrast to the frank ways in which Li Jue spoke to me about her memories as a historic individual of the PRC, I include conversations with Chinese people who lived quotidian lives during the Mao era and were sent to labor in the countryside while hearing model works everyday. Together, this

chapter shows the disparate experiences during the Mao era, and specifically the Cultural Revolution, and the consequent different modes of remembering.

Practices of Western art music during the Cultural Revolution were paradoxical: the music was censored yet used for significant political moments that reshaped the trajectory of the country and to create new national emblems such as the model works.²⁷ Prior to harsh censorship, Li Delun and Premier Zhou Enlai (1898–1976) created a “red orchestra” during the Chinese Civil War (1927-49) as part of revolutionary efforts.²⁸ Although Western art music was denounced during the Cultural Revolution, Premier Zhou used it as a cultural broker to help restore diplomatic relations with other nation-states such as the U.S. At the individual level, the censorship of this music imbued it with greater nostalgia and affects, which I argue led to its wide embrace from 1978 onwards as some survivors of the Cultural Revolution still desired to realize their lost musical ambitions. Concurrently, new forms of precarity motivated Chinese people to seek possibilities of socio-economic stability through musical practice. In various ways, the politicization of Western art music during the Cultural Revolution led to its popularity in the decades following.

In pursuing this research, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork, which I argue can strongly complement the rigorous historical work on contemporary Chinese history.²⁹ While

²⁷ The China National Traditional Orchestra (CNTO) was another musical creation during the Mao era that was a national emblem. It was an ensemble comprised of folk and traditional instruments arranged like a Western orchestra. Like the model works, the form of this music drew heavily from Western art music. It is still a prestigious performing arts organization today. For more, see Lau (2008), Liu (2010), and Mittler (2012).

²⁸ A red orchestra was a Western orchestra that was meant to help with the revolution by boosting morale amongst other Communists and entertain those in the countryside. The red orchestra eventually became the Central Philharmonic.

²⁹ Excellent scholarship has been produced about the Mao era and the Cultural Revolution. To name a few for further reading, see the work of Jeremy Brown and Matthew Johnson

much of China studies is grounded in historical methods, recent years have seen innovative texts that use oral history and ethnography. For instance, historian Jie Li's *Shanghai Homes: Palimpsests of Private Life* (2014) explores contemporary China's transformations through a focused study on Shanghai alleyway homes and their consequent transformations parallel to municipal and national changes.³⁰ She employs an interdisciplinary approach that includes ethnography and microhistory.³¹ Ethnomusicologist Lei X. Ouyang's *Music as Mao's Weapon: Remembering the Cultural Revolution* (2022) is a bold intervention that centers the role of music as a political tool, ethnographic methods, and the politics of memory in her study of how music was manipulated from 1966 to 1976 and how propagandistic music is remembered today.³² Inspired by these works, this chapter combines ethnographic and archival methods to study musical moments during the Cultural Revolution, arguing that in the study of traumatic history, silence and splices of memory may be as revealing as fragments in archives. Moreover, it is imperative to consider, and respect, ethnographic refusals.

As theorized by anthropologists Audra Simpson (2007, 2014) and Lisa Stevenson (2014), ethnographic refusals may take various forms: interlocutors may refuse to answer questions, may ignore questions, and may give answers to questions that were not posed but

(2015), Alexander Cook (2016), Frank Dikötter (2016), Andrew Walder (2015), Yiching Wu (2014), and Guobin Yang (2016).

³⁰ Contemporary China refers to the era after the dynasties, which ended in 1911. Prior to that is the modern era in China.

³¹ Jie Li's *Utopian Ruins: A Memorial Museum of the Mao Era* (2020b) is also a very useful text.

³² In addition, I am indebted to the work of ethnomusicologist Nancy Guy (2005); music theorist Nancy Rao (2017); anthropologist Emily Wilcox (2019); and China scholar Mei Li Inouye (2020). Their work on different music, dance, theater, and performance practices in China and the Chinese diaspora during the twentieth century have greatly influenced how I research Western art music practices throughout China's turbulent contemporary history. I think also with the work of Joshua Pilzer (2012), Gavin Steingo and Jim Sykes (2019), and Jim Sykes (2018) to consider how individuals' music practices transformed alongside national upheaval and trauma.

which communicate their thoughts, and perhaps criticisms, of an ethnographer's queries. On the part of the ethnographer, we may refuse to write about certain moments in fieldwork in order to protect our interlocutors' privacy. As Iroquois scholar Audra Simpson asserts, "I refuse to practice the type of ethnography that claims to tell the whole story and have all the answers. This is not an even playing ground for interpretation, and I do not pretend otherwise," as can be seen in historical misrepresentations of Indigenous and specifically Iroquois peoples (2014: 34).³³ Lisa Stevenson, in *Life Beside Itself: Imagining Care in the Canadian Arctic* (2014), practices modes of refusal in similar and different ways: her writing consistently resists resolution of individuals' stories, providing incomplete snapshots of people's lives as Inuit communities in northern Canada grapple with the suicide episode and the biopolitical control of the Canadian nation-state, which in its bureaucratic efforts to keep Inuit peoples alive, perform violent forms of care that prioritize statistics over the human(e) experience of life. Stevenson, like Simpson, challenges readers' expectations about knowing: who has a right to know about someone else's life, their health, and the history of their actions? Does knowing make us care more for a person, or does it make us examine them as a specimen? In her profound study of life and death in the arctic, Stevenson asserts that "we're not truth seeking, but standing alongside" others (2014: 157). Although my study is not about Indigenous lives on Turtle Island, or North America, it is in part about settler

³³ In Simpson's *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life across the Borders of Settler States* (2014), she studies issues of sovereignty amongst the community of Mohawks from Kahnawà:ke, in what is now southwestern Québec. Simpson shows how some Mohawks refuse Canadian citizenship, passports, and forms of sovereign control. She also boldly refuses to write everything she knows about this community and its peoples, thinking instead of what readers need to know and thus what is required of her to write in order to make her argument (2014: 105).

immigrant life here and is deeply informed by the radical, empathetic work of Indigenous scholars and those working on issues of Indigeneity and decolonization.

Moreover, in situations of political oppression and traumatic experience, ethnographic refusals are important means through which interlocutors and ethnographers navigate censorship and avoid re-traumatization. Historian Denise Ho adds that in socialist and post-socialist China, it is often easier for individuals to attach themselves to physical objects from the Cultural Revolution than to confront and speak about the pasts that these objects symbolize (2020: 357). I foreground some instances of “ethnographic refusals” in this chapter because the politics of refusal speak loudly to existing matrixes of power, disavowal, misrecognition, and colonial legacies; and because they were a significant aspect of fieldwork in Mainland China, where musical practices can have a crucial role as an ethnographic mediator.

Consequently, I highlight moments when some interlocutors refused, evaded, and answered my queries in unexpected ways, and withhold some information about them and contemporary Chinese life. In this dissertation, many of my closest interlocutors are millennials who are only children or those who grew up during that era. Some are young adults, navigating their first decade as part of the legal majority and carrying generations of familial loss while pursuing competitive careers as transnational musicians. Even as I write about their experiences with their permission, I continually consider the “ethnographic calculus” presented by Simpson: what do readers need to know and what should I refuse to write (2014: 105)? Some things are simply too painful, too personal. Even anonymized, I worry about over-exposing these individuals who, over the many years of conversations, have become my friends and who have shared many stories and gestured at unspeakables.

Other things have become increasingly politically sensitive. Although it may be a fascinating quote to read, it is not worth the risk of another person's safety. Discourse, in this dissertation, will always come second to the well-being of my interlocutors.³⁴

I write instead from a place of desire: desire for readers to have more understanding and humanity towards Chinese artists, Western classical musicians, and those whose lives have been profoundly impacted by China's violent twentieth century. I also write from the place of desire as a Chinese Canadian whose own family saw premature deaths, negotiated and continue to negotiate politics in the PRC, and learned modes of omission. I want to know more about my own history and the unfinished sentences I grew up listening to. It is a strange tightrope to walk, as I am led by desire as someone part of the community, seeking to know more about censored histories that are disavowed in various ways; and remain careful about what to share in efforts to protect interlocutors and resist Enlightenment demands of knowing that prioritize access over ethics.³⁵

From this tightrope, I hope to show that Chinese musicians are not perpetually and simply "musicians from a different shore," borrowing from the title of Mari Yoshihara's seminal monograph (2007). In this chapter, I write about musical moments during the Cultural Revolution with a focus on the lives of Li Jue and Li Delun, two of the most significant musical figures during the latter half of China's twentieth century who helped create a new era of Western art music in the country. I was fortunate to be the last person to

³⁴ For this reason, I do not provide any images of them or identify birth cities in order to protect interlocutors' privacy.

³⁵ In addition to Audra Simpson and Lisa Stevenson's work, I also think here with Walter Dignolo's *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (2011), Michel-Rolph Trouillot's *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (2015 [1995]), and Kirsten Weld's *Paper Cadavers: The Archives of Dictatorship in Guatemala* (2014).

interview Li Jue in 2013, a year before her death, and hear firsthand her recollections of that time. Connected to our discussions, as well as my conversations with other members of her family, such as daughter Li Yan 李燕 and granddaughter Rosalind Zhang, I examine archival photographs of Li Delun during the Philadelphia Orchestra's 1973 diplomatic tour of the PRC, in which he played a vital role for the visit's success. These photos were unexpectedly found in the University of Pennsylvania's Kislak Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, and show the integral role Chinese musicians had in the transnational development of Western art music. In addition, these photos show moments from the Cultural Revolution when music practices were used to transform a new nation grappling with recent memories of foreign imperialism and atrocities. Concurrently with national ambitions to rebuild through the co-opting, censoring, and control of musical arts, individuals also developed musical desires, inspired by prior experiences before Western cultural forms were heavily denounced by the CCP. As subsequent chapters will show, some passed on their musical ambitions to their only child after the Mao era. This second chapter argues that Western art music held affective meaning for a Chinese nation that was rebuilding after the creation of the PRC, and for individuals who, while negotiating changing national policies, desired to become professional musicians, to perform, and to engage more deeply with a musical practice that was censored.

Western Art Music in China and National Re-Imaginings

The presence of Western music in China can be traced back centuries and has, over time, become associated with foreign and domestic prestige, foreign imperialism, racial exclusion, and modernization. In 1601, Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) presented

a clavichord to the Ming Dynasty's Emperor Wan Li (1563-1620), who kept the gift in the Forbidden City in what is today Beijing. This action set a precedent for Western art music, and keyboard music in particular, to be tied to notions of prestige.³⁶ These notions were strengthened when the Qing court (1644-1912) hired the Belgian priest Ferdinandus Verbiest (1623-1688) and the Portuguese priest Thomas Pereira (1645-1708) to teach music in the Imperial City, which contained the Forbidden City at its center. In addition to prestige, these events also associated Western art music with the nation's political life as the Imperial City housed the Imperial family and the highest levels of government.

In the years since Western art music was introduced to China, the empire went through many transformations, influenced largely by internal strife, interactions with neighboring nations, and Western invasion. In 1644, the Ming Dynasty was overthrown by the northeastern Manchus who established the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911). In the nineteenth century, the Qing empire's disastrous defeats in the two Opium Wars (1839–42, 1856–60) weakened their rule, led to countless Chinese deaths, ravaged the economy, and compromised the country's sovereignty. In 1911, the Xinhai Revolution overthrew not only the Qing Dynasty, but dynastic rule as the governing structure in China. This monumental change was followed by the establishment of the Republic of China (ROC) in 1912, the First World War (1914–18), the May Fourth Movement in 1919, the intermittent Chinese Civil War that began in 1927, the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–45), the resumption of the Civil War in 1945, and finally the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in

³⁶ The earliest recorded evidence of organized European sound in China is dated in 1307, when Franciscan friar John of Montecorvino (1247-1328) travelled to Beijing, formed a boys' choir, and established the practice of chanting (Melvin & Cai 2015: 26). This form of religious practice from the fourteenth century differs, however, from what has become known and associated with Western art music.

1949 on the Mainland, with the Republic of China retreating to present-day Taiwan. One cannot overstate the scale and impact of these events.

Throughout these changes, various forms of Western music were introduced, developed, and weaved into Chinese civilization as a cultural thread that transformed alongside politics, national boundaries, socio-cultural expectations, and nation-state formation. Of particular note is China's military conflict with the West during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which deeply affected the development, reputation, and racialization of Western art music. Following Britain's ban of the transatlantic slave trade in 1807, the empire sought new forms of cheap labor and sources of wealth.³⁷ Consequently, it explored and expanded its grasp to Asia, colonizing India and establishing opium crops, which were then harvested, packaged, and smuggled into China (Lowe 2015).³⁸ Although Britain was the main agent in the opium trade, historical British Parliamentary Papers note the entrance of American merchants into the trade in 1807, their increased role after 1812, and the regularization of Anglo-American cooperation in the trade by 1821 (Lowe 2015: 98). Interdisciplinary scholar Lisa Lowe notes in her groundbreaking text, *The Intimacy of Four Continents*, that by 1830, nearly 70 percent of the entire British and American imports into

³⁷ Although the transatlantic slave trade was banned in 1807, the granting of freedoms did not begin until 1834 and proceeded in stages. For instance, the "granting of unrestricted freedom" in the British colonial Caribbean did not occur until 1838 (Ryan 2021). For more, see the work of musicologist Maria Ryan (2021).

³⁸ Members of the Qing government attempted to notify the British Crown of this illegal activity, requesting an end to the practice. Unknown to the Chinese empire, the British government was fully aware of the drug trafficking as it not only helped achieve more favorable trades, but opium was in fact the item of trade. In some cases, opium would be traded for Chinese silver, which would then be exchanged for tea. In other instances, opium would be traded directly for goods, such as silk (Lowe 2015: 95–97).

China were opium (Lowe 2015: 96). Their coordinated efforts against China would not be forgotten in the twentieth century.

The Opium Wars resulted in China's loss of land, wealth, and sovereign independence; and the tainting of Western signifiers, such as Western art music. At the end of the First Opium War in 1842, Hong Kong Island was ceded to Britain and five treaty ports for international trade (Canton/Guangzhou, Amoy/Xiamen, Fuzhou, Ningbo, and Shanghai), disadvantaging Chinese merchants, were established in the Mainland. In Shanghai, the International Settlement (created when the British and American Settlements merged together) and French Concession were also established. Opium continued to be traded in significant quantities. In 1856, the Qing government tried again to expel the trade of opium from its shores, only to lose the Second Opium War in 1860. Britain, allied this time with the French empire and later aided by the U.S., won another decisive victory and gained further land, extraterritorial rights, and trading privileges on the Chinese mainland. More than 80 additional treaty ports were established and many international musicians from Europe, Russia, the Philippines, and the U.S. migrated to them and formed ensembles in growing cities such as Shanghai.

Shanghai boasted the first symphony orchestra in China, which was established in 1879 as the Shanghai Municipal Band, the predecessor to today's Shanghai Symphony Orchestra. The ensemble expanded and in 1907, was renamed the Shanghai Municipal Council Symphony Orchestra before it became the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra in 1922.³⁹ Although this was the first such ensemble in the country, Chinese people were banned from

³⁹ At the outset, the Shanghai Municipal Band was mostly comprised of Filipino men from Manila. Beginning in 1906, professional European musicians were recruited. String players were also added, which expanded the potential repertoire (Melvin & Cai 2004: 25–26).

entering performance spaces due to racial segregation between them and foreigners residing in extraterritorial treaty ports. It was not until 1925, when the Italian Mario Paci threatened to resign as conductor of the orchestra, that Chinese people could attend performances (Melvin & Cai 2004: 26, 43).⁴⁰ In this way, Western art music became further associated with racializations against Chinese people, Western elitism and exclusionary practices, and Western imperialism. As noted by ethnomusicologist Philip Bohlman, “The ultimate act of racializing is the denial of place, that is, the removal of conditions of belonging” (Bohlman 2000: 645). Together with the increasing amount of Western establishments, American and European populations in Shanghai and other treaty ports, and opium dependency, Western art music became associated with decadence, racial hierarchy, and threats to Chinese sovereignty and nationalism.

The Mao era began in 1949 when Mao Zedong and his Communist Party assumed leadership on the Mainland. In the years between 1925 and 1949, China underwent the Chinese Civil War (1927-49) and the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-45), which was part of World War II. As historian Diana Lary notes, between 20 and 100 million Chinese refugees were created by the War, which “was one of the greatest upheavals in Chinese history” that “tore the fabric of society to ribbons” (Lary 2010: 28). In addition to refugees, approximately 30 million Chinese people died as part of what has been called the Asian Holocaust (Todd 2016).⁴¹ When Mao became the first Chairman of the People’s Republic of

⁴⁰ Paci’s insistence on Chinese inclusion was both moral and economical: he believed that Chinese citizens should be included in musical spaces and knew that the Orchestra would benefit financially from Chinese audience members. For more, see Melvin & Cai (2004).

⁴¹ In contrast to the German-instituted Holocaust in Europe, the Japanese had a rape, kill, pillage, and burn strategy in parts of Asia, particularly in China, that left little evidence of the atrocities, save for the decimated cities and villages. Approximately 50 million people died at

China in 1949, he intended to rebuild a nation that had been devastated by foreign imperialism. As a result, Western art music became increasingly controlled by the government and used for state functions.

In certain instances, Western art music was used to celebrate the nation and the accomplishments of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). In 1959, the CCP marked the PRC's ten-year anniversary by inviting the Dresden Philharmonic Orchestra to perform Beethoven's monumental Ninth Symphony with the PRC's Central Philharmonic in Beijing, Xian, Chongqing, Nanjing, and Shanghai (Chou 2013).⁴² By inviting the German orchestra at the height of the Cold War to celebrate the Communist People's Republic of China, Mao Zedong attempted to communicate the new China's ability to command Western musicians and their musical genre. In 1960, the Central Philharmonic Orchestra was formally established to perform Western art music under the direction of Li Delun and Premier Zhou Enlai, who was a strong supporter of the musical genre. Although Western music was increasingly criticized in the PRC, it was simultaneously used for significant national events and tied to the image of the PRC as a successful young nation.

The Cultural Revolution began in 1966 and was espoused as boosting the PRC's economy after Mao's disastrous Great Leap Forward, which was "the largest famine in world history, with tens of millions starving to death" (Leese 2011: xiv). These occurred mainly in the countryside due to famine and related health issues caused by starvation (Melvin & Cai

the hands of Japanese aggression, most significantly in China, Korea, the Philippines, Singapore, and Indonesia during the Second Sino-Japanese War (Todd 2016).

⁴² These were five of the largest cities in Mainland China. Nanjing was the former capital under the ROC government.

2004: 219).⁴³ Some of my interlocutors still carry the burden of family deaths due to famine and of resurfacing health issues. Within my own family, my maternal grandparents lost their first two children as infants and their surviving children all negotiate various health concerns in the present day. My paternal grandmother was also left a young widow with three children in a village with limited resources during the famine and revolutionary years. Yet some in my maternal family still optimistically say that, all things considered, they survived alright. While the premature deaths in my family are tragic, they are not unique. Rather, this is but one example of how the losses during the Mao era permeated so deeply and ubiquitously in Chinese society that to this day, they are still part of individuals' and families' everyday lives, both physically and in traumatic memories that to a certain extent, have been normalized.⁴⁴

⁴³ Many China scholars argue that the Great Leap Forward (1958-1961) was Mao's first attempted "cultural revolution." Some estimates put the death toll close to 30 million (Walder 2015: 4, 169). There were also many unsuccessful pregnancies and births. After the Great Leap Forward's terrible failure, Mao was marginalized within the Chinese Communist Party, leading to his desire to remove political rivals and re-establish himself as a sovereign figure in the PRC (Wu 2014: 15). The consequence was the wide-sweeping Cultural Revolution, which ended after he died in 1976.

⁴⁴ Although Mao's Cultural Revolution proclaimed that the hardships of peasants must be alleviated and communism ensured in the PRC, the result was that peasants remained poor and rural areas to this day receive little government attention or help. Most government allocations are directed at cities where health care, education, job opportunities, and housing are considerably improved (Afridi et al. 2015: 17). This significant stratification has resulted in a migrant worker issue in the PRC where many individuals, even entire communities, try to escape the poverty of China's rural life by seeking employment in cities (Ngai 2002: 343). Their movements, however, are constricted by the PRC's *hukou* 户口 system, which is a household registration program that determines where an individual can live, work, and access education, health care, and other social benefits based on where they are from and what *hukou* their parents hold. The countryside remains strongly stigmatized today and many who have successfully migrated to urban areas do not admit to their rural origins. For more on the *hukou* system in the PRC, see the work of Jun Li, Yanfeng Gu, and Chuncen Zhang (2015); Thomas Vendryes (2011); Fei-Ling Wang (2005); and Jason Young (2013). This system will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

For many in Mainland China, the dates of the Cultural Revolution are conflated with the revolutionary Mao era that began well before 1966 and continued until the PRC transitioned into the post-socialist era under Deng Xiaoping's leadership in 1978. This includes the Great Leap Forward, which is also known as the Great Famine, and even earlier in the '50s for some, as the practices of revolution, censorship, surveillance, and worship of Chairman Mao were present in various intensities throughout his leadership. 1966 was a significant year, however, due to several actions related specifically to cultural forms. On May 28th, 1966, a "Central Cultural Revolution Group" was created, led by Chen Boda and including Jiang Qing (Madame Mao), Kang Sheng, Yao Wenyuan, and Zhang Chunqiao. On June 1st, 1966, the *People's Daily* newspaper published the instructions: "Sweep Away All Monsters and Demons!" (Dikötter 2016: xxiii). Classes were suspended across the country and many students were swept up in the fervor of revolution. On July 16th, 1966, Mao swam (or floated) for an hour in the Yangtze River, symbolizing his physical strength at age 72 and his ability to carry through a large-scale revolution. The power of print media was used again, as photographs of this publicity stunt further solidified his cult of personality (Poon 2019).

Students, in particular, were co-opted to effect the anarchy of the Cultural Revolution. They received encouragement and political validation from the Chairman when, on August 1st, 1966, he wrote a letter supporting "Red Guards." A neologism then, Red Guards were students who declared their dedication to Mao and to fighting against "capitalist roaders," "rightists," and Chiang Kai-Shek's Nationalist Party. They, as well as older CCP officials, attacked individuals and families who were perceived as capitalist and Nationalist traitors, sympathizers, or spies; individuals with a "bad class background," which meant that they or someone with whom they had associations were branded as a capitalist

and/or Nationalist; and individuals who they believed had disrespected the Chairman in some way. Mao encouraged the early violence Red Guards showed, which spurred on further atrocities. Ultimately, the Cultural Revolution was a decade-long political struggle for power amongst Mao Zedong, his wife Jiang Qing, and other top officials, some of whom survived the event and others who did not. It was, overall, a chaotic time for Chinese people that resulted in millions of deaths (Walder 2015: 334).⁴⁵

The Cultural Revolution had a profound impact on musical arts in the PRC. Mao emphatically stated in his 1942 *Yan'an Talks* that art and literature must serve the masses in order to be considered valuable and good (Mittler 2012: 24). Consequently, music during the Cultural Revolution focused on love for the Chinese nation, praise for Mao and his Communist Party, and devotion to the revolutionary cause. The censorship was so extreme that “the PRC effectively eliminated all but a very few political songs for close to thirty years (1949-1978)” (Moskowitz 2010: 5). Much of the political music featured upbeat tempos and militaristic rhythms to promote labor output. Together with the vague ways in which a person could be judged as capitalist, Nationalist, or in general anti-Maoist, musicians were easily targeted as political and class enemies.

⁴⁵ Historian Andrew Walder gives a conservative estimate of 1.1 to 1.6 million deaths during the first five years of the upheaval, from 1966 to 1971 (Walder 2015: 334). Throughout the Cultural Revolution, the death rate was underreported and often did not include unsuccessful births due to malnutrition and lack of medical care. Many also died after 1971. In the years following this upheaval, many people passed away prematurely as a result of torture, mistreatment, hunger, and other physical and mental health issues caused during the Cultural Revolution. Historian Frank Dikötter notes that a significant amount of lives was also lost due to the CCP's lack of preparedness and poor response to natural disasters (Dikötter 2016: 312–316). The unorganized governance resulted in tens of thousands, if not millions, of unnecessary deaths. Unofficial sources give estimates of up to 20 million lives lost due to the Cultural Revolution (Strauss & Southerl 1994).

Moreover, since Western art music was strongly associated with Western colonialism, class and racial associations, and esotericism, musicians of this practice were particularly targeted. The Shanghai Conservatory, an institution focused on Western art music education, is reputed to have had the highest death toll of any music institution during the Cultural Revolution (Melvin & Cai 2004: 239). The city, as one of the earliest and largest treaty ports established after the First Opium War by European and American imperialists, was in general a center for Western music and culture, and consequently underwent much turmoil during the Cultural Revolution. Within the first few years of the upheaval, many pedagogues and musicians from the Shanghai Conservatory and Shanghai Municipal Orchestra took their lives after torture and other forms of abuse. Some of the names included: Lu Xiutang, an *erhu* player; Yang Jiaren, the head of the Shanghai Conservatory's conducting department who had studied at the University of Michigan; Cheng Juoru, the principle of the Shanghai Conservatory's middle school and wife of Yang Jiaren; Li Cuizhen, a famed pianist who returned to the Mainland from Hong Kong at the invitation of the CCP and other musicians in Shanghai; Zhao Zhihua, a violinist who had studied in Austin and Boston, and his wife; Chen Youxin, the head of the Shanghai Conservatory's instrumental department and one of the first Chinese musicians to join the formerly all-foreign Shanghai Municipal Orchestra; Fu Lei and Zhu Meifu, the parents of the famed pianist Fu Cong, who was the son-in-law of famed American violinist Yehudi Menuhin; and Gu Shengying, a renowned pianist who gassed herself with her mother and younger brother (Melvin & Cai 2004: 233–240). Other musicians, such as Lu Hongen, a timpanist and resident conductor of the Shanghai Municipal Orchestra, and Wang Jiaen, a piano professor at Shanghai Conservatory's middle school, died at gunpoint and during political punishment, respectively. This is but a partial

list of the lives lost and shows the transnational networks that already connected Chinese musicians with musical life in the West in the mid-twentieth century. During the Cultural Revolution, these connections were a reason for political punishment. A generation of musicians were lost or had their lives deeply impacted by the Cultural Revolution, the effects of which continue to be felt in the PRC today.

Some of those who survived the movement chose to pursue Western art music again after 1976, either personally or through their only child. Tan Shuzhen was one of the musicians who survived torture during the Cultural Revolution. Prior to the movement, he had become head of violin studies at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. For this, Red Guards confined him in a closet for fourteen months, assigned him to clean and fix toilets, and regularly beat him. After the Cultural Revolution, he became the Vice-Director of the Shanghai Conservatory. In addition to being a violinist and pedagogue, he was also an instrument-maker who left an indelible mark on Chinese musical life.⁴⁶ The father of Lin, an interlocutor who is today a Principal in an American orchestra,⁴⁷ attempted to be a violinist during the Cultural Revolution but was unable to due to the overall negativity towards Western music and interruption to schooling the movement caused. Although he never became a professional musician, he gave Lin the opportunity to do so after he was born by teaching him violin beginning at the age of three. Fei, another interlocutor who is today a burgeoning pianist with great international potential, comes from a family who struggled during the Cultural Revolution: her mother played violin, her father played saxophone, and

⁴⁶ For more on the incredible life of Tan Shuzhen, see Heather Greer's documentary, *The Gentleman from Shanghai* (1999) and Murray Lerner's documentary, *From Mao to Mozart: Isaac Stern in China* (2001 [1979]).

⁴⁷ Principals in orchestras lead their section of instruments (ex. Principal Violin, Principal French Horn). These are highly competitive and prestigious roles.

her maternal uncle was a composer. Although her musical development has meant great sacrifices for her parents, they have given her unwavering support since she is able to experience a life in music that they once desired. While these parents were unable to pursue their own careers in Western art music after the Cultural Revolution due to age, they re-engaged with this music through their only child.

These ethnographies will be further explored in following chapters. Here, I turn to the work and legacy of Li Jue and Li Delun, two musicians who advocated for Western art music throughout the Mao era and who worked in various leadership roles during and after that time. Li Delun worked closely with Jiang Qing, Mao's wife who had considerable influence on music and the arts during the Cultural Revolution, and Premier Zhou Enlai. Often hailed as the "father of Western classical music" in China, Li Delun protected musicians during the revolutionary years, conducted and led the Central Philharmonic in Beijing, and worked closely with foreign dignitaries and artists, such as the Philadelphia Orchestra during their 1973 visit.

Memories, Regrets, and Retrospectives

The whole Cultural Revolution was wrong. But even now, [they] still haven't honestly admitted what happened. No one has come forward to say it. But pretty much everyone thinks of it this way. Now, everyone acknowledges that it was a ten-year mistake. – Li Jue

I met Li Jue in 2013 at her home in Beijing, where she told me of her life in Shanghai before the Communist Revolution in 1949, before the Cultural Revolution, and before the crushing sense of failure of what the Cultural Revolution and nation-state had become. Born in 1924 into a middle-class family in Tianjin, in northeast China, Li Jue grew up in Shanghai and studied violin at the Shanghai Conservatory with Arrigo Foa, an Italian musician and then-concertmaster of what has become the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra. Highly musical,

Li Jue also learned Beijing Opera from a young age and performed for Mao Zedong and Jiang Qing while working as a Communist revolutionary during the Chinese Civil War. After the establishment of the PRC in 1949, she served as the Principal Second Violin for the North China People's Art Troupe 华北人民文工团, which became the Central Experimental Opera House 中央实验歌剧院, and then for the Central Opera Orchestra 中国歌剧团. After retiring from orchestral performance, she did administrative work for the Central Opera Orchestra 中国歌剧团 and taught violin at the Central Conservatory of Music's Middle School. Together with her husband, Li Delun, Li Jue helped protect Chinese musicians of Western art music during the Cultural Revolution, promoted the genre after the era of revolution, and ushered in a new age of Western art music development in the PRC. Their legacy in the PRC and in Western art music history can be seen around the world, as the recent generations of Chinese Western art musicians are a direct result of their musical advocacy and political acumen.



Figure 1: Li Jue at 89 years old in her Beijing home, 2013. Photo taken by author.



Figure 2: Photographs of Li Delun in their home, 2013. Photo taken by author.

I met Li through her granddaughter, Rosalind Zhang, who was a friend and close interlocutor from Toronto, where we both attended the University of Toronto's Faculty of Music, she in the Cello Performance program, and I in the Music History & Theory Specialization as a piano major. Li Jue's three children had immigrated to different English-speaking countries: Australia, the United States, and Canada. Her youngest daughter, Li Yan 李燕, settled in Toronto with her husband and son. Given the opportunity to have a second child, they had a daughter, Rosalind 张韞斯 [Zhang Yungsi], who freelances today as a classical cellist. Li Yan and her husband, Zhang Taining 张泰宁, are also musicians in Toronto. The former teaches piano and harp, and the latter teaches music history and theory. Since 2013, when I began fieldwork for this project, I have been fortunate to share many conversations and meals with Rosalind and members of her family.

Li Jue's musical commitments existed alongside her desire to create a better future for her country. As she recalled of the years during the Chinese Civil War and Second Sino-Japanese War:

There were a lot of wars, life was really difficult. Having something to eat was hard. I remember, during the war, you would walk outside and see a corpse ... Some people starved to death, others froze to death. ... There were some who had money, others who didn't have money.

The devastation she saw in Shanghai during that time compelled her to join the Communist Party, which she hoped would realize a new national structure that would distribute resources more equally and allow China to be independent of foreign imperialism. She said to me in 2013,

We thought China couldn't keep going down like that. We were a colonized country – a partially colonized country [半殖民地国家 *ban zhimindi guojia*] ... A lot of cities were divided up. Any country could come! We were a really miserable country [then] [很惨的国家 *hen can de guojia*]. You know the Opium Wars? Since then, we had been terribly disgraced [一落千丈 *yiluoqianzhang*].⁴⁸ We didn't even have gunpowder then!

Her sentiments about the shameful Opium Wars, China's consequently compromised sovereignty, and the negative impacts of foreign imperialism were shared by many at that time, and still to this day. As a result, Li Jue worked as a Communist spy in Shanghai in the 1940s before travelling to Yan'an, then the center of Mao Zedong's rebel faction and over 900 miles away from her home, in 1948. From there, Li Jue, Li Delun, and a core group of Communist revolutionaries walked 560 miles with Mao to Beijing. In 2013, she recalled the excitement in those days because of the hope that they could build a better nation than what they had experienced. At that time, the relationships between people in the Communist Party were good and there was a lot of mutual aid. In 2013, she mused, with regret, "People aren't the same anymore."

Li Jue's husband was Li Delun, a multi-instrumentalist and conductor who, like her, was a spy for the Communists in Shanghai before leaving for Yan'an. They both worked as guerilla musicians who taught other revolutionaries and peasants that they encountered on the Long March Western instruments, such as strings and woodwinds. With the group of revolutionaries travelling the 560 miles together, Li Delun formed a Western "red orchestra." Li Jue recalled, "We walked everyday and they put in a real effort to learn those

⁴⁸ 一落千丈 [*yiluoqianzhang*] is a four-character Chinese idiom that literally means to drop a thousand "zhang" in one fall. A "zhang" is a unit of measurement, equal to about 3.33 meters or 3.65 yards. Taken figuratively, the saying means to plummet or suffer a devastating blow.

instruments. It meant something to them to have this orchestra.” Some peasants who heard them perform had never seen an orchestra or Western music ensemble before and were astonished. As Li Jue explained in 2013, they wanted to form a Western orchestra because they believed that it symbolized China’s ability to modernize. Moreover, China had never had a Western orchestra formed by Chinese people; they were all run by and featured mostly foreigners. In this way, they could musically reclaim the country. Li Jue explained,

Why did I leave my home and run over there? Wasn’t it for the purpose of contributing musically [to the country]? ... While we were in music school, we all studied an instrument and harmony. We all had to learn that. But we all had one goal: we [Chinese people] needed to catch up to them [foreigners]. We had [Mario] Paci and the foreign orchestra [in Shanghai],⁴⁹ but we needed to catch up and have our own. We thought that China should have its own, and it should be good ... It wasn’t about competing with other countries, but about a cultural accomplishment.

Ethnomusicologist Frederick Lau notes that historically, “Chinese musicians ... equated Western [art] music with the supremacy of Western science and technology ... Learning Western music came not only as a fad but also as a way to embrace the concept of being modern and to redefine one’s social status” (Lau 2008: 31). Moreover, the Chinese term *modeng* [摩登] is the phonetic equivalent of the English “modern” and “implies being up-to-date, new, unconventional, and Westernized” (Lau 2008: 98). The phrase was adopted from English at the beginning of the twentieth century. Li Jue’s words show that musical accomplishments were tied to ideas of nation, modernity, and futurity; having a Western

⁴⁹ Mario Paci (1878-1946) was a Florentine conductor and pianist who led the Shanghai Municipal Band, the predecessor of the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra, and was a prominent musical figure in Shanghai. Instead of leaving China like many other foreigners during wartime, he decided to stay and died in Shanghai. For more on Paci, see Melvin and Cai (2004 & 2015).

orchestra communicated that China could develop and “catch up” to the foreign nations that had conquered it with the use of gunpowder. As her earlier quote implied, China’s lack of gunpowder led to its military defeats and colonization. This compromised sovereignty was a disgrace that introduced new racial hierarchies in the country and motivated many to rebuild an independent nation-state.



60年代中期中央乐团下乡为农民演出 指挥李德伦

Figure 3: Li Delun conducting the Central Philharmonic. Caption reads, “The Central Philharmonic went to the countryside to perform for farmers in the mid-1960s.” Photo courtesy of Li Yan, his youngest daughter. Personal collection.

Li Delun was a Chinese cellist, conductor, educator, multi-instrumentalist, and music advocate who joined the Communist Youth League in 1936, walked the historic Long March from Yan’an to Beijing in the 1940s, helped maintain the practice of Western art music during the Cultural Revolution, and advocated for this musical practice afterwards. Like

many disillusioned Chinese nationals in the 1930s, Li believed in the potential of socialism for a new Chinese nation, freed from foreign influence and the socio-economic strictures of China's feudal past. In 1938, he enrolled at Furen University in Beijing to study music, playing flute in the university band and studying violin with Ma Wensheng (Melvin & Cai 2004: 141). After two years, he transferred to Shanghai Conservatory, where he studied cello with the Russian expatriate Igor Shertzoff and met Li Jue in the midst of the chaos of the Second Sino-Japanese War. Shanghai was heavily bombed and the devastation was extreme. Like Li Jue, Li Delun's experiences in Shanghai during this time fuelled his desire to contribute to the Communist cause for a new nation.

During the Long March, Li Delun led the Yan'an Orchestra, which included other members of the Communist Party and used old instruments from Shanghai and Beijing. Together, Li Jue and Li Delun taught the participants how to play their instruments and performed for local farmers and workers during the Communists' land reform, which they enacted on their way to Beijing. In accordance with Mao's directive that music should serve the peasants and masses, Li Delun would speak before each performance and explain to audiences the purpose of each Western instrument, the history behind musical pieces, and how this music may relate to their socialist cause. As he recalled of that time,

It was a peaceful land reform, very peaceful. We got the landlords to split up their land. Really, the landlords were often poor, too. They just had land—oftentimes there was nothing planted on it. Then, later, people said peaceful land reform was too rightist – the leftists came out and made it all chaotic (Li in Melvin & Cai 2004: 180).

In the political context of that time, a “rightist” meant someone who supported capitalism, the Nationalists, and/or old feudal values from China's dynastic past. A “leftist” was a socialist who supported Mao's socialist vision for the PRC. However, as many who lived

through that era note, who was labeled a “rightist” or “leftist” was a topic of much debate, which sometimes led to extreme violence.⁵⁰

As Li Jue said in 2013, “We never could have imagined what it [the Cultural Revolution] became. It was never supposed to be like that.” Having served her country for most of her life with other highly ranked Communist officials, Li Jue felt a confidence to speak her mind with attribution to her real name. Unlike many other Chinese nationals, she and her family do not feel a precautionary need to hide their identities. Perhaps this is because of their stature within Chinese history. Based on our many conversations, I would proffer that it is also due to the fact that they faced the most risk in the years following the Cultural Revolution, when those who worked with Jiang Qing in any capacity were politically hunted and Li Delun’s life was threatened on multiple occasions. Having survived more of China’s tumultuous twentieth century than most, Li Jue spoke honestly about her memories and regrets of the PRC’s first three decades.

Writing about the Cultural Revolution with a focus on its peripheries, China scholar Wu Yiching asks,

Why do the powerful fear history and seek to dominate memory? In the case of the Cultural Revolution, the state’s intention is not mysterious. The history of the Cultural Revolution is censored for the unabashed purpose of curbing *luan* – “chaos” or uncontrollable public disturbances – and of preventing the repoliticization of a subversive or even potentially explosive subject at a time of prevalent social and political uncertainty, despite the appearance of economic prosperity (2014: 5).

⁵⁰ In addition to scholarly texts on the Cultural Revolution, I consider autobiographies of those who lived through that era as alternative perspectives of a tumultuous time. Here, I think of Liang Heng’s co-authored autobiography with Judith Shapiro, titled, *Son of the Revolution* (1984) and Jung Chang’s autobiography, *Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China* (1991). I also consider historic novels such as Madeleine Thien’s acclaimed, *Do Not Say We Have Nothing* (2016).

While completing archival research in the PRC, Wu was arrested, detained, and interrogated for several days and nights by the Ministry of State Security, China's secret police organ. An officer said to him,

The Cultural Revolution was an unprecedented social movement that negatively affected the lives of tens of millions of Chinese. It destabilized the party and disrupted the political life of the state. Now, when the course of "reform and opening up" is not going too smoothly, when there are many disgruntled people for one reason or another, the hostile elements inside China and abroad will then attempt to take advantage of the memory and knowledge of the Cultural Revolution to make trouble for us. This is why the study of the Cultural Revolution is a matter of state security (Wu 2014: 5-6).

Wu's experiences are incredibly telling of the political atmosphere and attitude towards research, historical memory, and state credibility. They are also quite alarming, not least because his detention occurred in Changsha, Hunan, the city where I was born and a field site to which I returned several times throughout the years. The known risks of pursuing archival research in China, which I would argue increased as the CCP censored more of its history under the strengthening leadership of Xi Jinping, influenced my strong engagement with ethnography and careful treading of state sources.

Archival Encounters and Music as Diplomacy

It was consequently a welcomed surprise to discover dozens of photographs of Li Delun and other Chinese musicians and dignitaries in Kislak Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts at the University of Pennsylvania in 2018. Part of Ms. Collection 330, "Eugene Ormandy photographs," Li Delun is featured in the Philadelphia Orchestra's 1973 China Tour with their conductor, Eugene Ormandy. His archival presence came as a surprise because he was unlocatable in the Finding Aid since his name was either misspelled as "Li The Lun" or Romanized as "Li Teh Lun," a prior Romanization that his family and scholars

do not use.⁵¹ Moreover, while Li Delun was present in dozens of these photographs in ways that showed his significance to this diplomatic tour, his role during the visit and Western art music history was little known to English scholars and those leading the Orchestra today. In 2021, when I reached out to the Philadelphia Orchestra about the photographs, they were unaware who Li Delun was.⁵² These archival discoveries show the uneven historical knowledge of the Cultural Revolution and Chinese involvement, even leadership, in significant moments of Western art music history. This lack of knowledge led certain European icons, such as the Austro-Hungarian Jewish conductor of the Philadelphia Orchestra at that time, Eugene Ormandy, to be heralded while their Chinese collaborators, such as Li Delun, were forgotten. As anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot notes in his study of history, archives, and the production of knowledge, “the production of traces is always also the creation of silences” (2015: 29), as hierarchies of power and cultural biases determine what is present, omitted, ignored, or engaged with in institutional records.

In September 1973, the Philadelphia Orchestra became the first American orchestra to tour the PRC as cultural ambassadors for the United States during the Cold War, when international relations between the two countries were extremely limited and strained. The orchestral tour began in Beijing on September 12th, in collaboration with Li Delun and the Central Philharmonic. It concluded ten days later in Shanghai as the year’s most significant diplomatic event. Although most Chinese people had no access to these concerts, snippets were broadcast on loudspeakers, including those in the countryside. As Oscar-winning

⁵¹ Working with staff in Kislak Special Collections, I corrected the Finding Aid spellings in 2021. These photos were also unknown to his family and rarely studied. I have since shared them with his family and they have gained greater exposure.

⁵² In this instance, I explained his role as the Chinese counterpart to the famed conductor of the Philadelphia Orchestra, Eugene Ormandy.

composer Tan Dun recalls in the documentary, *Beethoven in Beijing* (Lin and Mullally 2021), he was standing in a rice field, laboring when the music emanated in the commune. Like many others, he had not heard symphonic music before and was captivated by it. The moment was inspirational for Tan, who pursued composition studies at the Central Conservatory in Beijing in 1977, after the Cultural Revolution ended, before moving to New York City for further studies. He was one of the first Chinese students to move transnationally after the end of the Cultural Revolution, and one of many who were inspired by the Philadelphia Orchestra's visit, which was enabled in part by Li Delun.



Figure 4: Eugene Ormandy landing in Beijing and being greeted by Li Delun, September 12, 1973. Eugene Ormandy photographs, 1880-1992, Ms. Coll. 330, 42.3.2, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania.



Figure 5: The Philadelphia Orchestra delegation with Chinese officials, including Jiang Qing, in Beijing, Sept. 16, 1973. Eugene Ormandy photographs, 1880-1992, Ms. Coll. 330, 43.4.2, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania.



Figure 6: Front row audience of the Philadelphia Orchestra's performance on Sept. 16, 1973. In the center is Greta Ormandy, the wife of conductor Eugene Ormandy. To her right is Jiang Qing and behind her is Li Delun. Eugene Ormandy photographs, 1880-1992, Ms. Coll. 330, 43.3.2, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania.

The visit represented the potential restoration of diplomatic ties between China as the PRC and the United States. Western art music served as a cultural broker that allowed the two nation-states to interact, perform musically and diplomatically, exchange state gifts, and initiate conversations regarding politics. The Philadelphia Orchestra performed three different programs across six concerts, with four taking place in Beijing and two in Shanghai.

As can be seen in the repertoire list in Figure 7, the programs included homages to contemporary Chinese music and PRC culture. The *Yellow River Piano Concerto: Ode to the Yellow River* is based on the *Yellow River Cantata*, composed by Xian Xinghai in 1939. During the Cultural Revolution, Jiang Qing ordered it to be rearranged by a Chu Wanhua, Liu Zhuang, Sheng Lihong, Shi Shucheng, Xu Feisheng, and Yin Chengzong, with the standard edition premiering in 1970. Ironically, the *Yellow River Cantata* was denounced and banned during the Cultural Revolution, while the *Yellow River Piano Concerto* became an emblem of socialist pride only to be eschewed after the Cultural Revolution. The piano concerto began to be featured again in the PRC in the late '80s. In addition to playing the piano concerto while it was popular in the PRC, the Philadelphia Orchestra also performed an arrangement of “March of the Workers and Peasants,” which was used as propaganda at the time.

Repertory Performed during the 1973 Tour of China						
	Beijing			Shanghai		
	14 Sep	15 Sep	16 Sep	17 Sep	20 Sep	21 Sep
Samuel Barber: <i>Adagio for Strings</i>			☞	☞	☞	
Ludwig van Beethoven: <i>Leonore Overture no. 3</i>		☞				
Beethoven: <i>Symphony no. 5</i>				☞		
Beethoven: <i>Symphony no. 6</i>			☞		☞	
Johannes Brahms: <i>Symphony no. 1</i>	☞					☞
Antonín Dvořák: <i>Symphony no. 9</i>		☞				
Roy Harris: <i>Symphony no. 3</i>	☞					☞
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: <i>Symphony no. 35 ("Haffner")</i>	☞					☞
Maurice Ravel: <i>Daphnis et Chloé, Suite no. 2</i>		☞				
Ottorino Respighi: <i>Pines of Rome</i>			☞	☞	☞	
William Schuman: <i>New England Triptych</i>		☞				
<i>Yellow River Concerto</i>			☞	☞	☞	
Richard Wagner: <i>Prelude to Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg</i>				☞		
Encores						
<i>San Pei</i> ("March of the Workers and Peasants"), arr. William Smith and Jesse Taynton	☞		☞		☞	☞
Kent Kennan: <i>Night Soliloquy</i>				☞		
John Philip Sousa: <i>The Stars and Stripes Forever</i>	☞					☞
Johann Strauss: <i>An der schönen blauen Donau</i>		☞				

Figure 7: Repertoire list of the Philadelphia Orchestra during the 1973. Available from the online exhibition, “Ormandy in China: The Historic 1973 Tour,” of the University of Pennsylvania (2015).



Figure 8: Li Delun with Philadelphia Orchestra conductor, Eugene Ormandy, exchanging gifts in Beijing on Sept. 15th, 1973. Eugene Ormandy photographs, 1880-1992, Ms. Coll. 330, 42.30.2, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania.



Figure 9: Li Delun with Philadelphia Orchestra conductor, Eugene Ormandy, the Central Philharmonic, and members of the Philadelphia Orchestra delegation studying scores in Beijing on Sept. 15th, 1973. Eugene Ormandy photographs, 1880-1992, Ms. Coll. 330, 42.32.1, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania.



Figure 10: Li Delun with Philadelphia Orchestra conductor, Eugene Ormandy, and the Central Philharmonic during a rehearsal in Beijing on Sept. 15th, 1973. Eugene Ormandy photographs, 1880-1992, Ms. Coll. 330, 42.33.1, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania.

Music was further politicized by Jiang Qing and the Chinese and Americans in their attempts to pay respects to the other. When the Philadelphia Orchestra landed in Beijing on September 12th, Li Delun arranged for them to be greeted by the Central Philharmonic Chorus singing “American the Beautiful” in English (Melvin & Cai 2004: 268). On September 15th, the conductor Eugene Ormandy and members of the Philadelphia Orchestra attended a rehearsal of the Central Philharmonic, as Figures 8-10 show. Li Delun provided a short history of the Philharmonic, which he helped form, and led a performance of “Reflections of the Moon on the Second Fountain,” a short orchestral piece attributed to the composer Hua Yuan-Jun, also known as Ah Bing, that was based on a folk song.⁵³ Li and

⁵³ When the Philadelphia Orchestra left the PRC in 1973, Ormandy took with him a copy of the score for “Reflections of the Moon on the Second Fountain,” which he had found beautiful. He later requested program notes and permission to perform it. Unfortunately, due to Jiang Qing, Li Delun was unable to provide it since it was recently censored. After the

the Central Philharmonic also performed Beethoven's *Symphony No. 5*, which was a favored piece of Ormandy's and which the Philadelphia Orchestra had hoped to perform in the PRC. In a collaborative spirit, Li conducted the first movement, then offered the baton to Ormandy to conduct the next. This gesture was received very warmly.⁵⁴

Unfortunately, although the Philadelphia Orchestra was prepared to perform Beethoven's *Symphony No. 5* on September 16th, the repertoire had to be changed due to Jiang Qing's belief that the famed symphony with the "fate theme" challenged communist ideology.⁵⁵ Ormandy deftly changed the program to include *Yellow River Piano Concerto*, but was reluctant to switch Beethoven's *Symphony No. 5*. In its place, Jiang Qing requested *Symphony No. 6*, nicknamed "Pastoral", since she believed it to be more appropriate and related to peasants and rural life. Although Li Delun believed "Pastoral" to be related to European feudalism, he acquiesced to Jiang Qing's demand and prepared Beethoven's *Symphony No. 6* (X. Yang 2010).⁵⁶ American Nicholas Platt, who was the Foreign Service Control Officer during the visit, helped convince Ormandy to change his programming at the last minute. Ormandy personally did not like *Symphony No. 6*. Moreover, it was extremely

end of the Cultural Revolution and the downfall of Jiang Qing, Li sent Ormandy the requested program notes and an explanation of the situation in 1977. This story was related to me by Li's daughter, Li Yan 李燕. A copy of Li's letter to Ormandy is in the Philadelphia Orchestra archives, which was recently acquired by the University of Pennsylvania. Its exact location is currently unlocatable.

⁵⁴ There is a growing literature on music and diplomacy. For more, including on the U.S.-China Silk Road project, see Rebekah Ahrendt et al.'s *Music and Diplomacy from the Early Modern Era to the Present* (2014).

⁵⁵ Symphony No. 5 is arguably Beethoven's most famous piece, featuring the opening four-note motif that many describe as fate's knocking at the door.

⁵⁶ As part of his duties, Li Delun had to prepare summaries of each piece to Jiang Qing and her cultural leadership group, who often added their own input and perceptions of what a musical piece represented. For more on this infamous situation with Beethoven's Fifth and Sixth Symphonies, see Jennifer Lin and Sharon Mullally (2021) and Xiyun Yang (2010).

rare to change symphonic programming one day before a concert, as each of these pieces was up to 40 minutes long and ensembles typically rehearse for hours before a scheduled performance. However, the changes were made and the September 16th concert was well received.

Although the visit by the Philadelphia Orchestra, and other foreign ensembles before them, were successful, Jiang Qing was displeased by Zhou Enlai's leadership in the events. As a member of the Central Cultural Revolution Group, a prominent member of the CCP's Politburo, director of the Cultural Revolution's Arts and Literature Group, and chief creator of the model works, Jiang Qing used arts and culture as well as her position as Madame Mao to command political influence. In the early years of the Cultural Revolution, Jiang Qing and the Gang of Four maneuvered the downfalls of many artists, musicians, writers, and some politicians who they did not view as personal allies (Melvin & Cai 2004: 272; Walder 2015: 196). The visits from foreign orchestras took attention away from her model works and suggested a shift in Cultural Revolution politics towards more openness and collaboration with Western countries and artists. It also communicated Premier Zhou's superior position to her. As a result, Jiang led a campaign against absolute and "bourgeois" music. Absolute music is non-representational instrumental works, such as many symphonic and instrumental pieces from the Classical music era. In Jiang's opinion, this "bourgeois" music, which focused on the expression of emotions and the pursuit of music as high art, did not support the purposes of the Great Proletarian Revolution. In 1974, she spearheaded publications criticizing Western absolute and bourgeois music. One article that was widely circulated stated,

The current tendency to idolize the foreign and revive the ancient in the realm of music is aimed in essence at negating the Great

Proletarian Cultural Revolution, attempting to reverse the wheel of history, and reviving the practices of the sinister revisionist line in literature and art (Melvin & Cai 2004: 277).

Written under the pseudonym of “Chu Lan,” the piece was created by one of Jiang’s supervised writing groups and aimed to attack Zhou Enlai as someone who idolized Western culture (Melvin & Cai 2004: 277). Although this and other publications did not significantly harm Premier Zhou, there were no further visits from foreign orchestras for the remainder of the Cultural Revolution and significantly fewer performances of Western music.⁵⁷

Zhou Enlai and Li Delun’s roles in musical life during the Cultural Revolution helped maintain the practice of Western art music, strengthen international relations with foreign dignitaries and musicians, and protect Chinese musicians’ lives. Although Premier Zhou passed away from cancer before the end of the movement, Li Delun and Li Jue survived and continued to impact arts and cultural life for decades. However, this is not to say that their experiences during the Cultural Revolution were easy. Since Li Jue was the Principal Second Violin of the Central Opera Orchestra at the start of the upheaval, she was denounced multiple times during the ten years. As her granddaughter Rosalind Zhang relayed to me, during one denunciation, her critics shaved half her head and ordered her to clean bathrooms in order to humiliate her. Li Jue herself said to me, there was constant

⁵⁷ When Premier Zhou died of cancer on January 8th, 1976, Jiang and her allies attempted to minimize media coverage of his passing, which only fuelled public mourning for Zhou and dislike for Jiang and her associates. Millions of mourners lined Beijing’s streets to watch his funeral cortege and pay respects (Melvin & Cai 2004: 281–282). Four months later, in April during the traditional Tomb Sweeping Day and Festival, thousands of people, including Li Delun and other musicians of the Central Philharmonic, again poured out into Beijing and honored the Premier’s memory at Tiananmen Square by laying flowers, wreathes, and hand-written poems at the Monument to the People’s Heroes. After a few days, Jiang and her associates ordered military troops to clear out Tiananmen Square, killing many in the process.

anxiety of “falling out of favor” during the Cultural Revolution. Yet, it was still important to get up every morning and do one’s work as best as one could. Li Delun’s humor helped them stay motivated as they continually negotiated Jiang Qing’s demands and the political sensitivities at that time. The precarity of that era, though, was burdening and led Li Delun to reflect decades later: “It was all a power struggle, all politics—Jiang Qing just used music ... We were all used by her, to give her something to do. I worked hard, but in my heart it was difficult” (Li in Melvin & Cai 2004: 287). Despite the incredible pressure Li Jue and Li Delun were under as state musicians, who could have lost their lives like others, their advocacy of Western art music, ingenuity at negotiating political demands, and effort to protect other musicians greatly influenced musical practice during the Cultural Revolution and for decades following in the PRC.

A year before her passing, Li Jue said to me, “The whole Cultural Revolution was wrong. But even now, [they] still haven’t honestly admitted what happened. No one has come forward to say it. But pretty much everyone thinks of it this way. Now, everyone acknowledges that it was a ten-year mistake.” Although the Cultural Revolution was almost forty years behind her, Li Jue still omitted the subject of the CCP in one of her sentences, stating that “[**blank**] still haven’t honestly admitted what happened.” While she felt comfortable acknowledging the shortcomings of the socialist upheaval, her careful self-censorship led her to instinctively omit the subject of the government. Instead, she implied it as she expressed her regret. The significance that a historical figure, who had sacrificed so immensely for her nation, would express such profound regret about the movement was not lost on me. Li Jue had worked very closely with other leaders and had helped effect the Communist Revolution in 1949. Yet all of her children had immigrated abroad, her

husband's life had been threatened numerous times, and many of their actions had been controlled at various points.

But they were fortunate to have survived. As historian Li Jie notes, “During the Mao era, hundreds of millions of Chinese devoted themselves to the building of a better world yet suffered from hunger and strife at unprecedented scales” (2020b: 4). Wu Yiching adds, “In spite of the people’s constitutionally enshrined status as the master of the state, the revolution essentially declassed Chinese society by leveling pre-existing class hierarchies, while new social and class antagonisms emerged” (2014: 228). Although Mao was initially motivated to right past wrongs of Western invasion into China, his Cultural Revolution introduced new circumstances of political turmoil and trauma that continued to impact PRC policies and individuals’ lives after his death. In regard to music, while Western art music was censored during the socialist upheaval, it was also adapted and used for international diplomacy. Li Jue and Li Delun are but two of the many individuals who sacrificed much during the Mao era because they believed in a new China, independent of foreign influence and feudal class divisions. Today, Li Jue and Li Delun’s legacy remains as almost every city in the PRC has at least one Western symphony orchestra, millions of children study Western art music, and foreign orchestras and conservatories are establishing ever stronger relationships with Chinese arts institutions. Yet, while remembering the Cultural Revolution, Li Jue said pithily, “It was such a disaster.”

“Why do you want to know?”

Unlike Li Jue, many citizens of the PRC are careful to criticize the Cultural Revolution. Little Grandmother and Big Grandmother are two interlocutors of mine who are teachers in southern China and who grew up during the Mao years. They are not notable

musicians, although they are musical and enjoy singing and dancing. Rather, they are like many people in China who grew up during the Cultural Revolution. Big Grandmother did not regularly go to school for years because she experienced the most turbulent years of the Cultural Revolution as a teenager. Little Grandmother is over a dozen years younger and had more schooling, but they both lived and worked in the countryside, where their family was moved after their father had an unfortunate disagreement with a colleague at work. They did a lot of physical labor, but were fortunate that their parents believed in educating their daughters. As teachers in the Hunan province, which was Mao's home province, they were members of the Communist Party since they were state employees. What they shared and how they spoke to me depended on their moods, our surroundings, and our level of privacy. This is common in most social circumstances; however, their tone could vary widely in some instances. I highlight here a few moments of ethnographic refusal.

Shelley: "Why do you play Teresa Teng's music here?"

Little Grandmother: "This has nothing to do with you. Why do you want to know?"

Little Grandmother had been a long-term interlocutor who at times shared with me more than I expected to know about her life, such as her childhood and her present middle-age burdens related to work, parenting, and kinship responsibilities. In those moments, she accepted me as an insider in Chinese social culture, someone worthy of her stories and intimate thoughts. But there have been moments, too, where I have been rejected as a Canadian, a young woman raised in Western culture who is not expected to understand her and Chinese life. "You don't understand Chinese people;" "Your research is wrong – you know nothing about the Cultural Revolution;" "Hmph, you Westerners think Chinese people are so complicated with politics, other motives ... it's not so complicated. We're just

trying to live our lives.” These are a few of the incisive things she has said to me over the years. Little Grandmother speaks to me in these blunt ways because we also share kinship and the dynamics of our relationship have changed over the years as we have entered new phases in our lives, sometimes together and sometimes oceans apart.

In 2018, we revisited a structure called the Old House in a suburb in Hunan. The owner of the Old House, which had been heavily renovated from a dilapidating building into a restaurant, boarding house, and museum-like space of the Mao years, was named Li Bingbing. Sometimes, he played Teresa Teng’s music to help recreate the aura of the Mao years at his establishment. Yet Teng’s music was banned during Mao’s time since she was a Taiwanese musician singing a sentimental style of music, *enka*, that was from Japan. I visited the Old House in 2016 with Little Grandmother, Big Grandmother, and others, and in 2018 with Little Grandmother alone. In 2018, I met Li Bingbing and asked him why he chose to play Teng’s music in a space that pays homage to Mao. Before he could answer, Little Grandmother retorted, “Why do you ask what music they play here? This has nothing to do with you. Why do you want to know? He can play whatever he likes.” Li Bingbing simply said, “Teresa Teng’s music is played here because it was popular during that time.”

In that moment, I was embarrassed that my question had been shut down so forcefully. But I also understood their actions: Little Grandmother and Li Bingbing both grew up during the Cultural Revolution and had developed various strategies of self-censorship and omission. Little Grandmother’s words communicated her irritation that I would pursue questions about censored media from her childhood and her desire to end a conversation that may contain politically sensitive matter. In other interactions when I had privacy with Little Grandmother and Big Grandmother, they spoke openly. For instance, in

2016, after our first visit to the Old House, Little Grandmother had admitted that Teng's music was considered hedonistic during the Cultural Revolution. Her relative had added, "You couldn't enjoy or talk about music that was for self-pleasure, for your own enjoyment," to which Little Grandmother said, "They just wanted you to suffer." Yet, in the same conversation, Little Grandmother defended the original goals of the Cultural Revolution, stating:

Their goal was to revolutionize people's way of thinking. The movement hoped that everyone could start at zero and rebuild a very noble, perfect society. But in the process, there were a lot of problems, such as political struggles. Certain people pursued power in the process and they went to extremes. Many students didn't go to school, believing that labour was the most noble and glorious, so the younger generation didn't have much time to learn, to study.

She did not specify who "certain people" were that pursued power and referred to the "many students [who] didn't go to school" vaguely, although she and her siblings were amongst that demographic.

During that day in 2016, our conversation turned towards music during the Cultural Revolution and I asked about the model works, which my interlocutors learned during their youth. Today, many in their generation still sing them at social gatherings and play the music in public parks. One of the most popular works was *Shajiang* 沙家浜, of which my interlocutors started singing excerpts in the car. *Shajiang* tells the story of anti-Japanese resistance in the mid-twentieth century and focuses on the protagonist, Aqingsao. Aqingsao is an underground member of the Communist Party and a waitress at a tea shop where, with the help of local villagers, she saves wounded Chinese soldiers in their small town of Shajiang in the eastern Jiangsu province. At one point while my interlocutors were singing excerpts, Big Grandmother forgot the lines and asked for help. Despite the fact that her son

had been singing along with her, albeit parodying the music with overly accented syllables and dramatic gestures, he responded with, “I never liked the model works and don’t remember. *Dunst dust dust!* That’s what they sounded like to me and that’s all I remember.” His wife immediately called out his apparent lie while their own son laughed in confusion, never having heard this music or these family conversations before.

The clashing narratives show the complicated legacy of this genre in contemporary China and the layers of meaning these arias have accumulated over time. As media scholar Jonathan Sterne notes, sound is a set of vibrations that is received by the human sense and is “an artifact of the messy and political human sphere” (2003: 11-13). Model works from the Cultural Revolution era understandably spark different affects from different individuals. Although these songs were not sung as propaganda in the car, they still held much cultural and political meaning and guided our social interactions. In moments when words fail, knowledge is often transmitted through music and performance (Abu-Lughod, 2016: 238; Taylor, 2003: 2). What then was the father communicating to his son, who had not learned this history in school or at home, when he parodied his mother’s musical interests and disavowed his own knowledge of Cultural Revolution repertoire? As the father performed his memories, he made clear his negative opinions about propagandistic music from the Mao era and his mother’s nostalgia for it. Nevertheless, his decision to visit the Old House, and during a work holiday, communicated an attachment to these memories that cannot easily be dismissed.

Soon after her son’s disavowal, I asked Big Grandmother how she felt when she thought about the model works and sang the songs. She said, “I feel that life during those times was truly really difficult. It was carrying your head [提着脑袋] for the work of the

Revolution, for the people, for China's liberation cause [解放事业]. They sacrificed themselves [牺牲自己] for everyone else.” Later in our conversation, she elaborated:

They were all around 15 years old, but every one of them moved down to the countryside. They were right around the age of going to high school and university. So [they] just moved them all down to the countryside and forbade them to go to school, just demanded that they do this [labour], wasting their precious youth. Ah, they came at the age of 15 and they didn't leave until 25. During all these ten years, they were in a rural area, learning how to dig in the ground, how to farm crops; they didn't learn anything else besides that. There, they were away from their parents, from their city, living with sorrow and suffering.

During the Cultural Revolution, many students were sent to the countryside to labor in the fields. They were deterred from studying because, as my interlocutors recalled, “if you had too much classroom instruction, then you'd develop into a seedling of capitalism.”

Moreover, Big Grandmother and her son both noted, “You couldn't have too much intellect” or else “they would say you were reactionary against the communist cause [越反动].” This judgment would be grounds for others to denounce and politically blacklist a person. Although model works have become a part of many people's cultural repertoire, they were also symbolic of a time of severe oppression and suffering, which Big Grandmother remembered with much chagrin.

Big Grandmother omitted the subject and object of certain sentences in the above quotation and elsewhere in our extended conversation. She said, “So [blank] just moved them all down to the countryside and forbade them to go to school, just demanded they do this [labor], wasting their precious youth.” She also used the pronoun ‘they’ instead of ‘we’ in reference to the students who were moved to the countryside. As memory allows particular omissions, memory also allows us to smooth over narratives, especially the ones most

difficult to relive. Silences then *become* speech and fill history as they overwrite the unrepeatable and index the traumas that bring the past into the present. Although Big Grandmother remembered who it was that moved her and her peers down to the countryside and what it was that they were demanded to do, that is, hard physical labour, she did not name the agents responsible but instead left it to listeners to translate the omission.

In addition to my discussion of musical moments during the Cultural Revolution, I include these ethnographic moments where interlocutors engaged with memories of the Cultural Revolution in the present day through musical activities, such as listening to and performing music from that era, and/or music that was denounced during that time. Thinking with the historian Kirsten Weld and anthropologist David Scott, I hold that memory is a “shape-shifter” (Weld 2014: 19), changing as it is looked back upon and potentially showing more of an individual’s present life and political negotiations than about their past (Scott 2004: 2; Weld 2014: 19). For some Chinese individuals, memories are best articulated through actions instead of words, as the modes of self-censorship learned during the Maoist revolutionary years are tenacious. Many, such as some of my interlocutors, will pursue musical practices that were formerly forbidden as they attempt over and over to recover what was lost in previous decades. They share some of these actions with their children, grandchildren, and me during my years in fieldwork. This building of intergenerational memory through what performance scholar Diana Taylor terms “acts of transfer,” that is, verbalized and non-verbalized actions that transmit socio-cultural knowledge and senses of identity (Taylor 2003: 2), reflects the continuing censorship after the Cultural Revolution and individuals’ myriad ways of making do. As justice, violence, and the sovereign are intimately tied (Yoneyama 2016: 7–9), Chinese citizens realize that redress

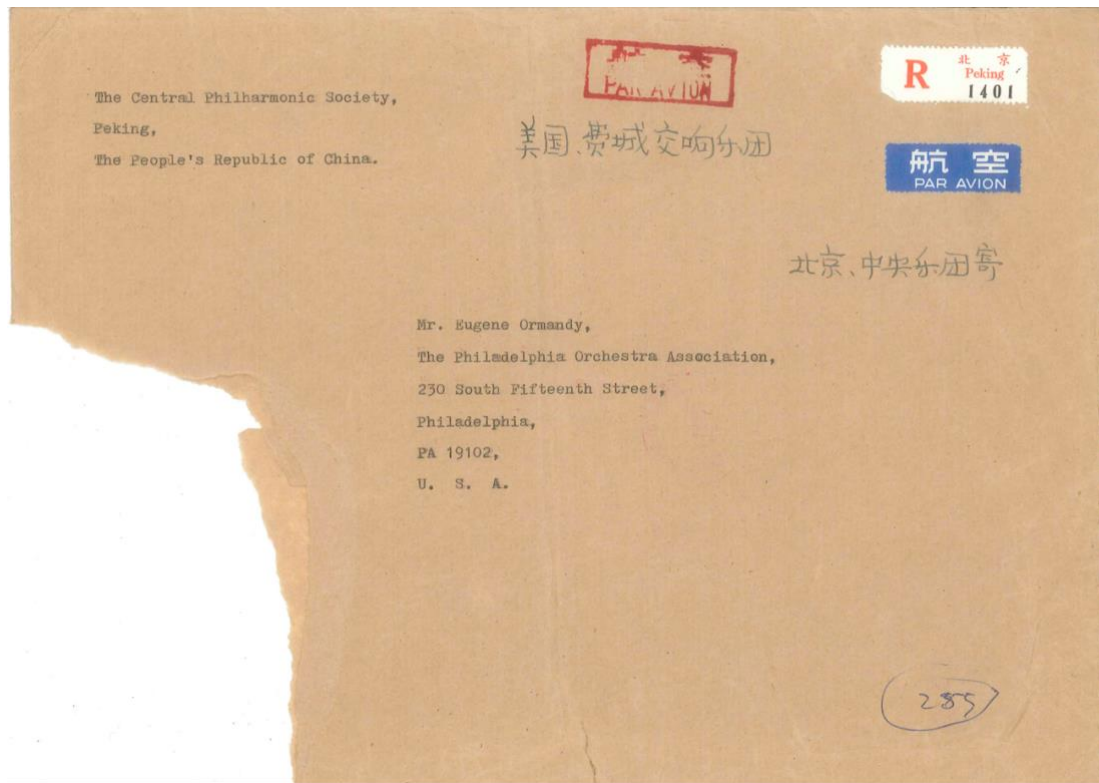
for the Cultural Revolution is not possible with the authoritarian governance of the CCP, which continues to silence and revise Cultural Revolution history. Thus, individuals and families seek creative ways of sharing knowledge, engaging with memories, and being musical in their present lives. In these processes, they also refuse to speak of certain topics during particular moments and omit subjects in sentences, as Chinese grammar allows.

Conclusion

This chapter has investigated Western art music during the Cultural Revolution and the different ways in which this era is remembered by both influential cultural figures such as Li Jue and Li Delun, and anonymized citizens such as Little Grandmother and Big Grandmother. Their ways of remembering, sharing, and refusing to share speak to their past and present socio-political positions. While the PRC used music in various ways to represent a new nationalism after the Chinese Civil War and Communist Revolution in 1949, Western art music and model operas were at times heralded and other times disavowed. These changing cultural practices reflected a country undergoing great political struggles and competing ambitions.

These struggles were further shown after September 9th, 1976, when Mao Zedong died and a new era in the PRC began. Hua Guofeng assumed power and, on October 6th, arrested the Gang of Four. On March 26th, 1977, Li Delun conducted the Central Philharmonic in a performance of Beethoven's *Symphony No. 5*, which Jiang Qing had previously forbidden. Public demand for concert tickets was so high that an additional eleven performances were added (Melvin & Cai 2004: 286). The March 26th concert was broadcasted and celebrated nationwide. A few months later, Li Delun finally sent Eugene Ormandy program notes for "Reflections of the Moon on the Second Fountain" with

permission for the Philadelphia Orchestra to perform it, which they have done numerous times since 1977.



The Central Philharmonic Society.
Peking.
China.
July , 1977.

Dear Mr. Ormandy:

For your reference, herewith enclosed is some extra material on "Reflections of the Moon on the Second Fountain" and its composer. This work is forbidden in 1973 by Chiang Ching and the "Gang of Four" and their underlings in the Ministry of Culture.

Now that the conspiracy of Chiang Ching and her underlings has been smashed, an excellent situation prevails. There has been a rejuvenation on the stage in literature and in art and "Reflections of the Moon on the Second Fountain" is being publicly performed here.

We hope the enclosed material which Mr. Louis Hood of your orchestra asked for in his letter in 1974, will be useful. Under the circumstances, if you wish to present "Reflections of the Moon on the Second Fountain" in a public concert, we would feel much honoured.

My colleagues and I often recall with pleasure your orchestra's visit to our country three years ago and particularly think of our very pleasant meetings together.

With good wishes to you and Mrs. Ormandy as well as to all members of your orchestra.

Yours sincerely,

Li Teh Lun.



Figure 11: Envelope and first page of the letter Li Delun mailed Eugene Ormandy in 1977.⁵⁸

The year after, in May 1978, Seiji Ozawa, who was the conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra (BSO), travelled to the PRC to perform with the Central

⁵⁸ Three other pages followed that were the program notes for this music. I received a copy of this letter from Li Yan's personal collection.

Philharmonic.⁵⁹ In 1979, Ozawa returned with the BSO and performed in Beijing and Shanghai. The Central Philharmonic joined the BSO for the final Beijing concert, which featured Beethoven's *Symphony No. 5* before an audience of 18,000 people (Melvin & Cai 2004: 288). The performance of his *Symphony No. 5*, particularly after Jiang Qing's repeated efforts to silence it during the Cultural Revolution, signalled a new political reality in the country. Furthermore, the Central Philharmonic's collaborative performance with the Boston Symphony Orchestra symbolized the possibility of transpacific partnerships with Western institutions.

⁵⁹ Ozawa (b. 1935) is a Japanese conductor who was born in China. His continued attachments to the country led him to arrange a visit to the country in November 1976, just weeks after the Gang of Four was arrested. He was the first international musician to visit after the end of the Cultural Revolution. He has returned many times since then.



Figure 12: Li Delun conducting before a crowd of thousands in Beijing. Eugene Ormandy photographs, 1880-1992, Ms. Coll. 330, 44.8.1, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania.⁶⁰

Although the Cultural Revolution had concluded and the PRC was opening up to foreigners, the political situation was still precarious as members of the CCP Politburo

⁶⁰ This photo is attributed to September 1973, during the Philadelphia Orchestra's visit. However, it was likely taken either during the 1960s or during the 1977 concerts of Beethoven's *Symphony No. 5*, as Li did not conduct before a large crowd during the Philadelphia Orchestra's 1973 visit since he was busy hosting them. This view is based on my consultation with Li Yan, his daughter who was present during the Philadelphia Orchestra's tour, and on descriptions of the 1973 and 1977 events in other secondary sources. This photo shows the importance of ethnographic methods with archival sources in determining historical accuracy, particularly regarding histories of revolution and censorship.

jostled for power after Mao's passing. Under Hua Guofeng's leadership, many high-ranked and influential figures during the Cultural Revolution were scapegoated for the atrocities of the movement. Since Li Delun was the conductor of the Central Philharmonic and at times worked with Jiang Qing, he was investigated for political crimes in 1978. Despite the fact that he was not found at fault for any actions and only interacted with Jiang Qing when she intervened in the orchestra's activities, he was nonetheless removed as conductor of the ensemble. After Deng Xiaoping's consolidation of power and the initiation of the Open Doors Policy in 1978, circumstances again changed in the PRC and Li was reinstated as the Central Philharmonic's conductor in 1979. That year, he led the orchestra in performances with the famed American violinist Isaac Stern and the German conductor Herbert von Karajan and the Berlin Philharmonic. In the years immediately after Mao's passing, China again restructured and ultimately entered a post-socialist era that embraced free market reforms and interactions with other nations. During this time, Western art music was again used to represent a transformed nation and improve international relations between the PRC and Western countries. It was also practiced by many individuals who, for more than a decade, held onto nostalgias and desires for this music. Many of them, as the preceding chapters will show, passed on their ambitions to their only child.

CHAPTER 3

The Post-Socialist Shift: The One-Child Policy and Conservatory Pathways

In 2019, there were 100 million only-children under the age of 40 in Mainland China (Fifield 2019). Although this number may seem large in itself, since the introduction of the one-child policy in 1980, there were reputedly almost 400 million abortions in the country (Fifield 2019; Zhou 2019b: 367). Perhaps more accurately a 1.5-child policy, as exceptions for a second child were eventually made in specific circumstances, the austere program in population control was implemented just four years after the death of Mao Zedong (1893-1976) and the end of the Cultural Revolution. In contrast to Mao, who encouraged large families with the reasoning that a larger population meant more laborers for economic development, his successor Deng Xiaoping restricted the number of births women were permitted to have in an effort to address widespread poverty in the country.⁶¹

Anthropologist Susan Greenhalgh notes, “Like many policies of the early Deng era, the one-child policy was born of the traumas of Maoist China” (2008: 46). Yet the harshness of the one-child policy, which was brutally enforced in many regions and at various points in time, added to that trauma and sense of precarity as previously large, multi-children Chinese families became focused on one heir while the nation transitioned out of Maoist socialism and defunded education, healthcare, senior care, and other social services.⁶² The

⁶¹ Chinese traditionally have large families, which Mao Zedong further encouraged with the belief that more people would equate more workers for the PRC. Consequently, the population increased exponentially and many large families suffered from poverty and famine. In response, the CCP created the one-child policy in 1980 in order to counter the unsustainable population growth.

⁶² Scholars Judith Farquhar and Qicheng Zhang’s co-written monograph, *Ten Thousand Things: Nurturing Life in Contemporary Beijing* (2012), shows how Chinese citizens used a multitude of methods to monitor, sustain, and improve their health as social services were

ramifications of these changes have been extraordinary, wide-ranging, and in some instances, unpredictable in Mainland China and the Chinese diaspora.

It is during this era that a new professional class of Western art musicians developed in China and began moving transnationally. Critics and scholars alike have noted the sudden visibility of this demographic in Western music institutions. Innovative texts by music scholars Grace Wang (2014), Mina Yang (2014), Mari Yoshihara (2007), and Su Zheng (2010) tie racial, economic, and transnational influences to sites of music performance, such as conservatories and concert halls. Inspired by this research and my ethnographic fieldwork, I argue that success in Western art music was an avenue for Chinese only children to honor their families, while the PRC transitioned to a post-socialist economy after the Cultural Revolution. As noted in this dissertation's Introduction, many children separated from their families during this process, migrating domestically and internationally as they auditioned for elite conservatories with global reputations. Many of them carried their parents' unrealized musical ambitions from the Mao era. And they are aware of their presence and histories: as several interlocutors have noted, many famous Chinese musicians, such as Lang Lang (b. 1982) and Yundi Li (b. 1982), were born in the first half of the 1980s, immediately following the introduction of the one-child policy and not long after the conclusion of the Cultural Revolution. Those who have achieved international renown are friends with some of my interlocutors, as they entered conservatories together as children who had moved to new cities and geographies for musical training. Their connections are strong, as they endured homesickness, language barriers, and career challenges together. They also share similar

increasingly defunded in the PRC, despite the fact that the country continues to have an incredibly large aging population from the Mao era.

family histories of musical parents who could not pursue their own ambitions, and so began teaching their only child at a young age, sacrificing time, finances, and personal comforts for their child's success. As anthropologist David Scott notes, memory and trauma motivate desires for reparatory justice, for a future that can compensate for past losses (Scott 2013: 14). This chapter examines conservatories such as Beijing's Central Conservatory of Music, the Curtis Institute of Music, The Juilliard School, and the University of Toronto's Faculty of Music as pathways and sites influenced by intergenerational trauma, the PRC's one-child policy, and post-socialist shifts that caused greater precarity for Chinese families.

The literature on Chinese only children in the arts is sparse and my studies benefit greatly from a wide range of research on the one-child policy, only children, music institutions, transnationalism, race, and memory. Social scientist Susan Greenhalgh has completed groundbreaking work on the one-child policy and population studies in contemporary China (Greenhalgh 2003, 2008, 2010, 2018; Greenhalgh and Winkler 2005). This scholarship is grounded in the social sciences, with other excellent research completed by anthropologists, population scientists, and demographers.⁶³ Anthropologist Vanessa Fong's work is of particular note due to its focus on only children and their educational ambitions (2004, 2011). I combine this work with research by the Asian American music scholars mentioned above, as well as other research on music conservatories (Borel 2019; Kingsbury 1988; Palmer and Baker 2021; Valenzuela et al. 2020). Although the few texts mentioned here are by no means an exhaustive list, much of the literature on conservatory culture is recent and little scholarship has been pursued that investigates the global

⁶³ To name just a few, see the work of Yong Cai (2010), Baochang Gu et al. (2007), Tyrene White (2006), and Yun Zhou (2019b).

development of music conservatories throughout the twentieth century, when art music was increasingly tied to capitalism, national interests, and transnational routes of socio-economic mobility. While that scholarly need may be addressed in future projects of mine, this chapter focuses more specifically on four significant conservatories in the PRC, United States, and Canada, and considers the ramifications of the Cultural Revolution and one-child policy with conservatory pathways.⁶⁴

In this consideration, I argue for an ethnomusicological study of contemporary Chinese issues that confronts the recent traumas of the twentieth century, which, as stated in the previous chapter, saw tens of millions of deaths due to famine, revolution, war, and political persecution. In studies of Western art music and conservatories, these histories undoubtedly follow young musicians as they migrate transnationally with aspirations to succeed in a profession that was impossible for their parents to pursue. An only child bears not only their family's need to realize socio-economic stability, but also their family's trauma, memories, and nostalgias. While familial environments may be ripe with refusals, omissions, and intergenerational pain, they may also be characterized by hope, joy, and desires for better futures. These may co-exist. In this chapter, I investigate the one-child policy and explore

⁶⁴ I am indebted to the work of scholars in various fields who have challenged notions of migration, difference, colonial pasts and presents, and political upheaval. Often, these issues were considered together. The work of Arjun Appadurai (2000, 2006), Eiichiro Azuma (2005), Homi Bhabha (1996), Stéphane Dufoix (2008), Paul Gilroy (1993), Stuart Hall (1990), Lisa Lowe (1999, 2015), Achille Mbembe (2021), Walter Dignolo (2011), Aihwa Ong (1999, 2003, 2006), David Scott (1999, 2004, 2013), Shu-mei Shih (2007), Anna Tsing (2005, 2015), Chi-ming Yang (2011), and Lisa Yoneyama (2016) have been instrumental to my thinking. I have also considered the work of Shelly Chan (2014) and Adam McKeown (1999), historians of Chinese diasporas, in relation to the focused study of memory, trauma, and nostalgia by cultural theorists Alastair Bonnett (2016), Svetlana Boym (2001), Dominick Lacapra (2016), Andreas Huyssen (2003), Gabriele Schwab (2010), and Christina Yano (2002).

the socio-political context of Chinese musicians moving through Beijing's Central Conservatory of Music, Philadelphia's Curtis Institute of Music, and the University of Toronto's Faculty of Music after the Cultural Revolution. I consider New York's The Juilliard School as a fourth site of transnationalism, with special attention to their 2019 opening of the Tianjin Juilliard campus. Through these conservatory case studies, I share the experiences of an interlocutor under the pseudonym of Lin, who is a graduate of the Central Conservatory and Curtis. Ultimately, I argue for the humanization of Chinese musicians whose artistry is often belittled by Orientalist critiques of technical mastery, manners, and aesthetics, and whose socio-cultural contexts are not considered. While discrimination is often regenerated in conservatories and concert halls, this dissertation shows that community may also be built in these spaces as migratory only children and young adults build strong networks across geographies. They bear witness to each other's experiences and have shared some of those moments with me.⁶⁵

It is necessary to note that although many Chinese children from the '80s and early '90s began music due to pressure from their parents, those who continued as professional musicians all came to love the music they practiced. Some also chose to pursue Western music of their own volition at a very young age because of their emotional connection to their instrument and the music repertoire they learned. As teenagers and adults, all chose to continue music studies. Indeed, the music they spent countless hours practicing and performing became the most consistent element in many of their lives as they moved

⁶⁵ I draw here from Deborah Thomas's theorization of "bearing witness" as a means to humanize individuals who are often marginalized, and criminalized, by the state (2019). While Chinese musicians are not usually criminalized, they are often dehumanized by Orientalist biases explained in the Introduction.

thousands of miles from their initial homes. It would be harmful to deny or neglect the agency of Chinese musicians who have carved out spaces for themselves to succeed in spite of linguistic, socio-cultural, and political challenges.

Post-Mao: The One-Child Policy and a New Era

In January 2020, four years after the implementation of the two-child policy in 2016, I spoke with Fei about the change in law. Like many young Chinese women, she was “really annoyed” that the government was now encouraging families to have more children after decades of draconian enforcement of the one-child policy. She herself wished to have had a sibling who could share the responsibility of caring for her parents, especially as she traveled extensively and has lived in the United States since the age of fourteen. Fei recognizes, however, that her success owes in part to the focused attention she received as an only child. Yet this weighs against her guilt that she has not been “a good daughter” and fulfilled her filial piety to her parents. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, they spent about two weeks together a year, when she would return briefly to Mainland China during the summer. Since the pandemic, she has not seen her family.

Fei’s feelings are not unique amongst only children: many recognize that they benefited from their parents’ incredible investments in their educational success, but desire to have had a sibling with whom they could share family responsibilities, and also memories and friendship.⁶⁶ Other women echoed Fei’s displeasure about the change in policy with harsher words. Paraphrasing, I have heard many women in various professions complain

⁶⁶ Sociologist Vanessa Fong speaks further to the issue of only children in China receiving significant attention from parents and extreme pressures to succeed. See Fong (2004, 2011).

that they are dehumanized, treated as reproductive machines for a state that, for decades, only allowed them one child and are suddenly pressuring them to have two. Many noted that they were raised to believe in the ethical imperatives of having an only child, so as to prevent the country from overpopulating. Yet now, the country is urgently pressuring wives to have two children to counteract the large aging population and growing economy. It is noteworthy that some of these women work for the state as individuals in banking, security, IT, health, and education. It is also noteworthy that it is wives who are receiving most of this pressure. Only married women in heterosexual relationships may have legitimate births where their child receives residency status and is allowed social services and other forms of identification. Children born outside of matrimony are illegitimate to the family and to the state. They become undocumented persons. Since the implementation of the two-child policy, many families have refused to have another child, with women complaining about the workload as full-time employees and wives with many domestic responsibilities. As one interlocutor said, “Who’s going to help me raise a second child? Having one is hard, expensive enough. I still have to work, do laundry, raise the child. They told us to only have one – and now they’ve changed their minds. Is *he* [gestures towards her husband] going to help me with things? No, I’m not having a second child.” Although Mao famously said that “women hold up half the sky” in a seemingly gender equal stance, the reality is Chinese women are expected to hold up half the economy, complete domestic duties, raise children, and help with senior care of aging family members. My fieldwork and membership as part of Chinese communities in the Mainland and North America lead me to assert that contemporary China remains a deeply patriarchal society that has placed unrelenting pressure

on women's bodies as biopolitical sites of economic reproduction, domesticity, and tradition.⁶⁷

In response to families' resistance to having a second child, government companies have promised financial bonuses, implied promotions, and, in some instances, implied demotions if a second child is not produced by employees. However, in spite of these potential consequences, the known challenges are enough to deter many young families. Musicians and non-artists alike have noted the rising expenses of raising a child in the Mainland. Parents need to pay for schooling, extracurricular activities, and, for sons, houses and cars. While wives are expected to complete most domestic chores, husbands' families are expected to provide a home and car for the family.⁶⁸ Often, as a result of the financial assistance and the impossible demands of full-time work and domesticity for young couples, the husband's parents move in with the couple and help with child rearing responsibilities. This pattern in post-socialist China has created a new phenomenon of the "three-generation household," where middle-class families of grandparents, parents, and an only child share an apartment in an urban center. Drawing from my fieldwork, I would proffer that these are usually uncomfortable arrangements that encourage more women to resist having a second child, as that would extend the years in-laws would need to co-habitate to help with childcare. While researching the impacts of the Cultural Revolution on music practices in

⁶⁷ For more on gender equity and marriage in Mainland China, see Ji and Yeung (2014) and Zhou (2019a, 2019b).

⁶⁸ This is particularly true in middle- and upper-middle-class families. In lower-income households, husbands' families may only provide a home that the daughter-in-law would move into. In traditional Chinese culture, sons are expected to continue the family line, with women marrying into the husband's family. This dissertation focuses on urban families who are within a middle-class range in the PRC context, which does not correspond with middle-class salaries and lifestyles in North America.

contemporary China, the cascading consequences of the one-child policy have featured in countless conversations I have had with both women and men. At times, they have been the focus of our conversations in private spaces, such as in people's homes where they feel comfortable expressing their opinions. Even in public spaces, single only children, couples, grandparents, public servants, and entrepreneurs have all spoken about this policy as it relates to their own domestic and professional aspirations, anxieties, and frustrations.

Since the 1970s, Mainland China has seen a sharp decline in the national fertility rate, dropping from six births per woman to about 2.7 (Zhou 2019: 367). As sociologist Yun Zhou notes, the one-child policy was "possibly the most extreme and controversial population control policy ever enacted." It was enforced "in the hope that it would reverse population growth and eventually produce what the Chinese Communist Party had believed to be an optimal population size for China's economic development (2019: 367)." Yet, as other demographers such as Yong Cai have assessed, the PRC's fertility rate dropped below replacement since the 1990s (Cai 2008: 271). During the '90s and '00s, the reported national fertility rate was around 1.5, even dipping as low as 1.22 in the 2000 census (Cai 2008: 271). Cai notes that not only is a fertility rate of 1.5 well below replacement, but it is among the lowest national averages globally (Cai 2008: 271). Rates rose slightly in the following decade, with the World Bank estimating in 2015 that there were 1.6 births per woman (Zhou 2019: 368). What is most alarming about these statistics and their circulation is that the PRC was well aware that fertility rates were below replacement for nearly three decades, but did not reverse the one-child policy (Zhou 2019: 367). Now, the government is pushing women to have more births to offset a problem that could have been prevented.

While the CCP experimented with a two-child policy during the 1970s, studies showed that birth rates were already declining without legal implementation.⁶⁹ Racked by famine and high rates of infant mortality, and with more knowledge of and access to contraceptives, families were having less children by choice. After the one-child policy formally began in 1980, the CCP experimented with a 1.5-child policy in rural areas in 1984, where families who had a daughter were allowed a second child to help with farming and other labor needs. In 1988, the 1.5-child policy was formalized. Between 1984 and 2011, altered versions of the one-child policy were adapted in various regions and at different times. For instance, a common exception was for couples who were both only children. In this circumstance, they were allowed a second child. Another loophole was for non-government workers, such as entrepreneurs, to pay fines for having additional children. While completing fieldwork in the Hunan province in 2013, one businessman, who had three daughters, told me he paid 30,000¥ (equal to \$4,480 USD) for both his second and third children. In this instance, his unusually large family, by Chinese standards, was also a sign of wealth. In 2013, the CCP further relaxed policies to allow couples of whom just one spouse was an only child to have a second child. On January 1st, 2016, all married couples in the Mainland were allowed two children.

Yet, to the CCP's alarm, birth rates have not increased sufficiently. Instead, many citizens have noted the hypocrisy of the sudden change in policy. Since the latter half of the '70s, the government has promoted smaller families as a patriotic ethic, with having an only child seen as a service to the nation. One Chinese woman who had immigrated to Toronto in the late '80s or early '90s recalled that, while growing up in a rural area in the Mainland,

⁶⁹ See the work of Susan Greenhalgh (2003, 2008).

political leaders encouraged villagers to advertise the one-child policy amongst themselves. She and others would parade through the village, drumming and banging pots to attract attention, chanting slogans about the morality of having an only child. Her own family had three children before policies changed. In the documentary, *One Child Nation* (2019), the directors Nanfu Wang and Lynn Zhang show that in the villages in southern China where they conducted fieldwork, plaques were hung outside homes to show which families had fulfilled the CCP's mandates. If a family had an only child, they would receive a public star. If they had more than one child, a star would be conspicuously missing (Wang & Zhang 2019). There were also many forced sterilizations of women, some of whom would be carted away like livestock to be operated on against their will. Statistics show that in 1983, one of the most austere years of the policy, about 20 million women were sterilized (Manninen 2019: 178). Operas were also composed about having an only child, as the CCP continued its use of arts as propaganda (Wang & Zhang 2019). In *One Child Nation*, some family planning officials recalled of that time, "The one-child policy was so strict," and, "We really had no choice." In other areas, such as in the province Hunan, many babies were kidnapped and given to orphanages as another means of ensuring families had only one child (Wang & Zhang 2019).⁷⁰ These actions not only traumatized mothers, but also fathers, families, and public servants, many of whom had no desire to inflict such pain on others but had to obey superiors.⁷¹ In these many circumstances, limiting a family to an only child was seen as an

⁷⁰ *One Child Nation* (2019) shows further information about the one-child policy, such as its links to human trafficking issues in the PRC and how the government made financial gains from the trade, and adoption, of orphans, both domestically and internationally. Some of these children were forcibly stolen by local officials, who may have also been forced to act against their will.

⁷¹ The chain of command could have come from the central government, the provincial government, the city government, the regional government, and/or the village government.

ethic, a sacrifice families, and public servants, should be willing to make to help their country develop. As part of this ethic, wives' bodies were subjected to the wishes of the state and their husbands, or husband's family.⁷² This notion travels with those in diaspora, where many Chinese women undergo abortions at the request of their husbands in an act of obedience and sacrifice.

The pressure to now have two children has ignited scorn, frustration, and bitter anger amongst women, families, and only children of the millennial generation. Throughout the one-child policy, unwanted abortions, preventable pregnancies, and deep heartbreak became aspects of quotidian life. In other journalistic pieces that have emerged in recent years, such as Mari Manninen's *Secrets and Siblings: The Vanished Lives of China's One Child Policy* (2019), it is noted that while the CCP enforced the law through draconian measures, there was insufficient education and access to contraceptives, particularly in rural areas (Manninen 2019: 10).⁷³ The national anxiety for families to now rapidly have more children also contradicts the notion that the one-child policy was even necessary. Arguments have been made that this policy remained for 25 years, an entire generation, because it supplied jobs for influential family planning officials and to save face for the CCP (Manninen 2019; Wang &

Family planning officials often had a statistic that they had to meet, otherwise they would have received punitive consequences themselves. The use of statistics and a long chain of superiority further dehumanized the process as a business order with numerical goals.

⁷² As is widely known, during the one-child policy sons were favored over daughters since male descendants carry the family line. In many instances, as shown in *One Child Nation* (2019) and as openly spoken about in Chinese communities, it is the husband's parents who decide whether or not to abandon a daughter. This leads to much trauma and heartbreak within a family.

⁷³ In addition to academic scholarship, I refer to documentaries and journalistic work that has emerged in recent years because of the immediacy of the information and the fact that, given the sensitivity of the topic, a diversity of source materials helps inform my study of the ramifications of the one-child policy.

Zhang 2019). If the government had reversed the policy too soon, it would have been obvious that the initial implementation was in error. Fei's statement, "I'm really annoyed" by the CCP's changing laws, are a great understatement of the many emotions and layers of loss Chinese people feel. Although I do not know the full extent of my interlocutors' families' experiences, as I would not prod into such painful conversations, it is a tacit understanding that simple comments such as, "I'm really annoyed," and, "I wish I had a sibling," which I have heard from Fei, Eli, and countless others, are tips of emotional icebergs. Many Chinese people today presume that they were lied to and forced to make sacrifices that caused great harm. Sometimes these thoughts are voiced as asides in conversations. Other times they are the focus of conversations, spoken in low volume. In all situations, the admissions index unspeakable things that may have been lost and the urgency for only children to succeed, both of which have become shared cultural understandings of Chinese post-socialist life.

Tied to the pressures of being an only child is the significance of securing well-paid employment, usually in urban centers. To legally work long-term in an urban center, a Chinese person needs an urban *hukou* tied to the city of employment. *Hukou* is a person's household residency status, which can be transferred to different locales during one's life. Every legally born person will receive a *hukou* after birth that follows a parent's urban or rural status. Urban status became increasingly valuable as the CCP allocated more resources and built far better infrastructure in cities, where hospitals and schools are concentrated. Status is also assigned according to the laws of the one-child policy: if a family has a second child illegally, that child is not given status. They are pejoratively called "black children" as undocumented persons who, without registered status, will have extremely limited options for schooling, healthcare, and employment. They will not be allowed to marry and will face

great discrimination and far greater precarity in the Mainland. It is estimated that there are millions of these individuals today (Manninen 2019: 25).

The stakes of the one-child policy and urban *hukou* became frighteningly clear to me while completing fieldwork in the PRC from 2018 to 2019, during which I discovered that my identity had been stolen after I left China as a toddler. I was born in 1990 and emigrated to Canada in 1992, when Changsha, my birth city and the capital of the southern province of Hunan, was in the early stages of an economic boom. I received Changsha urban status, following my mother. Although she grew up outside of a much smaller city in Hunan, she completed her undergraduate degree in Changsha and then rose through the ranks of a publishing house to become an editor. With her job, she became a permanent Changsha resident whose child could follow suit. Following the 1989 Tiananmen Square Massacre, however, countries such as Canada and the United States accepted many Chinese people, particularly students and researchers. The ethos then was that those who could emigrate should. After the disastrous Cultural Revolution, the PRC seemed to “open up” to international influence and citizens felt a greater sense of freedom to express their views during the 1980s. This changed dramatically as the CCP shocked Chinese citizens and the world alike by sending the army to violently end protests at Tiananmen Square in June 1989. Chinese people who survived the revolutionary years did not know where the country was heading and feared a return to violent autocratic rule. Thus, many who could emigrate pursued that path. As my father was a researcher, my parents and I resettled in Toronto, where my father worked in sales and my mother in accounting. Due to language barriers, they were unable to continue the careers they had built in the PRC.

With our long absence from Mainland China, it was expected that our *hukou* would be cancelled after a few years. I discovered in 2018, however, that mine and my mother's had been given, or presumably sold, to other Chinese people who had lived as us for decades. In the early 1990s, when many Chinese were emigrating and the one-child policy was extremely strict in regions, some government officials made lucrative careers selling city residency status on the black market. Depending on their position, they had access to *hukou* and immigration records, and the connections and influence needed to give someone a new identity. It was also assumed that those who had emigrated would not return, or at least they would not need their Chinese status since dual citizenship is not allowed in the PRC.

In 2018, while I was attempting to complete visa processing within Mainland China, an officer at an immigration bureau informed me that it was impossible since I still had active Chinese residency *and* had entered the country on a foreign visa. This was illegal and I was directed to a local police bureau, where they confirmed the information and intimidated me about the illegality of my situation. In these fraught interactions, it was clear that my situation was not a rare occurrence, but one that they could predict. I also learned that the girl who took on my identity had in recent years moved the residency to another city where she was living. Had she found a new job? Did she have siblings? I wondered if she was a second child or a rural resident who, upon birth, could not access social benefits in the country or city. I hoped she had benefited from all the services in Changsha that my parents and I had left behind, and that she had prepared for the occasion when my identity may be reclaimed. In one afternoon, I was told that my *hukou* had been transferred back to me, but officials were struggling to cancel it because of a new web of logistical challenges. What had happened to her life when her assumed identity vanished in a day? Even as I dealt with the

legal and emotional ramifications of the theft, I understood the importance of acquiring status, and particularly urban status, in post-socialist China and hoped that someone had built a better life for themselves as Zhang Sha. In 2022, I learned through relatives that my *bukou* had finally been canceled, although the means through which that was accomplished were unclear to me.

I share this to illustrate the stakes of life since the one-child policy and strict measures of population control were enforced in the PRC. All children are aware of the pressures to succeed, of the importance of the one life in which their parents can invest. As post-socialist China sees increasingly large inequalities, urban status is extremely valuable and children strive to honor their parents by becoming economically successful (Fong 2004: 28). As Lin has stated, in the '80s, music seemed like a viable career path due to the abundant prospects of teaching. This continues to be true in Mainland China. Moreover, his pursuit of a professional music career also addressed his father's unrealized ambitions of becoming a violinist during the Cultural Revolution. These memories and economic precarities compound to influence the development of musical skills amongst Chinese children who have moved through transnational conservatory pathways.

Conservatory Pathways: The Central Conservatory of Music

One of the most pre-eminent conservatories in the PRC is Beijing's Central Conservatory of Music, which attracts many of the most talented children in the country who later migrate to North American and European epicenters of musical practice. Founded in 1949 by Premier Zhou Enlai, the Central Conservatory of Music (Central Conservatory from hereon in) was and continues to be an emblem of a new, communist China that can

compete with Western nations. As mentioned in the previous chapter, after the PRC was established in 1949, Western art music was used in various ways to symbolize a modern, developed country through artistic forms such as the creation of a Chinese-led symphony orchestra. Even during the harsh censorship of the Cultural Revolution, Western art music was present at state functions and in propagandistic model works. In contrast to the Shanghai Conservatory, its rival institute, the Central Conservatory hired Chinese musicians to lead and build the school.⁷⁴ Since its inception, Zhou Enlai and others recruited Chinese musicians who had studied abroad, such as the famed violinist Ma Sicong 馬思聰 (1912-1987), who became the Central Conservatory's first president.⁷⁵ Ma was the first Chinese to be accepted at the Paris Conservatory and had trained in France from 1923 to 1929 (Melvin and Cai 2004: 122). After returning to China, he became the first Chinese soloist to perform with the Shanghai Municipal Orchestra in December 1929. According to Sheila Melvin and Jindong Cai's *Rhapsody in Red: How Western Classical Music Became Chinese* (2004), Zhou invited Ma to become the Central Conservatory's president with the words, "I want to place the burden of the preparatory work on your shoulders. You can bring to it everything you

⁷⁴ The Shanghai Conservatory was founded by Cai Yuanpei and Dr. Xiao Youmei on November 27, 1927. It was previously the National Conservatory of Music and China's "first higher music education institute" (Shanghai Conservatory of Music 2022). It had a large number of faculty who were expatriate musicians from Europe.

⁷⁵ Here, I provide Ma Sicong's name in traditional Chinese characters since simplified characters were not used in China until later in his life. The simplified version would be 马思聪.

learned in France” (Zhou in Melvin and Cai 2004: 188).⁷⁶ Ma modeled much of the Central Conservatory after the Paris Conservatory and recruited other prominent Chinese musicians.



Figure 13: Ma Sicong performing (Wu 2007).



Figure 14: Ma Sicong with Wang Muli, an established pianist and his wife, in the U.S. (Wu 2007).

⁷⁶ While not a peer-reviewed scholarly work, Melvin and Cai’s *Rhapsody in Red* (2004) is a very useful trade book with much interesting information. Its pioneering work on Western classical music’s history in China invites others to pursue further research.



Figure 15: The Central Conservatory of Music (Central Conservatory of Music 2020).

The Central Conservatory and its faculty had an extremely difficult time during the Cultural Revolution. For various periods, there were no regular classes or admissions. Faculty, such as Ma, were strongly persecuted. Although Ma Sicong could have left China again in the '50s and early '60s, he had stayed in order to help build the Central Conservatory and Western music training in the nascent PRC. In 1966, the government and Red Guards began harassing and torturing him, his family, and his colleagues. He was sent to a re-education camp, released because of illness, placed under house arrest, and endured various forms of physical and mental torture. In January 1967, he escaped to Hong Kong and then to the U.S. with his wife, son, and a daughter. Another daughter remained in Beijing. Although Ma and these family members arrived safely in the U.S., many of his relatives, friends, and contacts were persecuted and perished for his escape. Ma died in Philadelphia in

1987 while undergoing a high-risk heart operation.⁷⁷ This tragic story reflects the chaos of that time, when rival Red Guard factions would fight for control of the Central Conservatory and neighborhoods of the city, as happened in other parts of China. Other faculty from the Central Conservatory also suffered greatly, such as the vice-president Zhao Feng (1916-2001), who became Acting President in Ma's absence (1966-80) and later President (1980-82); and Liu Shikun (b. 1939), the great pianist who placed second at the 1958 Tchaikovsky International Piano Competition. Red Guards attempted to disable Liu by twisting his wrists (Melvin and Cai 2004: 242). Both Zhao and Liu survived the revolutionary years. Ma, however, was the only one to have escaped Mainland China. Like the Shanghai Conservatory, as mentioned in the previous chapter, Beijing's Central Conservatory lost many talented faculty and students during the revolutionary years. The trauma of that time stayed with those who did survive, and who remained at the Conservatory afterwards.

In 1977, one year after the Cultural Revolution ended, the Central Conservatory held auditions for the first time in over ten years, which marked the beginning of a new era of Chinese music. It was announced nationally via the *People's Daily* newspaper, which is government run and sponsored. As mentioned in the Introduction, an unexpected 18,000 applications were made to the Conservatory, which only a few years ago was condemned as a bourgeois institution focused on Western music (Melvin & Cai 2004: 292). Although there were initially only 100 positions available for students, the Conservatory accepted an

⁷⁷ For more on Ma Sicong and other Chinese musicians during the Cultural Revolution, see Melvin and Cai (2004: 231-246). After Ma's escape, the Chinese government convicted him of treason in 1968. The charge was not withdrawn until 1985, when Ma began to be celebrated again as a great, patriotic musician. Although he was eager to return to China, he tragically passed away in 1987. If the heart operation had been successful, he would have travelled to the PRC.

additional 100 in response to the overwhelming interest (Melvin & Cai 2004: 292). Some of the students who were accepted in 1977 included the composers Chen Qigang (b. 1951), Chen Yi (b. 1953), Guo Wenjing (b. 1956), Qu Xiaosong (b. 1952), Tan Dun (b. 1957), and Zhou Long (b. 1953). Hailing from different regions in China, Chen Yi, Qu, Tan, and Zhou were sent to the countryside for hard labor during the Cultural Revolution. Performing tasks such as picking rice in fields, driving tractors, and moving rocks, they remained interested in music, with Chen performing revolutionary songs for farmers' children and Tan leading an orchestra with tree branches, farm tools, and other homemade instruments (Melvin and Cai 2004: 293). In contrast, Chen Qigang, who came from an intellectual family in Shanghai, spent three years locked up in barracks during the Cultural Revolution (Christodoulou et al. N.d.). Known as the famed class of 1977 (who began their studies in 1978), each of these composers has become incredibly internationally successful and represent a new wave of Chinese music that has developed since the end of the Cultural Revolution.⁷⁸ Their

⁷⁸ In addition to having their music regularly programmed around the world, Chen Qigang, Chen Yi, Guo, Qu, Tan, and Zhou have each made other considerable achievements, along with many of their peers. Chen Qigang was the last student of French composer Olivier Messiaen and was awarded the Grand Prix de la Musique Symphonique by SACEM, the Chevalier de l'Ordre des arts et des lettres by the French government (he is now a French citizen), and the Golden Horse Award for Best Original Film Score for *Coming Home* (2014). Chen Yi is the first Chinese woman to receive a Master's in composition from the Central Conservatory, was a finalist for the 2006 Pulitzer Prize for Music, received an Honorary Doctorate from The New School in New York City, and has had numerous fellowships from prestigious organizations such as the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts. Guo, unlike his peers, remained primarily in Beijing for his studies and career. He and his music have been featured at many major festivals and received critical acclaim. He is the first composer to be contracted by the People's Music Publishing House, has served as the head of composition at Beijing's Central Conservatory, and remains on faculty today. Qu won the International A. Tcherepnin Competition in 1982 (while still a student), was an editor of the national journal, *People's Music*, was invited by the Center for US-China Arts Exchange of Columbia University to be a visiting scholar in 1989, and has taught at Beijing's Central Conservatory and the Shanghai Conservatory. Tan is perhaps best known for his film score to Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), for which he

international success parallels the fact that within the first five years after the Cultural Revolution, more than a thousand foreign musicians visited the PRC and held classes at the Central Conservatory (Melvin and Cai 2004: 293). Notable names include George Crumb, Alexander Goehr, Gyorgy Ligeti, Isaac Stern, and Toru Takemitsu. These visits, the international success of the class of 1977, and the eagerness with which Chinese and foreign institutions welcomed musical exchanges after the Cultural Revolution helped enable the following decades of transnational music studies through conservatories.

While this new era has been greatly celebrated, it has not been without its challenges for Chinese musicians, particularly for those who migrated at young ages and encountered various forms of racism and socio-linguistic barriers in North America.⁷⁹ My interlocutor Lin was born in 1985 and began violin at the age of three with his father, who grew up during the Cultural Revolution.⁸⁰ Like many families during that time, Lin's was not wealthy, but made incredibly sacrifices to support his musical development. Unable to become a professional violinist himself, Lin's father made him practice up to seven hours a day as a child. As Lin said to me, "[During the Cultural Revolution], it was all forbidden, right? So you are dying to listen, to play that instrument, but you can't. So that just makes you love

won an Oscar and Grammy Award. He also has a Doctor of Musical Arts (DMA) from Columbia University, has been a UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador since 2013, and has received many other awards for his compositions. Zhou Long received the ASCAP Adventurous Programming Award in 1999, won the 2011 Pulitzer Prize in Music, completed his DMA from Columbia University, worked with Yo-Yo Ma on the Silk Road Project, and has taught at many prestigious music institutions. This is a very partial discussion of the plethora of excellent composers who have emerged from China since the 1970s. For more, see Barbara Mittler's *Dangerous Tunes: The Politics of Chinese Music in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the People's Republic of China Since 1949* (1997) and Yayoi Uno Everett and Frederick Lau's edited volume, *Locating East Asia in Western Art Music* (2004).

⁷⁹ Undoubtedly, Chinese musicians face severe racism in Europe and other places as well.

⁸⁰ Like for most of my interlocutors, Lin is a pseudonym and some details about him are omitted, as that may reveal his identity.

Western music even more.” Lin reasoned that the PRC’s strict censorship caused his father’s longing for this music, which in turn led him to give his only son his unrealized ambition. As comparative literature scholar Svetlana Boym notes in her study of the post-Soviet context, “One is nostalgic not for the past the way it was, but for the past the way it could have been. It is this past perfect that one strives to realize in the future” (Boym 2001: 351). In attempting to make his young son a great violinist, Lin’s father acted on a nostalgia that was not tied to what he had, but rather what he *could have had* if the Cultural Revolution had not occurred.

At the age of ten, Lin confronted his father and quit violin because, as he said, “I couldn’t do it anymore.” His childhood was dominated by practicing violin, yet he did not feel a strong connection to the instrument. It was devastating to both, but ultimately led Lin to try a woodwind instrument. He soon developed a much stronger attachment and successfully auditioned for the Central Conservatory at the age of twelve. The achievement meant so much to his family that both his parents quit their jobs, found new ones, and moved the entire family to Beijing to support him in his studies. When I first met him in 2013, he explained to me,

I think those of us who were born during the ‘80s, or at least [since] ’75, you know, who are after the Cultural Revolution War, we all have the same background ... We’re all sort of forced by our parents or maybe you can consider it by the country or whatever. Basically, we’re all forced to learn music.

The pressure for only children to succeed was compounded by post-socialist shifts that saw rising costs in education, housing, and food. Another interlocutor noted that during the first two decades after the Cultural Revolution, students at the Central Conservatory practiced as much as possible because in addition to familial and economic pressures, children were

aware that their academic education fell behind others who went to public schools. Consequently, they would be unable to compete for placements in normal academic programs, which further motivated them to succeed within the conservatory system. Yet in these moments, Chinese children and students of Western art music are not devoid of agency. Undoubtedly, some decisions are made for them as minors, as Lin said. But it is also evident that these musicians are determined to succeed in order to realize better futures for themselves. While Lin was forced to learn music as a young child, he ultimately chose which instrument to pursue based on his preference. In Lin's situation, his choices have led him to North America, where he won a scholarship to an American boarding school for musically gifted children and then entered Curtis Institute of Music for his Bachelor's degree.

Curtis Institute of Music

According to the U.S. National Center for Education Statistics, the number of Chinese international students studying in the country has increased by 10,876% between 1980 and 2014 (NCES N.d.).⁸¹ The League of American Orchestras has released data for the same period, recording a 400% increase in the number of musicians who do not self-identify as white (League of American Orchestras and James Doerer 2016: 2). This is largely due to the growing proportion of musicians of Asian and Pacific Islander (API) backgrounds, as the number of African American and Latinx musicians “remains extremely low” (League of American Orchestras and James Doerer 2016: 2).⁸² But this is not to say that API's are a

⁸¹ In 1980, there were 2,770 Chinese international students. In 2014, there were 304,040 Chinese international students in the U.S. (NCES N.d.).

⁸² It can be assumed that within the API demographic, the findings include significantly more East Asian musicians than from other parts of Asia.

majority demographic in these ensembles. In 2014, around 9% of orchestral musicians in the United States were of API backgrounds—a remarkable increase from the 1980s, but still a minority. Figure 16 shows the demographics of musicians in orchestras with larger operating budgets as Groups 1 to 3, and musicians in ensembles with smaller budgets as Groups 4 to 8. As can be seen, API musicians are the largest non-white demographic by far, with the population of African American musicians in wealthier ensembles recorded at only 1.2%, Hispanic/Latino at 1.6%, and American Indian/Alaskan Native at an alarmingly low rate of 0.1%.⁸³ These statistics show that orchestras, particularly larger, wealthier orchestras that are typically more prestigious and hire musicians full-time, continue to be overwhelmingly white spaces.

Musicians	Groups 1 to 3	Groups 4 to 8
% African American	1.2%	2.5%
% Hispanic/ Latino	1.6%	3.7%
% Asian / Pacific Islander	9.3%	8.8%
% American Indian / Alaskan Native	0.1%	0.1%
% Other Non-white	0.8%	0.8%
% Total Non-white	13.1%	15.9%

Figure 16: Demographics chart from the League of American Orchestras’, “Racial/Ethnic and Gender Diversity in the Orchestra Field” (League of American Orchestras and James Doeser 2016: 4). Findings were concluded in 2014 and published in 2016.

⁸³ The use of the terms “American Indian/Alaskan Native” will likely raise eyebrows for some readers. In the Canadian socio-political landscape, “Ind*an” is an inappropriate term that, when used by non-Indigenous peoples, is considered a racial slur. Both its use and “Alaskan Native” index outdated terminologies. The “African American” category is also Ameri-centric and does not include African-descended musicians from other geographies.

The data for educational institutions is harder to obtain, save for recent years. In 2019, Curtis Institute of Music reported 41% of students were non-resident aliens—an increase of 6% from 2012. Moreover, in 2019, 34.7% were white, 17.9% were Asian, 4% were African-descended, 2.3% were Latinx, and 0% for other ethnic categories (Data USA N.D.a). Of course, these categories, like those used for the League of American Orchestras, are problematic. They are also unclear: non-resident aliens are, for tax purposes, international students who have been in the United States for less than five years. After that period, they become residents and may self-identify as a specific ethnic category on surveys. One could argue that tax categories would not have such an influence on self-identifications. However, as an international student myself, I can relay that non-residents are taxed considerably higher on fellowships, grants, scholarships, and salaries. Becoming a resident for tax purposes significantly changes our financial lives and communicates a prolonged time spent in a country that has likely changed our socio-cultural expectations. Bearing this in mind, we can assume that at least 18% of Curtis’ student population was Asian and at least 41% was international in 2019. The same year, The Juilliard School reported 34.5% of their students were white, 28% were non-resident aliens, 11.9% were Asian, and 8.33% did not report their race (Data USA N.D.c). Since 2012, these numbers have fluctuated within a 7% range (Data USA N.D.c). It is clear that Asians, as U.S. citizens, residents, and international students, are a significant demographic in these institutions.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ It is also clear that African-descended and Latinx populations are not a strong demographic in elite conservatories and orchestras. In both settings, Indigenous peoples have extremely low representation (Data USA N.D.a; Data USA N.D.c; League of American Orchestras and James Doeser 2016).

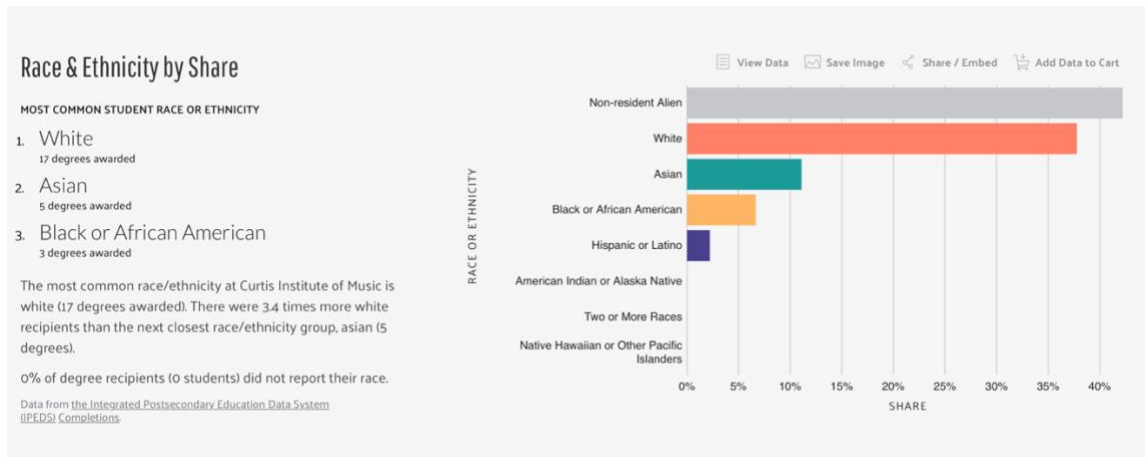


Figure 17: Curtis Institute of Music Demographics Graph for Graduates in 2019 (Data USA N.D.a)

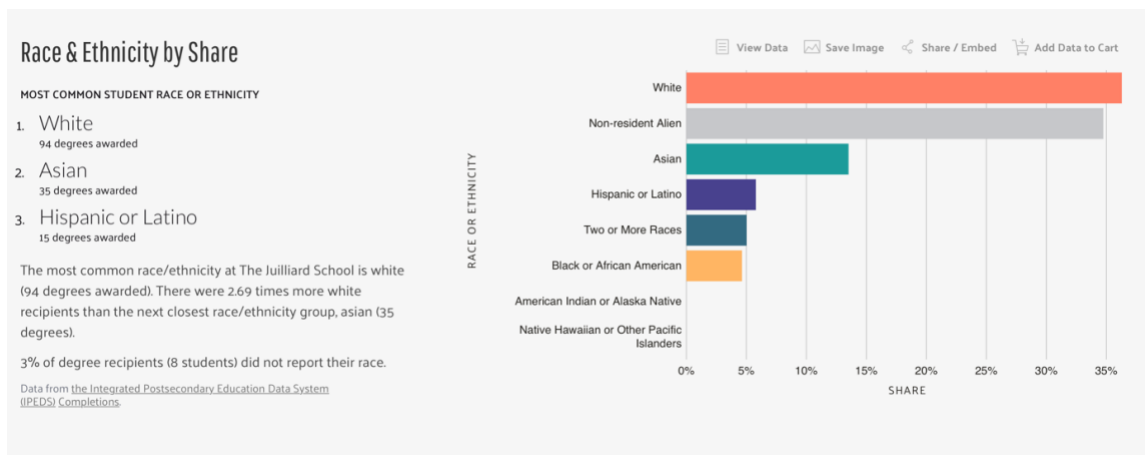


Figure 18: The Juilliard School Demographics Graph for Graduates in 2019 (Data USA N.D.c).⁸⁵

Historically, Curtis and Juilliard, like many American conservatories, were predominantly white spaces. It is well known in Philadelphia that Curtis had withheld admission to many talented African-descended musicians, such as Booker Rowe, the first

⁸⁵ The graphs shown here are for graduates in 2019, but the statistics are quite similar between graduating and current students.

African American musician to perform with the Philadelphia Orchestra in the late 1960s. The fact is so well-known that it is stated as such on a Philadelphia Orchestra webpage announcing Rowe's retirement in 2020. Written by his wife, Dr. Patsy Baxter Rowe, the statement acknowledges Rowe's early fame in the city and on the east coast as a young, remarkably talented violinist. However, "He faced one major disappointment (along with other talented African-American musicians during this period) at not being admitted to Philadelphia's Curtis Institute of Music" for his undergraduate (Baxter Rowe 2020).⁸⁶ The Philadelphia Orchestra and Curtis have long had strong professional ties.⁸⁷ Thus it is significant that the Philadelphia Orchestra acknowledged the fraught racial history of a partner institution. Indeed, the Orchestra itself did not welcome an African-descended musician until 1968, when Rowe joined as a substitute before receiving a full-time contract in 1971.⁸⁸ It was not until 2020 that the Orchestra hired the first full-time African-descended woman, Nicole Jordan (Dobrin 2020; The Philadelphia Orchestra 2022). As the famed American violinist Jennifer Koh said during a virtual symposium on Western classical music

⁸⁶ Curtis also infamously rejected the iconic Nina Simone in the 1950s (Garbus 2015). Speaking with *The Philadelphia Inquirer* in 1993, Nina Simone recalled, "I was rejected [by Curtis] because I was black." She also noted, since that time, her name had grown "bigger than the whole Curtis Institute" (Dobrin 2015). There have been debates amongst musicians whether race was a deciding factor in Simone's rejection or if it was due more in part to the competition that year. Regardless, it would be difficult to argue that race *has not been* a factor in Curtis' admissions history. Before Nina Simone and Booker Rowe auditioned, Curtis may have graduated as few as two African-descended musicians: Russell Johnson in 1928 and George Walker in 1945 (Dobrin 2015).

⁸⁷ Amongst performers, it is openly acknowledged that one of the early aims of Curtis Institute of Music was to train instrumentalists to join the Philadelphia Orchestra. This was more common during the twentieth century, when there were fewer students at the conservatory. Still today, some instrumentalists from Curtis successfully audition for the Philadelphia Orchestra when openings become available. Regardless of where a musician auditions, it is believed that a Curtis association is most favorable for performance opportunities due to the prestige of the institution.

⁸⁸ For more on Booker Rowe, see Baxter Rowe (2020), Dobrin (2020), Why PBS (2020).

and race, “classical music genuinely supports white supremacy, there’s no question in that” (Koh 2020).⁸⁹

The Curtis Institute of Music was created in 1924 under the vision and leadership of Philadelphian Mary Louise Curtis Bok, the famed conductor Leopold Stokowski, and the celebrated pianist Josef Hofmann. From the outset, the goal was to “attract the most promising students” and train “exceptionally gifted young musicians ... to prepare them for careers as performing artists on the highest professional level” (Curtis Institute of Music.b). Many would argue that these goals have been and continue to be achieved. Since 1928, Curtis has operated with a tuition-free policy after Mary Louise Curtis Bok donated \$12.5 million.⁹⁰ Equal to almost \$200 million today (Dobrin 2021), the generous gift has enabled the conservatory to guarantee all students full-tuition scholarships, irrespective of their financial situations (Curtis Institute of Music N.d.b). In 2019, the National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO) and Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association of America (TIAA) published the market value of Curtis’ endowment assets to be about \$253,189,000, which was a 1.59% decrease from 2018 (NACUBO and TIAA 2020). In 2020, the decrease was reversed with the endowment funds rising to about \$271,870,000. In 2021, these funds rose another 35.5% to about \$368,265,000 (NACUBO

⁸⁹ Koh was the keynote speaker for “Orchestrating Isolation, Isolating Race: Musical Interventions in COVID Fall-out,” a virtual symposium organized by the Institute of Musical Research and Royal Holloway, University of London, for which I also presented as part of a roundtable.

⁹⁰ Mary Louise Curtis Bok came from a wealthy family as the daughter of Louise Knapp and Cyrus H. K. Curtis of the Curtis Publishing Company, which produced the two most popular magazines in the U.S. at the time, the *Saturday Evening Post* and the *Ladies’ Home Journal* (Curtis Institute of Music N.d.c). For more on Mary Louise Curtis Bok, see the dissertation of Elza Ann Viles (1983).

and TIAA 2022).⁹¹ Curtis' endowment is the second largest of a music institution recorded in the NACUBO and TIAA findings, with only Berklee College of Music surpassing it (NACUBO and TIAA 2022).⁹² The Juilliard School, however, is noticeably absent from this list.

With these funds, Curtis provides other considerable benefits to students, such as the plethora of Steinway grand pianos in the buildings that are also delivered to specific student groups. As interlocutors from different majors have stated over the years, all pianists living off campus are offered a Steinway grand piano, with delivery, to their apartment. Composers living off campus may also request these pianos. To my knowledge, no other conservatory is able to provide such an amenity. Steinway pianos are considered one of the most prestigious, and expensive, brands of high-end pianos, together with Faziolis and Bösendorfers.⁹³ A symbol of artistic excellence and capitalist industrialization, Steinway grand pianos use choice materials and start at \$70,000 and increase to about \$150,000. Their special collections and limited editions of grand pianos range from hundreds of thousands of dollars to millions,

⁹¹ The National Association of College and University Business Officers and TIAA note that “the change in market values listed ... does not represent the investment rate of return for the endowments' investments” (NACUBO and TIAA 2022). Rather, their statistics are calculated considering multiple factors, such as withdrawals by the institution, costs of managing endowments, additional gifts from donors, investment gains or losses, estimations of real estate and “other ‘illiquid’ assets,” and foreign currency exchange rates for international investments. For more, see NACUBO and TIAA's 2022 report.

⁹² In 2022, Curtis Institute of Music placed 265th on the list of college and universities' endowments in North America (listed in descending order from the highest endowment). Berklee College of Music placed 240th (NACUBO and TIAA 2022).

⁹³ Of these piano makers, Fazioli and Bösendorfer pianos are more expensive, with Bösendorfer often the most expensive. Depending on the model, Fazioli pianos start at around \$128,000 and increase to close to \$200,000. Bösendorfer grands start in the \$100,000 range and increase to over \$500,000.

depending on the materials used, such as gold lacquer or pearls, and the craftsmanship required. As they advertise on their website,

The STEINWAY grand *is the gold standard* of musical instruments, representing over *160 years of dedication* to craftsmanship and *uncompromised expression*. It is for these reasons that over *19 out of 20 concert pianist* choose the STEINWAY grand piano – and why the instrument remains *at the heart of cultured homes* the world over (capitalizations and italics in original, Steinway & Sons 2022).

The self-professed importance of Steinways, and their reinforcement of Western art music's class issues that implicitly and explicitly delineate between “cultured homes” and “non-cultured” ones show the presumed stature of the brand. The generous provision of Steinway grand pianos to students' private homes, in addition to the school's tuition-free policy, shows the affluence, prestige, and exclusivity of Curtis Institute of Music.

Today, Curtis continues to have one of the lowest acceptance rates amongst American educational institutes. In 2019, it accepted only 3.93% of applicants – 27 students out of 687 who applied (Data USA N.D.a). In comparison, Harvard accepted 4.64% of applicants (Data USA N.D.b) and Juilliard 6.88% (Data USA N.D.c). Long revered by Western art musicians as the best conservatory in the world, its student-centered approach, low student to faculty ratio (3:2), world renowned faculty, extraordinary benefits such as a tuition-free education, and plethora of performance opportunities make Curtis sought after by many of the most talented musicians (Curtis Institute of Music N.d.a). As Lin and other interlocutors have said on numerous occasions, Curtis “is the best or one of the best schools in the world.”⁹⁴ Undoubtedly, it is a unique institution. With a total of 155 students in 2022 (Curtis Institute of Music N.d.a), the conservatory emphasizes training remarkably talented

⁹⁴ Unfortunately, Curtis, like many other spaces of Western art music education, has unresolved issues of sexual harassment and assault from faculty. See The Strad (2019).

youth, with no minimum age requirement.⁹⁵ Situated in a few buildings in Center City Philadelphia on Locust Street, between 17th and 18th Streets, it has an unassuming presence that goes unnoticed by many.

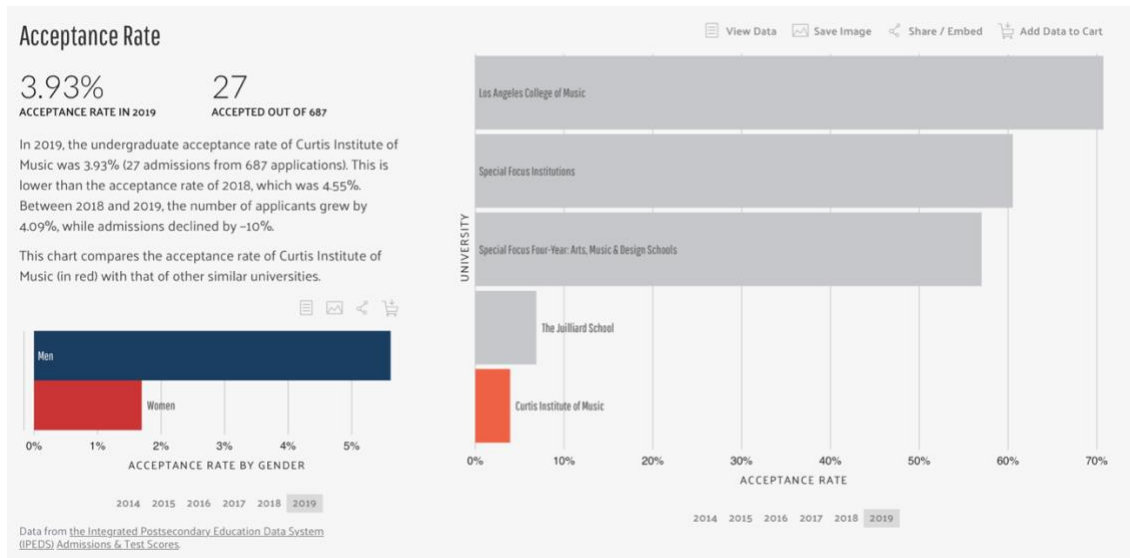


Figure 19: Curtis Institute of Music Demographics Graph for Graduates in 2019 (Data USA N.D.a)



⁹⁵ The American violinist Hilary Hahn famously began attending Curtis at the age of ten.

Figure 20: Curtis Institute of Music, front view of the main building, 1726 Locust Street, Philadelphia, PA 19103 (The Strad 2019).

What the data do not show are the potential experiences of Asian, and specifically Chinese, international students. Lin entered Curtis for his undergraduate and was the first Chinese to be accepted for his instrument. While he now feels quite comfortable in North America, having lived for long periods in various American and Canadian cities, he recalled that it was extremely difficult for him at first. He had limited English and ensemble-playing skills when he first arrived. During lessons, he used a translator that would slow down interactions with private instructors. Unlike his peers, he was not a strong collaborative player due to the emphasis on solo playing in China. Combined with language barriers, playing in chamber and orchestral settings were challenges for him that he worked extremely hard to improve.

Lin and other interlocutors have said to me on various occasions that they wish people could understand, or at least have sympathy for, what they went through as teenagers who came to the United States alone, trying to navigate competitive conservatories with dictionaries and limited financial resources. Other peers of his recounted arriving in the U.S. as teenagers to audition for Curtis. Their parents could not afford to accompany them and so they navigated the journey alone with limited English. Some of them developed a love for Philly cheesesteaks during their years at Curtis. These were available from food trucks on many street corners that do not require one to have extensive English skills, but which use photos to display their signature items. For Chinese students arriving in the '90s, Philly cheesesteaks were unlike what they ate in China, in part because of the abundance of meat. During the years in which China struggled with poverty and famine, eating meat was a

privilege. Even today, meat is expensive in the PRC. This anecdote about Philly cheesesteaks shows the circumstances of some Chinese students who studied at Curtis in the first two decades after the Cultural Revolution. While they were viewed as remarkably talented musicians, they were also teenagers learning English, how to feed and sustain themselves, and how to support each other with their families an ocean away.

The Juilliard School

The Juilliard School has a different structure and is a much larger conservatory that also features dance and theater programs. In 2016, the most popular undergraduate concentrations were Stringed Instruments, General Dance, and Keyboard Instruments (in descending order). It was established in 1905 as the Institute of Musical Art in New York City. In 1919, the school received a large donation from the will of textile merchant Augustus Juilliard, which led to the eventual renaming of the school.⁹⁶

Unlike Curtis, Juilliard does not guarantee full scholarships, but charges considerable tuition fees. In 2019, the undergraduate tuition was \$47,370, which was an increase of 5% from the previous year (Data USA N.d.c). Throughout the pandemic, tuition continued to rise despite protests from students and alumni (Lebrecht 2021). In 2021, the tuition for new and continuing students was \$51,230 (Juilliard N.d.b). Juilliard estimated that students choosing to live in a double room with meals in their residence hall would pay a total of \$79,572, which includes the estimated cost for health insurance, books and supplies, transportation, and fees (Juilliard N.d.b). A select number of students receive full scholarships, while others receive partial and others receive none. In addition, for those

⁹⁶ For more on the history of The Juilliard School, see the work of Andrea Olmstead (1999).

living off campus, living costs are very high in New York City. While the documented gender ratios at Curtis fluctuated throughout the 2010s, with men far outnumbering women in certain years and women outnumbering men in others, Juilliard’s statistics consistently showed that more men were admitted than women (Data USA N.d.c). In addition, there were more male instructors than female (Data USA N.d.c). While their endowment was not listed in NACUBO and TIAA’s collection of data, Data USA estimated it to be nearly 1.1 billion dollars at the end of the 2019 fiscal year, with a total expenditure of \$115 million (Data USA N.d.c).⁹⁷ Also dissimilar to Curtis, Juilliard does not offer grand pianos to students’ private residences. While Juilliard may be more well-known to the general public than Curtis, Western art musicians typically strive to gain admission to the latter due to its student-friendly policies and free tuition.

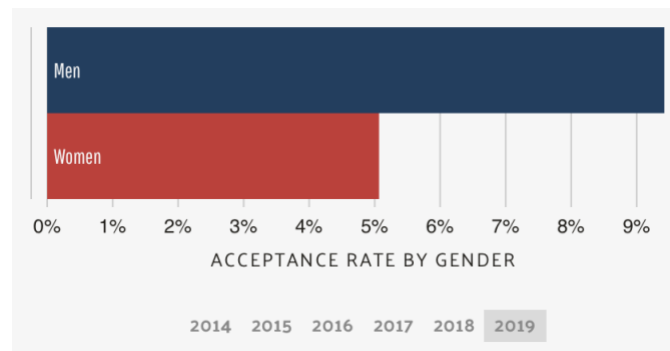


Figure 21: The Juilliard School’s statistics on admissions by gender. Since 2014, the statistics have fluctuated by 1.5% in both directions for men and women, with men always outnumbering women (Data USA N.d.c).

⁹⁷ Data USA is an online platform that uses U.S. government data to disclose information about educational institutions. It was created through the partnership of Deloitte, Massachusetts Institute of Technology Collective Learning Group, and Datawheel.

Although none of my interlocutors attended Juilliard for their Bachelor's degree, I include the conservatory here because of its stature within music studies and its new venture in Tianjin, China. My primary interlocutors Ang, Fei, Eli, and Lin, with whom I have developed the most sustained relationships over many years, attended either Curtis Institute of Music or the University of Toronto, Faculty of Music, depending on their family situations and audition outcomes. Some of them also successfully auditioned for Juilliard, but declined the offer due to the expenses and the prestige of Curtis, if that was an available alternative for them. Moreover, the faculty at each of these institutions differed and was a deciding factor for each musician. In these choices, we also see the effects of neoliberalism as tuition costs increased at both the Central Conservatory and Juilliard over the years alongside the defunding of education in the PRC and rising living costs in both regions. The economic demands are difficult for Chinese families whose only child was born in the first two decades after the Cultural Revolution, before the significant economic boom that began in the mid-90s. One interlocutor, Fei, attended Juilliard for her Master of Music degree, but with a full scholarship. Eli, as will be seen in the next chapter, declined his full scholarship to Juilliard for his Master's due to his desire to experience a university setting and maximize the privileges at Yale University, which is more famous globally than any conservatory. As Chinese musicians navigate transnational migration through conservatories, the socio-economic demands in both Mainland China and North America impact their decisions. These demands and possibilities also impact conservatories' business choices, as Juilliard, in particular, has capitalized on opportunities in East Asia.

In 2019, Juilliard opened The Tianjin Juilliard School in northeast China. Unlike their American campus, the Tianjin school only offers graduate studies and pre-college training

for those aged 8 to 18.⁹⁸ With this new campus, Juilliard has deepened its engagement with China and has created “a new revenue stream” (Dreyer 2018). Despite its large endowment, the school suffered during the 2008 financial crisis, losing over \$150 million of its endowment, which it has since earned back (Delevingne 2014). Led by Alexander Brose, the former vice president for development at the prestigious Aspen Music Festival and School, and Wei He, a professor at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and artistic director of the San Francisco-Shanghai International Chamber Music Festival (Juilliard 2017), The Tianjin Juilliard School is an ambitious venture in the Asiatic region that allows increased enrolment without overpopulating classrooms in New York. As noted in Juilliard’s press release for the new campus, it “is the first performing arts institution in China to offer students a U.S.-accredited master’s degree. Students in the Tianjin program will be held to the same rigorous standards as in New York, and graduates will receive a degree from Juilliard” (Juilliard 2017). Also akin to students in New York, non-Chinese nationals will be charged the same tuition fees, which increase 4-6% annually (The Tianjin Juilliard School 2022b). Chinese nationals have reduced tuition, equal to \$32,000USD (The Tianjin Juilliard School 2022a). On campus residency is, of course, considerably cheaper in Tianjin for both domestic and international students, at about \$4,060USD for a year (The Tianjin Juilliard School 2022a, 2022b).⁹⁹ Similar to other American universities, such as Georgetown University, New York University (NYU), and Northwestern University, Juilliard has created

⁹⁸ Similar to the New York campus, the Tianjin location offers the pre-college program on Saturdays. Unlike Curtis, Juilliard’s New York school requires incoming full-time students to be at least 16 years of age (Juilliard N.d.a).

⁹⁹ As a non-Tier 1 city in the PRC, the cost of living in Tianjin is considerably cheaper than Beijing and Shanghai, two of the most expensive cities.

a campus in Asia that will allow more educational opportunities for students in the Asiatic region, as well as provide additional revenue for the institution at large.¹⁰⁰



Figure 22: The Tianjin Juilliard School, front view of the main building (The Tianjin Juilliard School 2022c).

University of Toronto, Faculty of Music

The University of Toronto, Faculty of Music differs greatly from Curtis and Juilliard since it is a Canadian university that houses a school of music within the nation's largest university and North America's third largest post-secondary institution. The Faculty of Music (FoM) was created in 1918 and, as of 1964, was located in the Edward Johnson Building, close to the Royal Conservatory of Music, Canada. For over a decade, the FoM has been attempting to raise tens of millions of Canadian dollars in order to acquire another building for practice rooms, offices, and an additional performance space. Unlike Curtis and

¹⁰⁰ According to the Cross-Border Education Research Team (C-BERT), there are 77 foreign branch campuses of American higher-education institutes (Guo 2018). Georgetown has a campus in Qatar, NYU has branches in Abu Dhabi and Shanghai, and Northwestern University also has a campus in Qatar.

Juilliard, it does not have a large endowment. It is one of the premier music institutions in Canada.



Figure 23: University of Toronto, Faculty of Music (University of Toronto Libraries N.d.).

The University of Toronto (U of T) recorded a total enrolment of 95,055 students for 2020-2021 (University of Toronto N.d.). This included its flagship St. George campus in downtown Toronto, the Mississauga campus in the Greater Toronto Area's (GTA's) west end, and the Scarborough campus in Toronto's east end. The Faculty of Music is part of the St. George campus, which had a total of 64,218 students in 2020-2021 (University of Toronto N.d.). The Common University Data Ontario (CUDO), an official resource of the provincial government's Council of Ontario Universities, released information that in 2016, the FoM received 496 applicants and enrolled 136 new students. The acceptance rate is thus around 27%, which is higher than a decade ago. In 2008, my entering class of undergraduate and graduate students was around 90 with following years averaging 110-120 students. As is well documented, the defunding of Canadian colleges and universities has led many schools to admit more students and charge higher tuition fees (Canadian Federation of Students-Ontario 2015; Valverde 2019). For the 2020-2021 year, the tuition and fees equaled \$7,802.94CAD for domestic students of undergraduate Bachelor's programs (University of

Toronto – Student Accounts. N.d.a).¹⁰¹ The same year, international students were required to pay \$40,102.94CAD (University of Toronto – Student Accounts. N.d.b). The international fees have doubled within the past decade.

While these figures are lower than those of many private institutions in the United States, they are nevertheless a reflection of provincial and federal neoliberal policies that have defunded public education. During my time as an undergraduate at the FoM from 2008 to 2012, I witnessed tuitions increase and larger entering classes. Although the current number of students at the FoM are not publicized, interlocutors there inform me that there are at least 1,200 students in undergraduate and graduate programs. While this number is a small fraction of the total enrolment at the St. George campus, the Edward Johnson Building was not built to support such a population of practicing musicians and space is a serious issue, particularly for students who need practice rooms. The financial strain on international students has also risen sharply to address the needs of the university.¹⁰²

U of T's statistics show that there is a heavy reliance on international students across the university. In 2020-2021, there was a total of 24,691 international students, which equals to about 26% of the total student population (University of Toronto N.d.). The top six countries from which international students originate are (in descending order): Mainland China, India, the United States, South Korea, Hong Kong, and Taiwan (University of Toronto N.d.). While the FoM strives to compete with American conservatories, where

¹⁰¹ The Advanced Certificate in Performance and Operatic Performance Diploma had higher fees, at \$10,332.94 for domestic students.

¹⁰² It is necessary to note that the Faculty of Music, like other spaces of performance and music education, has been struggling to address issues of sexual harassment, assault, and racial discrimination. Efforts are being made to improve circumstances. For more, see Mohammed-Ali (2021).

many graduates continue their studies, it struggles with funding limitations beyond its control. It attracts some international students, however, with its large diasporic cultures that ease students' experiences in a foreign country.¹⁰³

One such student is Ang, whose parents encouraged her to audition for U of T's Faculty of Music because they had close friends from Mainland China there. Ang is an interlocutor who has completed her Bachelor and Master's degrees, and is pursuing her Doctorate at U of T's Faculty of Music. Previously at Beijing's Central Conservatory, she purposefully missed all the audition deadlines for conservatories in many parts of the world since she wanted to quit Western art music, which will be further explained in the next chapter. Since her family wanted her pursue a university degree and had contacts in Toronto who could help Ang adjust, they convince her to apply to U of T, which accepted her despite the lateness of her application.¹⁰⁴ She soon connected with other graduates of the Central Conservatory and those part of the Chinese diaspora, such as Lin, Rosalind Zhang, and many others, including myself. While Lin did not attend or teach at U of T's Faculty of Music, he spent a significant amount of time in Toronto as part of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. Several students at the FoM sought him out for lessons and career guidance due to his exceptional musicianship and success. Amongst Chinese musicians, he also became a friend and mentor to many, and in turn was aided by those who were more established in Toronto. The parents of Rosalind Zhang are particularly noteworthy. Her mother, Li Yan, and father, Zhang Taining, help moderate a Central Conservatory alumni network in

¹⁰³ Unlike American institutions, Canadian institutions traditionally do not collect demographics information on racial and ethnic identifications.

¹⁰⁴ Since Ang had spent most of her schooling in a conservatory, she would not have tested well on China's university entrance exam, which limited her possibilities for post-secondary education.

Toronto and Canada, and have helped many newly arrived musicians. These transnational networks help young musicians navigate new socio-cultural and political terrains with others who have faced similar struggles. They also show the strength of the Central Conservatory network and the many connections within elite music studies. Although some of my interlocutors have not met in person, almost all know each other by name, instrument type, and approximate age.

Conclusion

While Juilliard's ventures in China, Curtis' and the University of Toronto's high enrolment of Asian international students, and the growing number of API musicians in American orchestras lead many to the notion of greater Asian inclusion in Western art music,¹⁰⁵ the reality is often different. Acclaimed American violinist Jennifer Koh, who is of Korean descent, wrote an article for *The New York Times*, in which she states, "Classical music is often called 'universal,' but what does universality mean when the field was built for white men who still hold much of the power? In my nearly 30-year career, I have seen not even a handful of ethnic Asians – much less Asian American women – ascend to executive or leadership positions" (Koh 2021). This is a common trope in other professions as well, where Asians are hired in entry- and mid-level positions, but are rarely promoted to

¹⁰⁵ The League of American Orchestras' statistics on API (Asian Pacific Islander) participation do not specify further breakdowns within the broad Asian identifier. While the Asian American affiliation was born out of coalitional politics during the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, it has been heavily used in demographics surveys to connote ethnicity. While West, Central, South, and Southeast Asians are important populations within the umbrella "Asian" term, it can be assumed in the League's findings that most API musicians were of East Asian descent. Moreover, the League's use of API does not specify American identifications within the Asian Pacific Islander grouping.

leadership roles.¹⁰⁶ In the League of American Orchestras' 2016 report, the percentage of APIs in management positions was not listed, which Koh reasoned to be due to the fact that the statistic was too low (League of American Orchestras & James Doeser 2016; Koh 2021). Amongst musicians, it is a well-known fact that ensembles, especially those with higher budgets and greater prestige, lack gender and racial diversity for leadership roles such as CEO, artistic director, conductor, and board member. The League of American Orchestras goes so far as to state at the beginning of their report, "The wider orchestra field – conductors, executives, staff, and board members – also remains predominantly white" (League of American Orchestras & James Doeser 2016: 2). Moreover, "Women conductors are still rare, especially in the high-status position of music director" (League of American Orchestras & James Doeser 2016: 2). The women and musicians of minority background who are in leadership positions often struggle in these environments, with some resigning after a certain amount of time.¹⁰⁷

These challenges affect the network of Chinese only children who observe and experience racializations, and specifically Orientalisms directed at East Asians, during their time in conservatories and afterwards. Some of have been very successful, such as Lin and his peers. One such peer, and close friend, is Yuja Wang. Wang is also an only child whose mother was a dancer and father a percussionist. Born in 1987, Wang attended the Central Conservatory and Curtis at the same time as Lin. While in Philadelphia, they were welcomed by the extended family of violinist Ma Sicong who had immigrated to the area after their

¹⁰⁶ This is not limited to East Asians but includes a considerable demographic of South Asians as well.

¹⁰⁷ For more, see the op-ed of Javier Hernández, who interviewed several API musicians during the pandemic's spike in anti-Asian hate crimes (2021).

own graduations from the Central Conservatory. With the network of Central Conservatory graduates, they have navigated American life and celebrated holidays together, developing strong ties with the overseas Chinese music community. As mentioned in the Introduction of this dissertation, Yuja Wang was detained and harassed by authorities at Vancouver International Airport in February 2020, during a peak in anti-Chinese xenophobia tied to the COVID-19 crisis. As can be seen below, Wang wore sunglasses during her recital to hide her swollen eyes since she had cried after her encounter with Canadian authorities (Wang 2020). For this, she received harsh criticism and unsolicited advice from other musicians and audience members who interpreted her actions during the recital to be unacceptable (Lebrecht 2020; Roberts 2020; Swed 2020). Below are photos of Wang at the Vancouver recital and from her website, screenshots from the Facebook page of a Canadian conductor who chastised Wang, and a screenshot from Wang's Facebook page explaining the situation.



Figure 24: Yuja Wang during her Vancouver recital (Vincent 2020).



Figure 25: Yuja Wang press photo (Yuja Wang N.d.).

Last night I attended a Vancouver Recital Society concert with Yuja Wang performing. I was looking forward to hearing her perform. When she walked out on stage with sunglasses and a direct approach to the piano, quick bow and immediate performance with no acknowledgement of the audience, I thought it was quirky. Some of the audience tittered at the thought that this was some sort of cool new dress code.

But with each subsequent work that she performed, she stood up, bowed quickly without a smile, and when she left the stage she walked with clear body language that shut the audience out. When the audience continued to clap to bring her back out on stage, she refused. The effect was shocking. As each subsequent work was performed and this pattern continued, it became clear that she was shutting the door on her audience.

I heard later that she had trouble with the Canadian border getting into Canada. She was obviously angry. But Yuja Wang, you must not forget that the music is the most important treasure. And that some are bestowed with the ability to share it and it is an honour and a blessing to do so. Your innocent audience, some donning masks to protect themselves from the potential Coronavirus, came to be in your presence for this sold-out concert, and to hear the music and extraordinary talent that you had to share.

Instead, they experienced the rejection of an artist withholding the permission to share in the feeling, transcendence and the shared emotion of the beauty, joy, and humanity of music.

Figure 26: Canadian conductor Tania Miller's unsolicited feedback to Wang, posted on Miller's Facebook page and subsequently removed (Vincent 2020).

It is difficult for me to share this with all of you, but given the circumstances, and harmful speculation and criticism being shared online and elsewhere, I feel it important that the following is made public.

On arrival at Vancouver International Airport on Friday, I was detained for over an hour and subjected to intense questioning which I found humiliating and deeply upsetting. I was then released, giving me very little time to travel to the Chan Centre for the Performing Arts. I was left extremely shaken by this experience.

When I was dropped off at the venue for my recital that evening my eyes were still visibly red and swollen from crying. I was in shock. Although I was traumatized by what happened, I was determined not to cancel the recital, but to go ahead with the performance and not to let the audience down, which included my dear teacher Gary Graffman. I decided that wearing sunglasses was the only way to prevent my distress from being seen, since I wasn't yet prepared to make a statement about what happened.

Figure 27: Yuja Wang's response to Miller and other criticisms, posted on Facebook and Instagram February 23, 2020 (Wang 2020). Highlights by author.

The wording and phrasing Miller chose are harsh and index cultural anxieties about East Asian musicians and difference. Miller described Wang's actions as "quirky," "shocking," and "angry," and instructed her on how to better behave towards her "innocent audience, some [of whom were donning] masks to protect themselves from the potential Coronavirus" (Vincent 2020). Miller also seemed to mock Wang's sunglasses, noting that "Some of the audience tittered at" what she wore and blamed Wang for "shutting the door on her audience" (Vincent 2020). These words suggest an impression that echoes the observation of David Eng and Shinhee Han, who state that Asians in the U.S., and presumably Canada, are "continually viewed as eccentric to the nation" and pathological to the nation-state (Eng & Han 2019: 37). Soon after, Wang explained her situation on her social media pages and the Vancouver Recital Society issued a strong statement in support of Wang:

We are so grateful to Yuja Wang for being the consummate professional during her all too brief time in Vancouver on Friday evening. We have received so many comments from patrons who attended the recital, glowing about how wonderfully she performed and asking for her return. It saddens us to read all of the mean-spirited commentary online and we want to make it known that the VRS has nothing but the highest regard for Yuja as a person and an artist. All too often, people forget that musicians too, are human. We all have good and bad days and it is a testament to her strength and character that she chose to press on despite the terrible treatment she received. We are sharing her words describing her experience, and ask that everyone take a step back and try to imagine how they might have handled a similar experience (Vincent 2020).¹⁰⁸

The level of publicity Wang's experience received within the Western art music world was due to her own level of fame. At a more personal level, her peers and mentors from the Central Conservatory and Curtis offered support, as they have also sustained strong criticism that seemed unattached to the quality of their musicianship and other racialized interactions in everyday life. Within Chinese diasporic communities, many lamented about her treatment and expressed sympathy for her experiences. In these moments, the transnational network of Chinese musicians, most of whom are only children, observe and help each other endure challenges from both Mainland China and North America. For many, their family histories from the Mao era influenced the rapid development of their musical skills. These intergenerational memories, and losses, were compounded by the stresses of being an only child who *needed* to succeed to support aging parents in a post-socialist country. These achievements led to conservatory pathways, where a generation of only children and those born during this time formed strong bonds as they navigated the

¹⁰⁸ Fans of Yuja Wang also came to her defense and Miller apologized on her Facebook page.

complexities of being Chinese nationals pursuing elite music studies in unfamiliar languages and regions.

CHAPTER 4

The Strategic Citizenship of Chinese Musicians

“You should go to Eastman!” I was surprised Ang didn’t accept this offer.

“I’m not sure...”

“They have such a great piano program and it’s good to go somewhere new. You already have two degrees from U of T.”

“Yes, but Eastman didn’t offer a full scholarship. And I have a great teacher here in Toronto. Plus ... if I stay in Canada, I might be able to apply for permanent residency ...”

I looked at her and we both understood. There was more to this than just a music education and Ang had done her research.

In 2014, I had this conversation with an interlocutor to whom I will refer as Ang. A formidable pianist who had left her hometown at the age of eight to train in Beijing, Ang had completed her Bachelor of Music in Piano Performance at the University of Toronto’s Faculty of Music. Since then, she has stayed in Toronto, where she completed her Master of Music and is currently working towards her Doctor of Musical Arts (DMA). She has received permanent residency in Canada,¹⁰⁹ has established an expansive network of friends and colleagues, and usually sojourns back to Mainland China each summer to see family and other friends. Yet, despite all this success, Ang continually questions whether or not she should return to Mainland China, or at least the East or Southeast Asian region, to live and work full time in order to be closer to family. She feels a sense of guilt and stress that she cannot better fulfil her filial piety since she lives so far from her aging parents, and worries that her job prospects as a pianist in North America would not provide the income she would need to help support them. Ang’s transnational journey for elite music studies,

¹⁰⁹ Permanent residency in Canada is the equivalent of having a green card in the U.S.

uncertainty regarding her future, and sense of responsibility towards her parents is not unique amongst Chinese musicians who study abroad. Rather, she is part of a demographic of musicians born after the Cultural Revolution and during the one-child policy who have sought international credentials and carefully considered the legal limits of citizenship in Mainland China and North America in tandem with their musical aspirations.

In this chapter, I focus on the transnational journey of Chinese performers of Western art music, particularly after they have completed their undergraduate degrees. It is at this time that many grapple with the responsibilities of adulthood as an only child whose legal status in North America becomes more precarious. Although it is common for young adults to feel anxious about career prospects, this instability is heightened for Chinese musicians who often left home as children, have been dependent on music scholarships and student visas for the majority of their lives, and carry the burden of intergenerational memories from the Mao era. As they come of age in musical migration, they must consider how to optimize their citizenship possibilities and culturally honor their parents who remain in the PRC, where it is extremely difficult to obtain visas for personal travel abroad.

In thinking about how Chinese musicians consider citizenship, migration, cultural responsibilities, and career ambitions, I put forth the phrase “strategic citizenship.” I draw from anthropologist Aihwa Ong’s seminal text, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (1999), which investigates ethnic Chinese in the East and Southeast Asian regions who move transnationally, build capital, and negotiate social orders. Speaking with Chinese from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore, and the United States, she considers their global travels as careful responses to changing political-economic conditions in their original countries of citizenship. Through extensive ethnography with

migrant workers, CEOs, members of multinational family empires, immigrants, and others of different socio-economic backgrounds, she theorizes “flexible citizenship” as “cultural logics” that relate to gender, family, nationality, class, and socio-political power. These value systems guide individuals and networks in their accumulation of capital and through their experiences of travel and displacement. In these processes, many obtain new material possessions and identities to make their citizenship and labor options more flexible in the era of late capitalism.

I am inspired by Ong’s ambitious work and draw on her thinking of strategy in transnational movement. Strategy, for her, is found in the “art of flexibility, which is constrained by political and cultural boundaries, includes sending families and businesses abroad, as well as acquiring multiple passports, second homes, overseas bank accounts, and new habits” (1999: 214). While my interlocutors, like Ong’s, are responding to shifting political-economic conditions, they differ in that they cannot acquire multiple passports and can rarely buy second homes. As *the children* being sent abroad, they are responding to the *inflexibility* of being a citizen of the PRC, which does not allow dual citizenship. Young musicians born within two decades of the Cultural Revolution rarely come from families who have enough capital to afford homes in Western countries. As Mainland China transitioned out of extreme poverty from the ‘70s, music studies were significantly cheaper than today and many families who enrolled their children were lower income or middle class, in the sense that they could meet their monthly needs. Some families also borrowed money from a network of relatives and friends in order for their child to develop their talent. While Chinese international students will establish bank accounts in countries where their music conservatories are located and develop new habits, many are children or young adults flung

into the precarity of transnational movement under neoliberalism.¹¹⁰ In a sense, the musicians are the start-up businesses that families have invested in and exported abroad since the adults are confined within the borders of Mainland China. In this role reversal, strategies of citizenship become much more important than the possibilities of flexible accumulation.

Thus, I theorize “strategic citizenship” to address issues of precarity, intergenerational trauma and ambition, race, and transnationalism from the perspective of Chinese citizens born during the two decades following the Cultural Revolution. Strategic citizenship is the process of carving out opportunities within the constraints of China’s post-socialist, authoritarian government that manages the movements of its citizens within and beyond national borders. The parents of these children are motivated by harrowing memories of the Cultural Revolution, when biopolitical control was considerably stricter, food and resources often scarce, Western music nationally censored, and death a possibility in everyday life. It is out of this trauma that parents today invest heavily in their only child to succeed in music careers they could not pursue during the Mao era. In my theorization of strategic citizenship, I investigate both the Mainland Chinese context, in which *hukou* 户口, or household registration status, limits and documents the movement of citizens, and also the transnational context, in which Chinese international students are reliant on student visas

¹¹⁰ My thinking on neoliberalism has been heavily influenced by Aihwa Ong’s *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty* (2006), Elizabeth Povinelli’s *Economies of Abandonment: Social Belonging and Endurance in Late Liberalism* (2011), and Anna Tsing’s *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (2004) and *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (2015). Each of these groundbreaking texts combines socio-economic analyses with rigorous ethnography to investigate the impacts of late liberalism on human and non-human life forms.

and temporary privileges in foreign countries. While Ong examined graduated sovereignty for very wealthy, middle-class, and migrant laborers, I focus my study on the precarity of professional musicians who are millennials, navigating the arts in tandem with citizenship, displacement, and intergenerational memory.¹¹¹

It is necessary to note that it is a cultural ethic for Chinese people to invest heavily in their children's education, with some parents even considering it their retirement plan. As social scientist Vanessa Fong notes, the transition from large families to only children happened so suddenly in Mainland China that these children received significant attention and pressure from parents and extended family (Fong 2004). In many situations, these children became their family's primary financial and emotional investment, with the expectation that they would in turn support their parents financially, emotionally, and medically after the latter retired (Fong 2011). Added to this incredible expectation is the fact that only children will need to concurrently support themselves and their own potential families. Here, filial piety functions as another cultural ethic. Children are expected to honor their parents through their studies and employment. Gaining status in the capital city, Beijing, and going abroad are markers of cosmopolitanism and success in the PRC. These internal family expectations work with broader social mores and economic concerns in contemporary Chinese musical life.

Citizenship and *Hukou*

¹¹¹ In addition to Ong, I am also influenced by work on social citizenship (Shi 2012), political citizenship (Goldman & Perry 2002), and legal citizenship in the PRC (Solinger 1999).

Writing against Western axioms about globalization that oversimplify and stereotype Asian cultures, Aihwa Ong shows the complexities of Chinese life by emphasizing its plurality in different regions. In her monograph, she focuses on ethnic Chinese outside of Mainland China and details, for instance, how Chinese in Hong Kong reacted in unique ways in the '80s and '90s, before and after the PRC's reclamation of the region from British rule; how Chinese in Indonesia and Malaysia negotiate their ethnicity and economic ambitions vis-à-vis anti-Chinese sentiment; and how Chinese in the United States encounter the glass ceiling of racism to show the myriad cultural contexts that are included in the broad identification of Chinese (Ong 1999). Whereas Ong rightly asserts that previous studies on Chinese identity focused on the Mainland context and gave inadequate attention to the diaspora, I now extend considerations of Chinese to Mainland Chinese *in* diaspora as they travel back and forth across the Pacific. I emphasize the experiences of Chinese international students, millennials who may become "Sea Turtles," or *haigui* 海归, which translates as overseas returnees. Typically, Chinese Sea Turtles go abroad for high school or post-secondary studies and return to Mainland China to work and settle down. Much like actual sea turtles, they return to their place of birth in their adulthood. In Mandarin, the pronunciation for overseas returnee, *haigui* 海归, is a homophone for sea turtle, *haigui* 海龟; only the second character is written differently. Unlike most academic Sea Turtles, Chinese musicians may leave home as elementary school children. Their habitus is developed in continual migration and across diverse conservatory settings. These artists exist in a liminality and possess a socio-cultural hybridity few understand and many misrepresent. As Western art musicians who may be seen by the world as performing music "foreign" to their culture, their unique circumstances require far greater scholarly attention.

Historically, Western art music has been imagined as a stratified, upper-middle-class European practice that is sublime and transcends issues of race, language, and displacement (Goehr 2007; Hibberd & Stanyon 2020). Even in musicological and ethnomusicological studies of modern conservatories (Wang 2014; Yoshihara 2007), changing political-economic circumstances and citizenship are rarely considered as key influences in an individual's or a demographic's musical practice. Mina Yang's *Planet Beethoven: Classical Music at the Turn of the Millennium* (2014) is an exception that looks at the modern economy, primarily in the West, and its impact on the financial decline of Western classical music organizations. My work benefits greatly from the existing literature and also differs in that I confront the plurality of musicians' financial backgrounds, anxieties of socio-economic precarity, and the structural inequalities found in conservatories. I prioritize the perspective of musicians and connect economic concerns with issues of citizenship, transnationalism, and racialization to critically analyze Western art music during the era of late capitalism. More specifically, I focus on instrumentalists from Beijing's Central Conservatory who have pursued further studies in Toronto, Philadelphia, and New York City, epicenters for musical life in Canada and the United States.

For Chinese instrumentalists born during the post-socialist era after 1978, employment and citizenship privileges are intertwined. Since the 1950s, the Communist Party has experimented with population control, using *hukou* 户口 or household registration status to distinguish between the urban and rural, the capital (that is, Beijing) and non-capital dwellers, and finally, the Tier 1, 2, and 3 cities. As the scholarship, which is largely based in the social sciences, shows, *hukou* functions as an internal passport system that was intended to prevent mass rural-urban migration, particularly during the Mao era when famines in the

countryside were severe and farmers lived in extreme poverty (Afridi et al. 2015; Swider 2015; Young 2013). To this day, living in the Chinese countryside is undesirable since labor conditions are harsh, medical and social services are limited, education is poor, and job security is wanting (Chu 2010; Liang and Shapiro 1984). Unfortunately, regardless of where they are born, a child is assigned the rural or urban status of one of their parents. With their household registration status, they then obtain a *shenfenzheng* 身份证, or identity card, which they will need for transportation, education, employment, and most socio-political possibilities in life. Without a *hukou*, a person does not have legal identity in the PRC and their life is severely restricted. Put more bluntly, a person does not legally exist.¹¹² While the requirements of how to transfer one's *hukou* between specific cities are unique and periodically modified, this transfer is possible. What is extremely difficult is for a rural resident to become an urban one, and for a Tier 3 or lower resident to become a Tier 1 resident (Chu 2010). In many ways, *hukou* creates class stratifications in contemporary China (Li et al. 2015).¹¹³

One method for children to jump into a higher residency status is through schooling. Students receive a temporary *hukou* associated with the school's city, much like a student

¹¹² For more on the realities of those who do not have legal status in the Mainland, particularly children born outside the laws of the one-child policy, see Mari Manninen's journalistic book, *Secrets and Siblings: The Vanished Lives of China's One Child Policy* (2019) and Nanfu Wang and Jialing Zhang's documentary, *One Child Nation* (2019).

¹¹³ It is only with a *shenfenzheng* that Chinese can buy things as quotidian as metro cards. An identity card must always be carried, as police in cities often perform random stops in public to verify that a person is in their legal place. It is impossible to buy metro cards, train tickets, and plane tickets, amongst many other things, without proof of identity. If a migrant worker is found to be living unpermitted in a city, they may be deported. This example of policing is one of the many ways the CCP control mobility in the PRC. Beyond mobility, a person cannot even marry as they would be unable to obtain a license, and any children they have would also be unregistered. It is a damning fate for generations.

visa. After they graduate, their status reverts to their original residence unless they are able to find a job that will sponsor their status transfer, similar to a work visa. Musicians, who are seen as having a more specialized talent, may use their abilities to gain privileges in top tier cities. Parents whose children audition for Beijing's Central Conservatory undoubtedly consider the benefits for their child to be in the nation's capital. As sociologist Yun Zhou has noted, it has become increasingly difficult for individuals to gain status in Beijing, where many Chinese desire to live because of the concentration of socio-economic opportunities and the class status of being a capital-city resident (Zhou 2019: 373). From Beijing, a student of Western art music may catapult to a Western conservatory and gain greater status in the PRC as a cosmopolitan international student. These perceptions of cosmopolitanism and prestige are set against recent memories of China being a closed nation, extremely poor, and partially colonized. Within one or two generations, families who would have never had the opportunity to travel to Beijing, never mind to North America or Europe, are hoping for their youngest generation to live in these places.

More tangibly, the benefits of studying music in Beijing are undeniable: the Central Conservatory is known around the world; Beijing has a concentration of influential pedagogues; and if famous international musicians tour China, they are likely to visit the Central Conservatory and meet aspiring young artists. In this situation, gaining admission to the Central Conservatory and receiving a Beijing student *hukou* serve as a launch pad to international mobility and more career opportunities.

If a student intends to stay in Mainland China, it is easier to convert a temporary Beijing status into a permanent one while in the city. The most likely method to achieve this is to gain employment, such as through an orchestra or a school. *Guanxi* 关系, or

relationships, are incredibly important in Chinese professional networks. Many students and aspiring professionals give expensive gifts to influential individuals prior to an audition and job application. Of course, to hand over a gift, one also needs an existing relationship or mutual contact. While many university students hope to remain in Beijing after graduation, conservatories are a unique space where students may be admitted as children and are acculturated at a young age. The Central Conservatory accepts children as young as 9 years old, who must live in the city and study full-time at the school.¹¹⁴ Similar to international students seeking new residency and/or citizenship, it is assumed that spending a greater length of time in a place aids in the relocation process, as students are more socio-culturally familiar, may have stronger networks, and may make a more compelling application. Moreover, it becomes harder for the student to return to their prior homes since they may have socio-culturally adapted to the extent that they are no longer fluent in their regional dialects and have not built professional networks. In many instances, seeking residency and/or citizenship becomes a necessity in order to maintain a familiar life. In both the PRC domestic and international contexts, musical achievement allows musicians to move at young ages and to acquire status in cities with greater infrastructure and resources. In these ways and more, music studies are tied to the socio-economics of late capitalism, belonging, and mobility in and out of China.

¹¹⁴ Other conservatories also accept children, such as Philadelphia's Curtis Institute of Music, which has no age limits. Curtis has accepted elementary school children in exceptional circumstances and regularly admits high school students. Unlike pre-college programs where students do not need to board and complete their academic studies at other schools of their choosing, conservatories such as Beijing's Central Conservatory require students to live in the city and provide all academic requirements. It becomes the child's primary school.

In what follows, I provide ethnographies of three musicians who, after studying at Beijing's Central Conservatory of Music, pursued postsecondary studies at premier music schools in Canada and the United States. I draw from ethnographic research conducted in Beijing, Toronto, Philadelphia, and New York City to show that although these musicians may have the semblance of middle-class life as international music students, they are dependent on scholarships and negotiate a precarity few outside of their networks could imagine. While existing music studies have noted the influx in recent decades of East Asians and Asian Americans in U.S. conservatories (Wang 2014; Yang 2014; Yoshihara 2007), my study considers Chinese musicians in the context of neoliberalism after the Mao era who are bound by their citizenship and contend with Orientalism, precarity, and ambition abroad. As anthropologist Julie Chu has noted, risk management is an important aspect of contemporary Chinese life in the post-socialist era, where the costs of living have skyrocketed and senior care, higher education, and jobs are not guaranteed (Chu 2019: 207). While music is an artistic practice, it is not separate from the unrelenting pressures of capitalism and the one-child policy.

Fei

I can't help but wonder what my life would have been like if I stayed in a normal school. Maybe went into finance or something ... I can't help but feel a bit sad about that life I never got to know.

Fei is a pianist from northeast China who has studied at Beijing's Central Conservatory of Music, Philadelphia's Curtis Institute of Music, and New York's The

Juilliard School.¹¹⁵ Born into a musical family, Fei began piano at the age of four and, at eight, moved with her mother to Beijing in order to form *guanxi* 关系, or a relationship, with a Central Conservatory of Music professor. In the crowded, competitive world of the PRC, it is recommended that students seeking admission to the conservatory first privately study with a professor for a year. If impressed, the professor is then expected to help them gain admission through tutelage and/or influence at the institution. Fei studied a year with a professor and successfully auditioned for the school, which is arguably the most competitive conservatory in the nation.

With admission to the conservatory, Fei's career trajectory changed and she became focused on succeeding as a pianist. Academic demands in Mainland China are such that, if a student leaves the public school system, it is very difficult for them to re-enter and compete with their peers. Some say it is impossible. Chinese public schools are structured around examinations, with major tests determining where a child may go to middle and high school, which influences their probability of testing into a four-year undergraduate program at a reputable university. Without this degree, individuals are ineligible for many types of employment, which are often the most stable ones. Unlike in other countries, it is impossible to "work one's way into" this stratified class of positions.¹¹⁶ In recent decades, families with considerable wealth have sent their children to international schools based in China that

¹¹⁵ In order to protect interlocutors' identities, I do not provide the specific town, city, or province that they are from, but rather reference a broader region, such as northeast China or southern China.

¹¹⁶ These positions are often associated with a *danwei* 单位, that is, a government unit. Although these public-sector jobs may not be the highest-paid positions, they offer security, benefits, and influence in society. In the past, they were also accompanied by housing and food allocations, amongst other significant privileges.

charge tens of thousands of USD a year and feature less demanding curricula. It is expected that these children pursue post-secondary education abroad and obtain higher-paying jobs if they return to the PRC. Most families in the Mainland cannot afford private schools and must hope that their child tests well within the over-saturated public system in order to attend university and find secure employment after. This process may sound similar to the SAT-system in the United States; the cut-throat atmosphere of succeeding within a population of 1.4 billion, however, cannot be over stressed. Each spring, during examination season, many teenagers jump from high floors due to the unbearable pressure.¹¹⁷

At the age of four, Fei was already calculating how she could succeed at the *gaokao* 高考, the university entrance exam, and began piano studies as a way to secure more points on the test. She knew that as an ethnic minority in the Mainland, she would already garner extra points. Piano studies would give her a further advantage from her peers, which would be necessary if she was to compete for admission to a university. She was her parents' only child and viewed it as her duty to succeed academically. As anthropologist Zachary Howlett notes, academic success is viewed as an ethical duty of Chinese children (2021). Her musical potential, however, was soon noticed by her teacher, who recommended to her parents that she pursue piano more seriously and consider auditioning for a conservatory. When she was seven years old, her mother asked her if she wanted to play piano, if she liked it, and if she was willing to practice it every day. Fei initially said, "Maybe I'll try." A year later, she moved

¹¹⁷ The euphemism, *tiaolou* 跳楼, meaning to jump from a building, is regularly used. Many in Mainland China believe that the CCP's two-child policy was influenced in part by the high suicide rate of teenagers whose parents would be left childless at an older age, past the years of childbearing. See Yun Zhou's work for more information about the CCP's family planning policies, such as the one-child and two-child policies (2019), and Zachary Howlett's work for more information about the examination system (2021).

with her mother to Beijing to prepare for her Central Conservatory of Music audition. She recalled, “That’s when I realized I was going to switch schools ... I didn’t even know that my life was going to be all about piano until the moment I walked into the Central Conservatory.”

During our last in-person conversation in March 2020, right before the COVID-19 shutdowns, Fei made the statements in the above epigraph, describing a wistfulness for a normal life outside of music. She was in Philadelphia for a few days to make her premier with the Philadelphia Orchestra as a piano soloist. Immediately before that, she had completed two solo recitals in Milan, one of which was broadcast live for national radio. At the same time, she was completing her Master of Music at Juilliard, where she had received a full scholarship after her Bachelor of Music at Curtis, where she was also on a full scholarship. Fei had an impeccable piano resume and her career was taking off. Yet as she sat in front of me, excited about her successful performances in Milan and her upcoming concert with the Philadelphia Orchestra, she was also, to put it simply, a bit deflated. Before all the cancellations of 2020, she had expected to undertake an intensive travel schedule, performing in Italy, Canada, the U.S., and Korea. In recent years, she had spent less time in Mainland China with her parents since she had so many musical engagements. Similar to many international students, Fei has struggled with homesickness, anxiety, stress, and socio-linguistic barriers due to the extreme mobility, separation from parents, and sense of responsibility that she has experienced from a young age. She also feels continual guilt and a need to succeed because not only had her parents poured their finances into her piano studies, but they had also stretched and reformed their family structure for her, with her father living separately from them for many years in order to earn more income. Yet as Fei

becomes more successful, she is drawn further away from her parents, who remain in the Mainland and do not have the same visa privileges as she does. As Fei added during our conversation in March 2020, “Maybe my life would have been easier [if I did something normal]. Maybe I wouldn’t travel so much.” Throughout the rest of 2020, she remained in the United States after multiple failed attempts to secure a flight back to the PRC to be with family during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Fei’s ambition is influenced by the musical loss experienced by her family during the Cultural Revolution and the fact that she is her parents’ only hope. Although her mother used to play violin, her father used to play saxophone, and her maternal uncle was a composer, none of them were able to pursue their talents due to artistic censorship and political chaos. In fact, they suffered for their abilities. Moreover, her grandparents immigrated to China after fleeing the Korean War. Fei’s accomplishments as a pianist are a source of particular pride for her family after generations of turmoil and loss. She admits that she took some of her parents’ sacrifices for granted as a child. She recalls,

Sometimes, I would say, “Mom, I’m so tired, I don’t want to practice.” But then I would see my mom get really upset because she of course wants me to get better because they’re *all*—like, my parents went through such a hard time and I gave them an even harder time. And then as I grew older, I realized that all the other kids, they have both their parents with them. And my dad was *always* in our hometown. I missed him for a big part of my childhood.

The family’s separation was extremely difficult for them. After several years apart, her father found a way to move to Beijing. Yet things continued to be challenging since, as Fei said, “Beijing is such an expensively place to live, to have a life.” Similar to Lin, Fei’s parents ultimately made the sacrifice to move their entire family to Beijing in order to support her studies at the Central Conservatory. Lin also struggled with that sacrifice, saying during an

interview, “It’s really tough to see your parents like that everyday ... that’s why we have to work really hard. Just practice.”

Although Fei’s family could afford her early piano lessons, they were not wealthy. Since the post-socialist era began in 1978, and accelerated during the 1990s, the CCP has defunded education. During Fei’s time at the Central Conservatory in the 2000s, her studies were partially subsidized by a scholarship, which greatly helped her family. However, living costs in Beijing were one of the highest in the country and she had moved from a smaller city with lower salaries. Her father had a considerable burden to earn enough to pay for their two residences and her parents carefully economized their spending. It is not uncommon for some families to borrow money from a network of relatives and friends to enable their child’s education, nor is it uncommon for working parents to only take a few days off a year in order to maximize their earnings. Whether or not Fei’s parents borrowed money, they were well aware of their precarity. Fei’s placement at the Central Conservatory and her scholarship were dependent on how well she performed in classes, during lessons, and at her year-end jury, which is a performance exam where a student plays different pieces of music while being silently adjudicated. As with many evaluations in the PRC, students would be ranked and the list would be publicized. While it is natural for a child to be disinclined to practice, lack of practice could lead to less improvement and lower jury results, which could put further financial burden on her parents. Worse, poor jury results could dampen Fei’s prospects as a pianist and potentially lead to expulsion. The difficulty Fei witnessed her parents endure was intimately tied to post-socialism in Mainland China, how well she performed under pressure, and the family’s separation.

Prior to commencing studies at Curtis, Fei considered quitting piano. She thought that a normal academic path would be much easier for herself and her family. The stress had become more challenging for her, as well. It was her parents' support that enabled her to continue. As she remembered, they told her, "I know you really want to do this. You've been doing great, it's okay, don't worry." In 2018, she acknowledged, "I think the reason I can be here at Curtis today is because they supported me."

At the age of fourteen, Fei entered the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. A small institution, Curtis only accepts enough students to comprise a professional-level orchestra and an opera company, plus piano, organ, and classical guitar students. Every admitted student is given a full scholarship, with some in financial need also receiving living expenses. It is arguably the most prestigious and selective conservatory in the world. Since Fei entered as a minor, her mother accompanied her until she was eighteen years old, at which point students may live in the dormitories. Similar to the Central Conservatory, Curtis has flexible admission requirements aside from the auditions (for which there are multiple rounds). While an educational institution in the United States, Curtis previously did not require English-language proficiency, nor any standardized test in order to enter. During Fei's high-school years, she and other Curtis students attended City School, a private Christian school located close to Curtis that had a partnership with the conservatory. After they turned eighteen, they automatically graduated into the Bachelor of Music program.

Many elite conservatories have flexible academic requirements because their focus is to train successful performers. In March 2020, Fei visited Curtis after graduating the previous year and noted that many of the students were "*so young*." Although she also entered as a young teenager, she now found it strange that Curtis accepted minors—children. Yet

when I asked her if she grasped what she was auditioning for at the age of thirteen, if she knew of Curtis's standing in the musical world and the commitment she was making to a professional music career, she said yes. She grew up in the conservatory environment and was trained to accomplish precisely that: to succeed in the most elite conservatories in the world.

In 2019, she graduated from Curtis with a Bachelor of Music. Neither of her parents were able to attend her graduation recital or ceremony due to visa limitations and costs. Although more Mainland Chinese have travelled internationally in recent decades, the PRC government remains strict regarding who may obtain visas. Most Chinese travel with tour groups, which obtain visas and affordable flights more easily. Tour groups are also supervised and the government is less concerned that individuals may defect. If individuals desire to travel abroad to visit relatives, they must obtain invitation letters, show financial, legal, and social documents that demonstrate significant reasons for them to return to the PRC, and pay approximately 10,000¥ (~\$1,475USD) in some regions for application fees. For many middle-class Chinese families, it is simply too onerous, as these would be in addition to travel costs. Fei's parents streamed her graduation events online instead.

As Fei completed her Master's at Juilliard, she carefully considered her next steps: could she win a full scholarship to a competitive DMA program? Could she find a way to stay in New York City and build her profile as a pianist? Could she return to the PRC and work at a conservatory there? With the continuation of COVID-19, when will she see her parents again? Having spent the majority of her life moving away from her hometown and nearly half of her life in the United States, Fei feels a certain alienation from PRC social and professional life. Moreover, although she has impressive international credentials, she is not

as well connected to influential Mainland musicians as someone who has spent more years there. As noted earlier, *guanxi* or relationships are incredibly important in Chinese professional life. Added to this, Fei's household registration status reverted to her hometown in northeast China, where her parents have returned and which she left at the age of eight. If she desires to obtain employment in Beijing or another top tier city, she would also require sponsorship for a new residency status. Having studied at the top American conservatories since the age of fourteen, Fei has realized a piano career of which many dream. Yet her absence from Mainland China and status from a northeast region lead to uncertainty about her ability to secure a well-paid position there, and her nationality as a PRC citizen on a student visa in the U.S. leads to uncertainty over securing a stable job in this region, as international students are in increasingly precarious positions and work visas are harder to obtain.

Eli

Before, people could have three, four, five, a lot of children. You didn't have to invest in each one of them in the same way. As long as one of them succeeds, then you're fine. But now it's more difficult ... you only have one choice. There's only one product, if we think of it like that. There's only one product that you can invest in so you have to invest all your money into it.

Eli is a classical guitarist who entered the Central Conservatory at the age of thirteen and since then, has lived independently. Although his mother originally accompanied him from their home province of Yunnan to Beijing, she had to return in order to work and support his music studies. Eli grew up learning various folk musics before starting classical guitar at the age of 12. Within a year, he gained admission to the Central Conservatory of Music. After six years there, he successfully auditioned for Curtis Institute of Music. Before

graduating from his Bachelor of Music, he turned down a full scholarship to Juilliard in order to go to Yale School of Music for his Master's because he wanted to attend a university. In 2021, he was working towards his Doctor of Musical Arts at Manhattan School of Music.

Suffice it to say, Eli, like Fei, is an exceptionally talented musician. He is also a very practical person: by the age of twelve, he realized that a music career could help him avoid the *gaokao* 高考, the university entrance exam. Knowing that most high school students only slept five to seven hours a night in order to study, yet many would still be unable to attend a reputable university, he decided to audition for a music conservatory. Gauging that this path would involve less academic pressure since admission was already so selective, Eli began classical guitar studies. Prior to that, he was in the top academic percentile in his home region. But, as he said to me in Philadelphia, "I wanted to sleep." As simple as that may sound, the statement throws into relief the reality for teenagers in the Mainland: adolescence is a time of extreme pressure as students attempt to meet academic demands, with only a fraction gaining admission to a well-ranked university since the country limits acceptance rates. The lack of sleep and time for recreation leads many to mental and physical exhaustion. Even with strong scores and entrance into a reputable university, though, careers are not secure. As Lin has said, "There are too many people. It's so competitive to get a job, to make a living. Everybody's got to get into college, but then after that, what? What's after college? So parents must think of some other way to help their children get a job, make a living." In this setting, a music career may seem to offer more stability since conservatory populations are smaller and, in the PRC's post-socialist context, teaching music may be a reliable source of income. In addition, the notion that conservatory auditions select the

“most talented” out of a significantly larger pool of applicants gives parents and children hope that the admitted student will succeed. For better or worse, “success” will look different for each musician.

Eli’s epigraph shows that the one-child policy raised the stakes even higher for families. As he added in that conversation, “Once parents get older, they definitely want their child to support them.” Culturally speaking, it is often viewed negatively to place parents in senior homes. Children are expected to invite parents to live with them and financially support them even while they raise their own offspring. An only child himself, Eli is keen to return to Mainland China for better employment prospects and to be closer to family. As he has frequently said to me, “How many full-time jobs are available for classical guitarists in North America?” He sees the plight of adjunct professors and knows that a low-paying part-time position would make it very difficult (likely impossible) for him to secure a work visa in the United States, never mind to also help support his parents in Mainland China. With the education sector continually expanding and interest in classical guitar growing in the PRC, Eli sees an opportunity to return there and establish himself in pedagogy.

Having lived on his own since he was thirteen years old, Eli is also keen to once again live in the same city as his parents. As a teenager, Eli cooked, cleaned, studied, managed housing issues, and took care of himself in a new city. It was, understandably, a difficult time for him. In the years following, his family moved their household registration status from their region in Yunnan to Shenzhen city. Yunnan is a southwestern province that is home to many ethnic minorities and is quite poor in many regions (Donaldson 2011; National Bureau of Statistics of China 2018). Through connections, risks, and new careers,

Eli's family has been able to gain residency in Shenzhen, a Special Administrative Region (SAR) that has significantly better infrastructure and more job prospects. With a SAR *hukou*, his stellar musical credentials, and his family's *guanxi* or connections with professionals in the education sector, Eli hopes to secure a stable, well-paid job in Mainland China. As an only child, he also desires to resettle close to his family.

Similar to Fei, Eli has also expressed a desire to explore other paths outside of performance. As he said while completing his Master's,

I want to do other things. I want to do marketing, I want to do things outside of music. I'm *jealous* of people who got internships in different companies. Even though [those internships] don't pay, they're still a really good experience. But I can't do that. I can't apply for a data analysis [job] because I don't even know how to do [that]. I can't apply for W.H.O. [World Health Organization], I can't apply for ... a lot of things. Especially [as a guitarist], I can't go to music festivals [either]. I can only go to Aspen,¹¹⁸ so for me it's like ... I definitely want to go explore the world. That's why Yale is a good place for me to learn about all the [different] majors. I know people in wealth statistics, epidemiology, architecture, a lot of things, which I'm really happy about.

Eli's ambivalence, and perhaps even frustration, with the narrow focus required in elite music studies has led him to expand his network. Although many would say that the Yale School of Music does not hold the same performance expectations as Curtis or Juilliard, Eli chose it because it is a university that is much larger than either conservatory. Moreover, the school is famous in the PRC, has allowed Eli to participate in student groups such as the Association of Chinese Students and Scholars at Yale, and learn about different career paths.

¹¹⁸ Aspen Music Festival and School is one of the premier summer music festivals in North America. Located in Colorado, it is one of the few to offer a classical guitar program.

Although Eli does not anticipate quitting classical guitar, he is mindful that he will need to be entrepreneurial as a musician.

In recent years, both Eli and Fei have repeatedly spoken to me about their concerns regarding visas and status in the United States. As graduate students and Chinese citizens, they are constantly aware that they have no citizenship rights and the paths toward permanent residency are extremely difficult. They do not have the capital or investments to aid their applications. As ethnomusicologist Su Zheng has noted, transnationalism and settling in the United States is not without its conflicts for Chinese migrants (Zheng 2010). Aside from the uncertainty of remaining in the U.S., each of my interlocutors has struggled with socio-linguistic barriers, homesickness, fear, and racism. Combined, these experiences motivate their consideration of becoming Sea Turtles, *haigui* 海归.

This demographic of Chinese overseas returnees became noticeable in the 1990s, during the nation's economic rise with free-market capitalism. As interdisciplinary scholar Lisa Lowe argues, the transnational flow of Asian bodies has always been intimately tied with labor, capital, and political economy (Lowe 2015). As in the nineteenth century following the Opium Wars (1839-42, 1856-60), transnational Chinese today are still driven by earning potential, the notion that the West will provide opportunities China will not, and the hyper-productivity of capitalism. For Chinese musicians born during the one-child policy, music studies allowed them to seek experiences abroad, gain visas to other countries, and accumulate socio-cultural capital that they are hoping to translate into financial stability. For those who desire to return home to their families, such as Eli, music studies and moving one's household registration status to a bigger city help cultivate circumstances where they may become Sea Turtles, overseas returnees who can hope for a better life in Mainland

China after gaining credentials abroad.¹¹⁹ Unlike at previous historical moments, the PRC's economy is growing faster than Western ones. Consequently, while Western credentials remain prestigious and enviable, Chinese migrants are considering returning to the PRC for work.

Sea turtles (the animal) have geo-magnetic abilities that allow them to “imprint on the unique magnetic signature of the beaches where they hatch” and use the North and South Poles to navigate the oceans, returning years later to the same beach in order to lay their eggs (National Geographic 2019). It is as if they have an internal GPS or compass to guide them through the expansive waters. In an affectionate comparison, Chinese nationals are thought to have lifelong ties to China, which is regarded as the point of return in their lives. Chinese nationals and many diasporic Chinese say “*huiguo* 回国,” meaning “return to the nation,” when speaking of visiting China.¹²⁰ The verb *hui* 回 is a unique pictograph: it is two squares, with one in the center of another. It signifies that someone has re-entered a space, perhaps their home, which surrounds them.¹²¹ It is important to note that *hui* 回 very

¹¹⁹ The foreign credentials of overseas returnees often come at high costs for families who invest hundreds of thousands of Chinese yuan in order to financially support their child. Moving one's household registration status/*hukou* in Mainland China is also not a simple task, but requires effort, time, finances, and social connections.

¹²⁰ In addition to Chinese nationals, many Chinese people who have familial and emotional ties to the Mainland use the phrase *huiguo* 回国, to return to the nation. This includes ethnic Chinese who are born in other countries. My discussion here is informed by my experiences with Chinese communities in North America, East Asia, and Southeast Asia.

¹²¹ Many traditional Chinese homes are structured around a four-sided courtyard. In a simplified drawing, these homes, called *Sibeyuan* 四合院 (literally, four-sided courtyards), would look like a square. For more on *Sibeyuan*, see Bo-Xun Huang et al.'s “Study on Courtyard Residence and Cultural Sustainability: Reading Chinese Traditional Siheyuan through Space Syntax” (2019) and Shuishan Yu's “Courtyard in conflict: the transformation of Beijing's *Sibeyuan* during revolution and gentrification” (2017).

specifically means “to return.” The character *guo* 国(國 in traditional Chinese) means nation and is the latter half of 中国, literally “middle nation,” signifying that this is the kingdom in the center of the world. 中国/“middle nation” is China. Linguistically, it is implied that China is permanently oriented as the place to which a Chinese national returns and to which they belong, regardless of where their permanent home is or how long they have been away.¹²²

Eli desires to *huiguo*, to return to the nation after his studies. He has accepted that he has few citizenship options outside of the PRC, since he would not be able to obtain a work visa in the U.S. as a freelancing classical guitarist and he has no other path to legal residency. He also does not have strong connections to other countries. His prospects in the Mainland, particularly in Shenzhen, seem much more promising. It is difficult to move one’s household registration to a top tier city. Throughout the CCP’s governance, urban and rural populations have been stratified with resources and infrastructure concentrated in large cities, with Tier 1 metropolises gaining the most. Shenzhen, as a Special Administrative Region, is a Tier 1 city that is located beside Hong Kong. Eli’s economic opportunities with a Shenzhen *hukou* are favorable. His experiences as an international student will make it easier for him in the future to obtain travel visas, which he anticipates needing. As classical guitar studies slowly become more popular in the East Asian region, Eli hopes to become heavily involved in guitar

¹²² This applies only to Mainland China. To my knowledge, Hong Kongers, Taiwanese, and overseas Chinese in other regions such as Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia do not use the phrase “*huiguo* 回国/回國/return to the nation” when speaking of travels home to these respective regions. Although the verb *hui* 回/to return is used by others, the phrase *huiguo* 回国 is unique to the Mainland context.

pedagogy and promotion. His unique circumstances make returning to the PRC a strategic and exciting choice that will also reunite him with his family.

This choice is also motivated by Eli's experiences of Orientalism in the United States and his desire to be part of the Chinese majority again. In May 2018, I had dinner with him and Coco, a cellist, to celebrate their graduation from Curtis and next steps at Yale and Juilliard, respectively.¹²³ As we spoke about their performing experiences in the United States, Eli said that they're always representative of "*Asian*." When I asked for his further thoughts on this, he said, "It's not a choice. If we do something wrong, people will just automatically assume it's all Asians. They'll just have an assumption. So it's like everything that we do is really important because it's still—Asians are a minority here." They both stated that they "don't really care" or "think about it too much" as to how others perceive them. As Eli said, "I just do what I want to do. I don't really care about what people think about me as an Asian or not." The burdens that they already carry as only children are made heavier by the awareness of how their errors may have negative repercussions for others racialized as belonging to the same minority.

Moreover, Eli's experiences of racialization and desire for a certain degree of colorblindness informs his perspectives about China and Chinese identity. Further into our conversation in 2018, I shared my own complicated feelings about China today and sadness about how much the country has previously suffered. Eli responded,

China's more like a power that can support us. We're not afraid of anything because there is a strong government and there is a strong community behind us [now]. Especially as China gets stronger, it's really an honor now to be Chinese. Because, you know, we'll come to support you and help you if you're in any kind of trouble.

¹²³ Like Fei, Eli's parents were not able to afford visiting the United States to celebrate his undergraduate or Master's graduations.

Coco added that there is a sense of unity amongst Chinese people, that our “hearts [are] connected. If something happens, then everyone has the same goal inside of their heart.” Eli and Coco were speaking specifically about the racism that Chinese people experience and the fear of being assaulted, harassed, and/or mistreated in other ways outside of the PRC. As they explained, the memory of China’s harsh past, the poverty experienced during the twentieth century, and the abuse by Western nations are not forgotten in Chinese communities today. Why do they need a strong country to protect them? Why is it *now* an honor to be Chinese? And how can they be confident that every Chinese person has the same goal and is connected? Their statements do not stand alone, but speak to the memories of pain, loss, injustice, and anger that were caused by Western empires’ de-humanization of China in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹²⁴ These memories continue to influence today’s international relations at the nation-state level and the transnational journey of international students who feel extremely vulnerable abroad. Eli’s statement, “it’s really an honor now to be Chinese” speaks to the *shame* many Chinese people previously felt. Many still do, as racism and intergenerational trauma work in myriad ways to inspire anger and self-hatred. As international music students, Eli and Coco are interested in the ways they may have more protection and aid from an influential Chinese nation as they struggle with being Asian in America. Tied to this is their empathy with other Chinese people who are vulnerable abroad. As their comments show, Asians in the United States are continually

¹²⁴ For more on this history, see Robert Bickers and Isabella Jackson’s edited volume, *Treaty Ports in Modern China: Law, Land and Power* (2016), Lydia Liu’s *The Clash of Empires: The Invention of China in Modern World Making* (2004), and Lisa Lowe’s *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (2015).

aware of the potential violence towards us, even before the events of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ang

I started to wonder what life would have been like if I had taken a different road because I had many, many bad lessons in a row. Since you were brought into this conservatory for your talent, and now that's always criticized, you start to doubt if your only strength is still your strength ... So I did secretly yearn—or imagined myself not being in a conservatory because I also felt that I was good at other things. Maybe it would have been a more positive experience...

Similar to Fei, Ang moved to Beijing at the age of 8 and gained admission to the Central Conservatory at 9, the youngest possible age. Originally from southern China, Ang moved across the country to study with the teachers of famed pianists Yuja Wang and Lang Lang. When she was eleven years old, her parents were able to have a second child since their provincial laws had changed. Although the one-child policy was originally very strict, different provinces and regions eventually adopted caveats. For instance, in Ang's province, parents could have a second child if the first had a physical disability. Ang was visually impaired, but not blind. Since she was already living with her grandmother in Beijing most of the year, Ang's parents decided to have a second child who has remained with them in the Mainland. While Ang is not an only child anymore, her mindset of wanting to care for her parents, and her younger sibling, of wanting to be close to them after so many years away, and of wanting to succeed in order to honor their sacrifices, is similar to Fei, Eli, and the majority of only children.

As Ang's words showed, she had an incredibly difficult time at the Central Conservatory and thought about quitting piano as a result. Despite the fact that she is very

talented, she was yelled at a lot by her first teacher, with whom she studied for seven years. She rightfully pointed out that, if one is brought into the conservatory based on their skills, which are then constantly criticized, how is one—how is *a child*—to understand themselves and their environment? Ang's desire to quit piano led her to purposefully miss all the deadlines for university auditions. In her final year of high school, she spent much time walking around the streets of Beijing and discovering bootleg records of jazz albums, with which she fell in love. Her parents, alarmed by her behavior, suggested she audition for the University of Toronto. They had family friends who lived there, it was one of the top schools in Canada with an excellent reputation in the PRC, and it would be a fresh start, a new environment. Ang emailed the school and, despite the fact that the deadline had passed, was allowed to audition and accepted into the most competitive piano studio because of her stellar musicianship. Although the University of Toronto's Faculty of Music does not have the same flexibility as private conservatories such as the Central Conservatory and Curtis, it was still able to adjust the rules to accept an undeniable talent. However, because of Ang's late application, she did not gain any scholarships and paid full fees for international students—about \$20,000CAD (approximately \$15,000USD or 100,000¥) a year at that time.

Since then, Ang has developed a new passion for classical piano and is considering ways she can relocate closer to her parents who now live in Shenzhen. She is pursuing a doctorate in collaborative piano, champions new music, has a very successful piano trio, and is promoting Chinese vocal repertoire in Canada. As a permanent resident of Canada, she is also considering if she should give up her present life in Toronto to seek employment as a professor in the PRC or countries in Southeast Asia, such as Singapore. Job postings in the PRC promise an extra 50,000¥, or about \$7,400USD, annually for Chinese citizens who

have studied abroad.¹²⁵ Although \$7,400USD may not sound persuasive enough for someone to uproot their life, 50,000¥ is a significant financial difference that would only continue to grow with time. Legally, in Mainland China, foreigners and citizens who have studied abroad earn more than locals who did not (Hao and Welch 2012). However, as a PRC citizen, Ang would not earn as much as a foreigner. As someone who has spent the majority of her adult life abroad, she also would not have a professional network, or *guanxi*, that was as strong as someone's who had remained in the Mainland. Nonetheless, the ways in which she has expanded her citizenship options provide her with more flexibility.

Ang was born in a smaller province in the PRC that unfortunately does not provide the same opportunities as Shenzhen, Beijing, or Toronto. It was a point of great pride for her family and hometown that she was accepted into the nation's top conservatory in Beijing as a child. Ang is several years older than Eli and Fei. When she began piano studies as a child, lessons were about 100¥/hour (about \$15USD)—still an expense since many monthly salaries were 2,000¥ for public-sector positions, which her parents held. Today in Beijing, lessons with highly sought-after pedagogues may be at least 800¥/hour and students are often expected to bring generous gifts. Between 1999 and 2001, the Central Conservatory awarded full scholarships to students based on their marks. Since then, only partial scholarships are available and living costs in Beijing have skyrocketed. Yet, in a country known for the world's largest population and authoritarian rule, gaining admission to a school and residency privileges in the capital is a highly coveted achievement. For many in the Mainland, living in the capital will never be an option. Some cannot even dream of visiting this site of Chinese history and government as a tourist. It communicates a great deal

¹²⁵ The exchange rate is usually \$1USD = 6.7-6.8RMB (*Renminbi*).

to live, study, work, and have *hukou* rights in this Tier 1 city. Every so often, the CCP cracks down on migrant workers and those living in the city illegally, forcefully moving them out of the metropolis. Ang's credentials at the Central Conservatory helped her gain admission to the University of Toronto's Faculty of Music. Through her degrees there, Ang has been able to secure permanent residency, strategically staying in Toronto for her graduate schooling in order to gain this status.

According to Canadian immigration policies, international students who have obtained a degree from a Canadian post-secondary institution have a considerable advantage when applying for permanent residency through an Express Entry profile (Government of Canada 2021). Express Entry is a system used by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada to process applications from three economic programs for those seeking residency: the Canadian Experience Class, the Federal Skilled Worker Program, and the Provincial Nominee Program (Government of Canada 2021). As Canada evaluates immigration applications based on a point system, post-secondary graduates may earn dozens of extra points because of their qualifications. Based on the number of points garnered, applicants may receive an invitation from the federal government to apply for permanent residency. Applicants' financial resources and investments in Canada have, of course, a significant impact as well in the application process.

By remaining in Canada, purchasing property with the help of her parents, and carefully completing her permanent residency application, Ang has secured that status. In this way, her strategies of transnational movement have given her and her family flexibility, as the property is a family home that her parents and brother may also use. Her Canadian

residency status will also make it considerably easier for her close family members to seek the same, should they desire to do so in the future.

Although Ang's successful music studies have provided her family with these privileges in Canada, it is no coincidence that she, like Eli and Fei, had considered quitting music and pursuing other subjects. Recalling her high school years, she said, "I liked other subjects so I wondered ... I also didn't want to be scolded so badly, so harshly by the teacher all the time. I didn't think it would be an easier experience because I know students in public schools have to study so hard and have endless piles of homework." Each of my interlocutors has struggled with their musical choices. Having entered such a competitive conservatory at a young age, their paths in some ways became more limited. The Central Conservatory trained phenomenal performers, but did not prepare students for the *gaokao*, particularly in the '80s, '90s, and early '00s.¹²⁶ The longer a student remained in the conservatory, the more difficult it would have been to transition out. As each of these three interlocutors have completed studies abroad and today consider their future career paths, they also reckon with the fact that they cannot go back to the lives they had before music or to the lives that they *would have had* without music. It is a strange loss that makes their success all the more necessary as only children. As multiple interlocutors have said to me on separate occasions, "I haven't been trained for anything else."

The Psychological Toll

Unsurprisingly, many transnational Chinese musicians struggle with anxiety and depression. As the pianist Lang Lang admitted in his autobiography,

¹²⁶ Today, there are more academic preparations at the school.

Depression had been looming over me since my professional career took off. I'd felt completely unmoored, always completely alone in spite of the crowds that clamored for my attention. I began feeling shaky and afraid. I worried about injuries. My biggest fear concerned my arms and hands. I worried I'd hurt myself badly and would no longer be able to play. If I couldn't play, I feared I'd go mad, there'd be no reason to live. Playing was the only thing that brought me joy. Every time I felt a twinge in my fingers or a tension in my arm, I was convinced that was it: the career-ending injury, the debilitating damage to my body that would render me useless for life (Lang and Ritz 2008: 227).

Lang Lang is one of the most recognizable pianists in the world today. He gained international recognition when he performed Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra at the age of seventeen. His energy, bombastic playing, breadth of repertoire, and charisma made him an overnight sensation to the press. This breakthrough, however, was years in the making as he had competed in international competitions, performed privately for other famous musicians, and already had management. Like some of my interlocutors, Lang Lang attended the Central Conservatory and Curtis as a child and teenager, respectively. Born in the early '80s, Lang Lang has served as a model for other Chinese musicians who desire to become internationally recognized as a soloist.

Lang Lang's experience of depression and anxiety, however, may not be what many assume a world-class pianist to experience. He is one of the highest earning soloists who has appeared with all major orchestras around the world. But since he was admitted to the Central Conservatory as a child, he was separated from his mother who stayed in his hometown to work and support him and his father, who travelled with him to Beijing. Obsessed with ensuring his son's musical success, Lang Lang's father forced him to practice more than eight hours a day. Due to the Cultural Revolution, Lang Lang's father lost his dreams of becoming a professional *erhu* musician, his mother lost her dreams of a

professional stage career, and other relatives lost their musical ambitions (Lang and Ritz 2008: 10). Musical talent was heavily present in Lang Lang's family, but he was the first in decades who could pursue a career. His father thus placed enormous pressure on him. Lang Lang's sense of loneliness, his great anxiety over injury, and his fear of losing his purpose grew with his level of success and are common emotions amongst successful musicians. Undoubtedly his intensive travel schedule, separation from his mother and homeland, and incredible responsibilities from a young age had a significant impact on his emotions. As David Eng and Shinhee Han note in *Racial Melancholia, Racial Dissociation: On the Social and Psychic Lives of Asian Americans*, the immigration experience is intimately tied with structures of mourning as many physical and abstract elements in a person's life are lost (2019: 48).

Many critics, scholars, and those outside of artistic performance do not consider the psychological toll music careers demand when discussing musicians who are perceived as wealthy, elite, and extremely privileged. Of course, there is privilege to pursuing one's passion and the arts. Some music students come from families that are wealthy or became more comfortably middle class during their studies. But in the two decades after the Cultural Revolution, many came from what the Western world would classify as poverty or near poverty.¹²⁷ By Chinese standards, they may have been middle class or lower-middle class. From this place of economic fragility, Chinese only children gained admission to world-class conservatories in more expensive cities and countries, where they were exposed to many opportunities but also negotiated significant precarity, fear, loneliness, and sense of loss.

¹²⁷ As twentieth-century China scholar Wu Yiching notes, "In the late 1970s, China was undeniably one of the most egalitarian countries in the world" due to the low incomes and limited resources throughout the country (Wu 2014: 4).

Moreover, the stresses of global neoliberalism have pushed expectations in classical music to extremes. As Lin, a contemporary of Yuja Wang's and a few years younger than Lang Lang, recalled to me in 2013,

So at that time [in the '80s and '90s], we just worked *as much* as we could because we knew that if we didn't practice, there was no way we could go back to a normal life because you know, our families were not wealthy enough for us to quit music. So if we didn't practice enough, we didn't do well—basically, we would be screwed.

Lin and Lang Lang's generation were models for later millennial music students, as they were the first generation of successful musicians after the Cultural Revolution. Like Lang Lang, Lin practiced six or seven hours a day as a small child until he had an emotional breakdown at the age of nine and snapped at his father, who had yearned to become a violinist during the Mao years. Today, Lin is an incredibly successful clarinetist with multiple faculty positions and a Principal seat in a top-tier American orchestra.¹²⁸ He also has legal status in North America, having attended Curtis as a teenager before landing a coveted job in a Canadian orchestra, which he held for many years before moving back to the U.S. In many ways, his trajectory is viewed by younger Chinese musicians, particularly orchestral instrumentalists, as ideal. He has mentored many of these younger musicians, as the unofficial alumni network of the Central Conservatory and Curtis Institute of Music is strong, with graduates connecting each other to more contacts and sharing personal stories and advice. Yet as Lin said, "I didn't have a childhood," because the necessity to succeed was so desperate.

¹²⁸ Principals are instrumental leads in an orchestral section. Each type of instrument will have a Principal and Assistant Principal.

This necessity is a convergence of intergenerational traumas from the Maoist years and the demands of post-socialism. Many parents, such as Lin's father, pushed their children to develop incredible talent at young ages because of the trauma of their own musical losses. With the defunding of social services, such as education and healthcare, only children were also given incredible burdens to succeed. In the musical world, more applications were made to conservatories because some parents considered it a safer route than traditional academics. Although it is standard to compete for conservatory positions, it is astounding to be competing amongst thousands or tens of thousands, which is the case for Beijing's Central Conservatory. It is also unusual for parents to move their entire families, or separate their families, in order for their child to attend a school. My interlocutors are but few examples of the many children whose parents quit their jobs and moved to a new city for them, or who had to adopt adult responsibilities as teenagers and live independently. With the only child becoming an emotional as well as financial investment for many parents, risks are taken for success, with depression and anxiety becoming unexpected consequences.

As anti-Asian hate crimes spiked during the COVID-19 pandemic, the violent associations of light-skinned Asians with disease and threat added to the psychological pressures musicians faced. Those who stayed in the United States, such as Fei, rarely ventured outside. In Fei's situation, she bought herself a keyboard to fit in the one-bedroom apartment she shared with another graduate student. She occasionally went outside during the day to go to Juilliard to practice since she was also auditioning for doctorate programs. It is only with a student visa that she could remain in the United States and maintain her

musical network that she built over the last decade. However, the pandemic made her consider permanently returning to China more seriously, as she was separated from her family and reminded in terrifying ways that Asians are unwanted, even despised, by many in the United States.

Conclusion

Following the Maoist era, only children inherited an unprecedented burden to honor what their families lost and sacrificed, and to later financially support aging parents. For Chinese Western art musicians, their stellar musical accomplishments are entangled with these conditions and desires to move household registration status, gain permanent residencies, and acquire international visas in order to realize a better life. While other scholarship has discussed social citizenship (Shi 2012) or political and civil citizenship in the PRC (Goldman & Perry 2002), this chapter has emphasized the parameters around legal citizenship for Chinese international students. Building on existing writing on *hukou*, which prioritizes examinations of state structures and demographics, particularly of those living outside the legal limits of residencies and labor laws (Swider 2015; Young 2013), I broaden the conversation on internal Chinese migration and legality to include transnational musicians who seek to expand their residency and socio-economic options through artistic practice, scholarships, and risks. Drawing also from research in music studies (Yang 2014; Yoshihara 2007), on the one-child policy (Greenhalgh 2008; Zhou 2019), and on issues of capitalism (Ong 1999, 2006; Povinelli 2011; Tsing 2004, 2015), this dissertation fosters a new conversation that bridges the macro-structures of citizenship and migration with personal experiences of transnationalism, precarity, racialization, and hope, as experienced by

professional musicians moving through the network of elite conservatories in Mainland China and North America.

This research would not have been possible without years of ethnographic fieldwork and sustained relationships with musicians, who shared with me the textures of their lives. Although it may be easy to overgeneralize the success of Chinese musicians and notions of middle-classness, it is my hope that more people may come to understand the complex realities for these musicians, who sit at the confluence of historical traumas and the changing socio-economics of neoliberalism. This demographic is under-studied, in part because aspiring musicians and those with intergenerational trauma do not wish to share their thoughts and sentiments with those outside of their networks. By sharing a fuller picture of musical practice with the permission of my interlocutors, I hope Chinese musicians may be approached with greater empathy and the mental health of musicians may be considered with greater care. Moreover, through the perspective of “strategic citizenship,” it is my intention that more scholarship will examine how music and the arts may be intimately tied to the sociopolitics of revolutionary upheaval, traumatic memory, economic precarity, and aspirations for mobility. For Chinese Western art musicians, strategies of citizenship become urgent early on in their lives as they enter conservatories as children or teenagers and leave behind alternative career paths. While international travel and scholarships are often signs of success, it cannot be forgotten that student visas and institutional funding are meant to be temporary—they all expire. Yet before they do, these opportunities draw students into new worlds of foreign status, bank accounts, languages, and socio-cultural customs, all of which require new strategies of citizenship in the face of great precarity.

EPILOGUE

“We Are One Generation”

In 2022, each of my interlocutors was in a different place in life. I had begun interviews with some of them almost a decade ago in Toronto and Beijing, before expanding my network to Philadelphia and New York City in 2015. Each of us has travelled extensively since then and experienced the pandemic in different ways, sometimes in the same city and other times across borders. Some, such as Lin, spent portions of the pandemic performing virtual home recitals that were broadcast over Facebook Live. Others, such as Eli, quit his doctoral program and moved indefinitely back to Mainland China. In this epilogue, I share where my interlocutors are today, in spring 2022. The COVID-19 pandemic presented incredible challenges since my interlocutors are performers of live music and Chinese nationals and/or immigrants. With in-person concerts cancelled, anti-Asian hate crimes abounding, flights to China difficult to secure and afford, prolonged lockdowns, and mental and physical illness exacerbated, each of their lives has been severely disrupted. Some have made significant changes to their lives and others patiently waited for pandemic restrictions to lift. This epilogue provides no argument, but rather more moments with my interlocutors and excerpts of our conversations over the years. I invite readers to “stand alongside” (Stevenson 2014: 157) them through these ethnographic vignettes that they have given me permission to share. I hope that through these final vignettes, further understanding can be gained about the contemporary lives of Chinese musicians.

In 2020, during the first few months of the pandemic, I called Lin and talked with him about his experiences being a new father. He had moved back to the U.S. and had a

toddler who would occasionally interrupt his online concerts that he held at home. His parents had also moved in with his family to help with childcare and to spend time with their grandson. As we spoke about family, the pandemic, and performance careers, the conversation turned to his relationship with his father. I provide here a portion of our conversation:

Lin: I [recently] had many conversations with my dad about my childhood, about how I started in music ... the one thing he kept saying was, if he could go back, he wouldn't be as harsh as he used to [be].

Shelley: What made him change his mind?

L: That's a good question. I don't know ... I was surprised, but he just kept telling me he had no choice because it was so competitive and we weren't a wealthy family, he really wanted me to become, not someone, but have a job. It's really easy [for someone to just] graduate from school and become a person with no job. So that's why he was very hard on me. I think maybe because my child was born, I don't know, it's just something ... It's really interesting, because he was the one who really pushed me into the music, he was the one who really pushed me to play the violin ...

S: Would you want your child to learn music as well?

L: Sure! I want him to learn music. However, I don't expect him to become a professional. Actually, I don't want him to [laughs]. Because it's so competitive. The competition here in the States, in Canada, it's brutal. It's really hard [and] getting harder ... So I just want him to do whatever he really loves. If he really loves music, then sure, I'll help him, I'll do my best. But if he wants something else, I'll be supportive. I won't force him to do something he won't like.

Since becoming a father himself, Lin and his father had reconciled and spoken about his difficult childhood. His father's words show the extreme pressures on parents of only children, who also felt that they "had no choice because it was so competitive" to get a job. During our conversation, Lin also shared that his father had sincerely apologized for how he had treated him as a child. As heartbreaking as the reality of his childhood was, the

interactions Lin has now with his father also show that there can be healing in generations impacted by war, revolution, and loss.

Shelley: "Hey, you made it!"

Fei: "Yeab, I'm in Philly for a bit before heading back to New York."

S: "You've been so busy lately! That's amazing with all the concerts going on!"

F: "Yeab."

S: "You must be exhausted ... you've been travelling so much."

F: "It's okay. After doing nothing for two years, it's okay to be busy now."

Fei spent the first part of the pandemic in her small Manhattan apartment with a keyboard. In 2021, she moved back to Philadelphia, where she is completing a post-graduate degree at Curtis. She will soon move back to New York for another post-graduate degree at Juilliard. The performance opportunities that were delayed during the pandemic have finally been realized, with new opportunities continually arising. As a result, she has been travelling extensively between different countries in Europe, New York, and Philadelphia. In 2021, she performed at La Scala, acquired a year of artistic management, won a recording contract for her first album, and secured seven more concerts in Italy and Germany, to be performed within the next year. It is a wonderful, and exhausting, time for her.

A surprising aspect of these successes is the low pay of young artists. Fei, like some of her peers who were performing with ensembles and winning significant competitions, was getting paid less than \$1,200USD for each performance. Her pay for a debut with a major North American orchestra was in the form of roundtrip train tickets, which cost less than \$100USD combined. These levels of compensation are also surprising to Fei and her peers,

some of whom are flown into a country to perform, only to realize they are responsible for their own commute to their arranged hotels. While a prepared taxi might seem like a luxury, it is noteworthy that these musicians are not informed of these travel details. With shockingly low payments of less than \$1,200USD, it is a further surprise to navigate a foreign country alone and potentially spend \$100USD or more on taxis to and from airports. That cost is almost a tenth of their compensation. Moreover, not all cities in which they perform have metro systems and public transportation may be slow and inconvenient. Some concerts may be within hours of their flight landing and musicians would be traveling with a carry-on and their performance dress, at the very least. While recitals and orchestra concerts are viewed as prestigious cultural events, the experiences of young artists do not always correlate with the glamor imagined. Nevertheless, Fei and her peers have continued to strive for more opportunities. It is a tiring and stressful time for her, but she is realizing dreams she had as a child to perform at La Scala and to build an international performing career.

Shelley: "Are you playing your grandfather's cello?"

Rosalind: "No, the orchestra provides you with travel instruments."

S: "They provide you with instruments? Wow, that sounds nice."

R: "They're not great, but they're easier to travel with. I left my cello in New York. I don't want to get it damaged."

S: "Do you think you'd want to play with this orchestra after the tour? Or go into orchestral playing in general?"

R: "I don't know. It's good experience and cool insight into this world."

Rosalind shrugged off the uncertainty as if it wasn't significant, but I knew she was asking herself the same questions and dwelling on them.

Rosalind Zhang is the granddaughter of Li Delun who was born and raised in Toronto. Since spring 2020, she had been grounded in Toronto, separated from her primary instrument, which she had left in Beijing in late 2019. Prior to the pandemic, she was a freelance cellist who had lived between Beijing, Shanghai, and a town in Germany. Before the pandemic began, she returned to Toronto, where her parents were located, for Christmas and the Lunar New Year. She left her favored cello, which was her grandfather's, in Beijing since she expected to return in March 2020. When the pandemic began, she remained in Toronto, where she has spent the last two years. Unable to reach her cello, which sits in her brother's unoccupied apartment in Beijing since he, too, has been grounded in Toronto, she hopes that its condition has not deteriorated too seriously.¹²⁹

When I asked Rosalind about her cello and playing with the orchestra in 2017, she was on an international tour with the China National Centre Performing Arts (NCPA) Orchestra that included a concert in Philadelphia. I met her after their concert in the famed Verizon Hall, where the Philadelphia Orchestra usually performs. Her cello is a black carbon instrument and a prized possession. As instruments may be damaged during travel, and some airlines may unpredictably insist that larger instruments be placed in checked luggage, many musicians have secondary instruments that are less valuable and with which they travel.¹³⁰ In Rosalind's situation in 2017, the NCPA Orchestra had provided instruments, which was a

¹²⁹ Like all wooden instruments, cellos are susceptible to changes in temperature, humidity, and overall climate. The wood could potentially split if conditions are poor, which could permanently damage the instrument. Since both Rosalind and her brother have been in Toronto, no one has managed the apartment, including moderating internal temperatures during the changing seasons.

¹³⁰ Different airlines have unique standards. Generally, instruments around the size of a violin may be carry-on items. Larger instruments, such as cellos, may occupy a seat on a flight for 50% the cost of a human passenger. In unfortunate cases, musicians may be forced to check an instrument, which could lead to severe damage if mishandled.

generous provision. Although she was eventually offered a position in the orchestra, which is a very coveted achievement, Rosalind decided to ultimately freelance. Various factors have led many instrumentalists to eschew large ensemble life: arduous rehearsal schedules, insufficient pay, challenging leadership and a lack of artistic freedom, and poor management are common reasons why some musicians are even leaving orchestra positions. This is not to imply these were Rosalind's reasons, but to show that even if offered job security and benefits, some musicians may choose a more precarious, but flexible, life due to a range of factors. In spring 2022, Rosalind was still freelancing and serves as one of the executive directors of the Li Delun Music Foundation, which is based in Toronto.

Ang has also been based in Toronto throughout the pandemic. While all of her in-person concerts from spring 2020 to fall 2021 were cancelled, Ang hosted many virtual concerts with other musicians. Her entrepreneurial spirit led her to find new sponsors for her trio, which includes a violinist and cellist, and to create new concert formats and collaborations. In November 2021, her trio performed for an audience for the first time in a year and a half. In March 2022, they put on an ambitious, multi-sensory concert program that paired paintings and digital media installations with their performances of new music by contemporary Canadian composers. These pieces were created specifically for the trio. Ticket demand was so high that they added a second performance, as the first sold out quickly. In total, they gave the world premiere of 6 compositions. With these successes, Ang still remains open-minded to future opportunities in the East and Southeast Asian region.

By March 2022, Eli had quit his DMA at Manhattan School of Music (MSM) because it had become unaffordable after MSM withdrew his funding during the pandemic. With MSM claiming heavy financial losses, Eli was still required to pay full tuition but without the financial aid he was promised and with only online classes. Unlike Fei, he was able to secure a flight back to China early in the pandemic, but paid about \$5,000USD in addition to his quarantine hotel. While he attempted to continue his DMA virtually, the expenses eventually became unbearable. After initially pausing it, he ultimately left the program and taught more in Shenzhen. He is now a professor of classical guitar at a university in Hong Kong, which has provided him with financial security. As Hong Kong neighbors Shenzhen, Eli is able to live in the same city as some of his family. Due to Hong Kong's outbreak of the omicron variant of COVID-19, Eli and all of Shenzhen were under a severe lockdown in March 2022. While he is overall satisfied with his present circumstance, lockdown aside, he does regret leaving his doctorate incomplete. However, he is grateful to have returned to the PRC in spring 2020, before the pandemic situation worsened and anti-Asian hate crimes severely escalated in the U.S.

This pandemic understandably brought new challenges to each of my interlocutors' careers. They were also deeply troubled by the widespread violence and harassment against Asians in various parts of the world. In March 2021, they and much of the world were shocked as news broke out of a mass shooting in Atlanta where six women of Asian descent were murdered. The event and the ensuing news cycle put on further display the spectacle that can be made of light-skinned, East Asian women. Femicide and Orientalism spurred media machines. An undercurrent of this news was the stereotype of Asian women working

in spas and nail salons. Why do they? What were their lives before this? While we have all seen the eruption of violence towards East Asians and other minorities during the pandemic, I cannot help but feel that there is still a lack of human representation that prioritizes who we are, where we come from, what we have survived, and what has led to the present circumstance. This threat of and actualization of violence has influenced some of my interlocutors' decisions, as some stayed indoors for considerable amounts of time, others left the city, and others left the country, indefinitely. In addition to the responsibilities and precarity of being an only child, Chinese musicians also contend with the socio-political, racialized context in North America. These challenges have caused many to doubt their futures on this side of the Pacific and have augmented the vulnerabilities they feel as international students.

In my work, I contextualize musical practice within China's recent history of traumatic upheaval, generational losses, and political revolution. These significantly influence artistic practices and desires, as can be seen in the generation of Chinese musicians born in the first two decades after the Cultural Revolution. Many of my interlocutors are only children who have family members that lost musical dreams. For some, it led to very difficult childhoods. For all, the one-child policy introduced new dynamics of family pressure on a sole heir to previously large families from the Maoist revolutionary years. Yet this is not to say that the children did not come to love this music in time. They all did, as their musical practice became the most consistent thread in their lives through migration, homesickness, displacement, and racialization. Their networks also became strong, as they moved through rigorous conservatory programs that required different language skills, economic resources, and family sacrifices. Through these moments of transnationalism and precarity, they

befriended other Chinese musicians who could share a language and deeply empathize with their experiences. As Lin said of his peers, “We are one generation.”

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