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He Luting: Musical Defiance in Maoist China

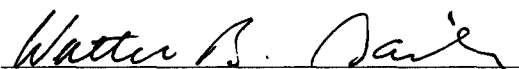
by

Sarah Spencer Rawley

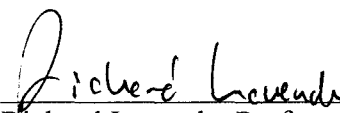
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ABSTRACT

He Luting: Musical Defiance in Maoist China

by

Sarah Spencer Rawley

Composer and educator He Luting (1903-1999) became one of the most influential musical figures in China's history. Trained in the Western classical tradition, He Luting promulgated the musical techniques of the West while dedicating himself to raising the standards of music in modern China. His outspoken advocacy of Western classical music rendered him a target during the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), causing him to become a victim of one of the earliest and most vicious attacks of that campaign. His bravery and defiance garnered him national attention, and he achieved legendary status for thousands of Chinese intellectuals terrorized by that regime.

This document will show the effects of the ever-changing political climate of Maoist China on Chinese musicians, as reflected in the life and career of He Luting. A thorough examination of the humble beginnings and life experiences of He Luting will clearly portray the ways in which the changing polemics of the Communist Party influenced the musical education and compositional style of prominent Chinese musicians. This document also depicts how the writings of Claude Debussy attracted the notice of those in the highest levels of government, and how He Luting's subsequent defense of Debussy's writings resulted in what they deemed "the most serious counterrevolutionary incident prior to the Cultural Revolution." He Luting's subsequent interrogation and violent abuse (which had the distinction of being the only live,

televised struggle session during this regime) is portrayed, as well as its effects on intellectuals throughout China. A detailed account of the sufferings of prominent musicians in Shanghai and their persecution by the government is also given in comparison with the case of He Luting. Other issues explored will include the importance of music in Maoist China, and why many musicians were persecuted for defending a musical culture that was not their own.

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INTRODUCTION

Composer He Luting (1903-1999) was one of the most influential Chinese musicians of his generation. He wrote over two hundred works for orchestra, piano and other instruments, as well as operas, cantatas, and songs for films and other genres. His music enjoys a perennial life in the standard repertoire of contemporary Chinese music.¹ Although many professional Chinese musicians of his generation adopted an almost Western-biased and colonial view of their own traditional music, He Luting remained faithful to the best attributes of Chinese music while endorsing the introduction of Western harmony and counterpoint as “scientific” improvements to the music traditions of China.

As an educator, He Luting worked for over sixty years training qualified musicians to promote the continued development of Chinese music. His emphasis on discipline, high standards, and his generosity towards his students were among the more salient aspects of his reputation as a teacher. Among the first graduates of the Shanghai Conservatory, he became president of that institution in 1949. The concert hall at the conservatory is named for him.

Although he remains distinguished for his notable contributions to Chinese music and his tireless efforts in national music education, He Luting’s renown extends beyond the realm of music. During the dark days of the Cultural Revolution, He emerged as a hero for the thousands of Chinese intellectuals who had been victimized by the collective

1. Penhai, Dai. "Personalities in World Music Education No.6 - He Luting." *International Journal of Music Education*, 1988: 41-45.

efforts of Chairman Mao and the Gang of Four. He Luting's courage has garnered him legendary status; successive generations of Chinese speak of him with awe to this day.

Prior to his victimization by its highest-ranking officials, the patriotic He Luting devoted himself and his family to the Chinese Communist Party. After joining the Party in 1926, he became one of its most loyal servants, eagerly obeying the Party's directives by traveling to the most desolate regions in order to train musicians to serve the Party. His revolutionary songs and other compositions in support of the Party attracted the notice of no less than Chairman Mao himself.

To anyone familiar with the chaos and destruction of Cultural Revolution, it should come as no surprise that the Communist Party would repay the diligent efforts of one of its most assiduous supporters with unbridled suspicion and hostility. The ultimate tragedy of this turbulent decade (1966-1976) was the treachery of colleagues, students, friends, and family, as the campaign nearly destroyed normal human relationships in China during this period. Indeed, as those second in command only to Chairman Mao were deposed and (in certain cases) killed, it was evident by the end of the Cultural Revolution that no one was safe. What was unusual about the case of He Luting was that prior to persecuting its top officials, the Party selected a musician as the target for one of the earliest and most venomous national campaigns of the Cultural Revolution.

He Luting would almost certainly have been targeted eventually, as would any Chinese citizen with affiliations to Western culture. His education in Western music and his promotion of its theories and standards would have assuredly marked him as a dangerous "bourgeois" element (although proponents of ancient Chinese music were

attacked with equal force.) But what is striking about He Luting's case is that his defense of Western music (most notably, the writings of composer Claude Debussy) attracted the notice of the highest echelon of the Communist Party, who labeled the defense of Debussy "the most serious counter-revolutionary incident prior to the Cultural Revolution."² The musician He Luting was also selected by the Gang of Four for one of the most sinister experiments in torture and exploitation during their regime, as they sought to make a national example of him. He Luting's courage throughout his ordeals had a lasting impact on millions throughout China; his conduct affected more people than his music. It has been said that "no composer ever made a braver stand against totalitarianism."³

There has been far too little written on the subject of the victimization of musicians and the suppression of Western music during the Cultural Revolution in the People's Republic of China. While the political struggles over the ideology of music and the plight of musicians in European countries during totalitarian regimes have been well documented, the unique challenges and perils facing Chinese musicians during this period have remained somewhat underreported. The life of He Luting provides the ultimate case study of the effects that the ever-changing political climate had on Chinese musicians, particularly those who promulgated Western music and its compositional techniques. In China as in other countries subjected to the control and dictatorships and regimes of terror, those in power were quick to recognize the persuasive power of music.

2. Cai, Sheila Melvin and Jindong. *Rhapsody in Red: How Western Classical Music Became Chinese*. New York: Algora Publishing, 2004.

3. Ross, Alex. *The Rest is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007.

They saw the necessity of either manipulating music for their political gain or stamping it out of existence altogether. He Luting's case also depicts one of the great incongruities of the Cultural Revolutions: many musicians who lost their freedom, their families, and often their lives by defending a musical culture that was not their own. Those who managed to experience and survive the Cultural Revolution belong to an older generation that is steadily in decline. Their stories deserve to be told.

He Luting's story will undoubtedly prove both instructive and inspirational to musicians of all levels, but its importance stretches beyond the boundaries of music. It is a story about refusing to participate in a culture of ignorance and chaos, no matter what the consequences might be. It is a story about holding fast to one's beliefs and ideals, no matter how small or insignificant. It is a story about how one musician's sacrifices and courage gave strength to millions of people. It depicts music's ability to embolden people to destroy lives as well as save them. It leaves no doubt that music can engender heroes, even in the darkest of times.

CHAPTER ONE: ANATOMY OF A STRUGGLE SESSION

The Musician

We have been afraid of professors ever since we came into the towns, we did not despise them, we were terrified of them. When confronted by people with piles of learning we felt that we were good for nothing. We must not tolerate it any longer. Naturally we cannot go out tomorrow and beat them up.⁴

– Chairman Mao, 1958

When they came for him at the end of April, 1968, He Luting knew what to expect. Like tens of thousands of Chinese, He Luting had already been dragged to innumerable “struggle sessions” to be verbally and physically assaulted for alleged crimes against Chairman Mao. By 1968, “denunciation meetings” had become a major feature of the Cultural Revolution. They invariably involved a hysterical crowd and were seldom without physical brutality.⁵

He Luting had already endured numerous painful and violent verbal and physical attacks, both during public struggle sessions and during house raids by the Red Guards. His family was usually ordered to kneel on the floor; they were then beaten with the brass buckles of the Red Guards’ leather belts. On one occasion, the Red Guards dragged Mr. He and his wife to a middle school classroom and forced the couple to kneel on desks while they beat them with their belts. After the beating, they made He’s wife, Jiang

4. John Chinnery and Tiejun, edited by Stuart Schram. *Chairman Mao Talks to the People*. New York: Pantheon Books, Random House, Inc., 1974.

5. Chang, Jung. *Wild Swans*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991.

Ruizhi, kneel on the floor so they could chop off her hair, and then they ran away.⁶ To have one's head shaved (particularly on one side only) was an emblematic gesture of persecution during the Cultural Revolution known as the "yin and yang" head, thus named because it resembled the class Chinese symbol of a dark side (*yin*) and a light side (*yang*.)⁷ Mr. He and his wife were just preparing to escape when the Red Guards returned to commit one last act of cruelty, dumping ink all over their heads and faces.⁸

He Luting was subjected to increasingly brutal struggle sessions, one after another in what was called "rotating struggle," the intent of which was to break the object of the session both mentally and physically.⁹ He was also the object of what was known as the "traveling struggle," whereupon he was bound by ropes and paraded through the streets as children threw rocks at him, and crowds summoned by loudspeakers jeered and chanted slogans against him.¹⁰ He was forced to parade in a circuit around his workplace wearing a signboard around his neck,¹¹ the inscription of which is not documented; however, it more than likely bore an unimaginative slogan such as "I AM A BASTARD

6. Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 237.

7. Chang. *Wild Swans*: 285.

8. Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 237.

9. "This exposure to one struggle meeting after another, called "rotating struggle," was a mind-numbing experience. Day after day, my ears were filled with the sound of angry, accusing voices, my eyes were blurred by images of hostile faces, and my body ached from rough handling and abuse. I no longer felt like a human being, just an inanimate object. Sometimes my spirit seemed to leave my body to look on the scene with detachment." Cheng, Nien. *Life and Death in Shanghai*. New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1986.

10. Shapiro, Liang Heng and Judith. *Son of the Revolution*. New York: Random House, Inc., 1983.

11. Kraus, Richard Curt. *Pianos & Politics in China*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.

or I AM A FOOL.”¹² It is possible that he may have struggled to stand upright and walk with an actual blackboard removed from a classroom, which was attached by a heavy chain around his neck.¹³

When they came for him at the end of April, 1968, He Luting had been imprisoned and in the custody of the Shanghai city police for approximately a month. While the conditions in the jail where he was held were deplorable, they were not markedly different from Mr. He’s standard of living for almost a year. At the end of the summer in 1967, He Luting’s home was ransacked by the Red Guards.¹⁴ Newspapers had announced that the mission of the Red Guards was to eradicate the country of the “Four Olds”: old culture, old customs, old habits, and old ways of thinking. There was no clear definition of “old”; it was left to the Red Guards to decide.¹⁵ This explicit official encouragement of vandalism led the Red Guards to destroy virtually anything they deemed “bourgeois” or “feudal;” and later anything that could be considered remotely “foreign” or counterrevolutionary. The homes of those under attack during the Cultural Revolution were raided and often occupied by the “revolutionary rebels,” the resident’s possessions removed, stolen, or destroyed.¹⁶ If the Red Guards did not immediately

12. Heng and Shapiro, *Son of the Revolution*: 77.

13. Thurston, Anne F. *Enemies of the People*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1987.

14. Kraus, *Pianos & Politics*: 123.

15. Cheng, *Life and Death in Shanghai*: 62.

16. Thurston, *Enemies of the People*: 117.

destroy one's personal possessions, it was common practice for them to be confiscated, particularly if they were valuable.¹⁷

The Red Guards repeatedly emptied everything from He Luting's house, down to the last quilt cover; they persecuted him and his family in his house, on the streets to and from work, and at his school. Mr. He and his wife, both musicians, often left early in the morning to hide in the thickets of the Western Suburbs Park, returning home only after dark.¹⁸ The atmosphere outside was terrifying, with the violent street-corner denunciation meetings and all the sinister wall posters and slogans; people were walking around like zombies, with harsh or cowed expressions on their faces.¹⁹ One day He Luting returned home early to eat. The Red Guards, who were already at his home, then dragged him to the school, blindfolded him with a black cloth, and began beating him with belts. Both his clothes and skin were torn. His wife, Jiang Ruizhi, was also beaten and suffered multiple wounds. That night, the couple, supporting each other, attempted to return home, only to run into another crowd, which dragged them back to school and tormented them the entire night.²⁰ He Luting and Jiang Ruizhi's shaved heads and bruised, ink-stained faces easily identified them as condemned; if they went out they ran the risk of being abused. There was nowhere they could hide.

17. "We took a lot of things away with us that day. We took most of the beautiful souvenirs from abroad. I don't know where they went or what happened to them." Ibid: 117.

18. Gao, Yan Jiaqi and Gao. *Turbulent Decade: A History of the Cultural Revolution*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1996.

19. Chang, *Wild Swans*: 332.

20. Gao and Yan: *Turbulent Decade*: 80.

On that day at the end of April, 1968, He would have heard the screaming of thousands of people before he was dragged to the stage by the Red Guards. There were thousands present at his last struggle session, organized by the Shanghai Revolutionary Committee. They were shouting slogans, waving the Little Red Book (containing the quotations of Chairman Mao) in the air, and wildly denouncing He Luting as an enemy of the people. He knew what to expect. His head and shoulders would be forcibly shoved down, presenting a submissive, repentant impression while the assembled crowd worked itself into a fury and the interrogator shouted at him with increasing ferocity. He would be spat on, kicked, and beaten as he attempted to remain upright. This would last for several hours. He would doubtless spend the majority of the struggle session in the position known as the “jet plane”: the body was bent over from the waist into a right angle, and the arms, elbows stiff and straight, were behind the back, one hand grasping the other at the wrist.²¹ The torments used during the Cultural Revolution were rarely unpredictable; by this time those in the Party had learned that it was ill-advised to try to be original, even in matters of torture.

If at some point in the struggle session He Luting was “accidentally” pushed too hard, or if he could not withstand the physical torture, then death was a very real and imminent possibility. As a known counterrevolutionary, he would assuredly be denied any medical treatment. But Mr. He knew this; he had been threatened with death at his last struggle session. An enraged Red Guard informed him that if he continued to behave the way he did, he would die. He replied that before he died, he had two requests – he

21. “I met one wizened old man who talked about his experience with a great sense of humor. I asked him about the “jet position,” which inflicted so much pain on the victims. He lightly brushed it aside, saying that it was used on everyone.” Cheng, *Life and Death in Shanghai*: 276.

wanted to finish his seven-section orchestra piece and he wanted to clear himself of all false accusations.²²

He Luting was not innocent of the charges about to be leveled against him, and he knew it. He could not deny that he had invited students into his home to listen to his private recordings of European music. He did encourage his students to take part in international competitions. He did resist sending his students to factories and villages for political work.²³ He Luting did not deny having committed these crimes. But he still could not fathom why they were considered crimes at all; thus, he could not be made to repent. The Cultural Revolution was a series of endless upheavals, and when a policy changed from above, the standard of values changed with it. Survival became dependent on one's adaptability to discomfiting and unpredictable changes of circumstance and reason. In a society where one was at the mercy of one political campaign after another, where what was right yesterday became wrong today and vice versa, He Luting remained unwilling and unable to change.

The glare of the klieg lights was temporarily blinding as the Red Guard dragged He Luting onto the stage. The noise of the assembled crowd was deafening. He was trembling with rage.²⁴ They were waiting for him.

22. Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 238.

23. Kraus, *Pianos & Politics*: 122.

24. Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 238.

The Audience

We have been afraid of professors ever since we came into the towns, we did not despise them, we were terrified of them. When confronted by people with piles of learning we felt that we were good for nothing. We must not tolerate it any longer. Naturally we cannot go out tomorrow and beat them up.²⁵

– Chairman Mao, 1958

When the crowd assembled for the struggle session against He Luting, they knew what to expect, and they knew what was expected of them. Struggle sessions, always dehumanizing, sometimes violent, were the primary and most frequent means through which the accused were attacked. They were usually held in the work unit of the accused – in classrooms, offices, or auditoriums – and it was the colleagues, students, friends, and sometimes even relatives, people one knew and saw every day, who participated in the attacks. Subordinates were pitted against superiors, students against teachers, friends against friends, colleagues against colleagues, and, often children against parents and spouse against spouse, rending the very fabric of Chinese society.²⁶ During past struggle sessions, the attackers were undoubtedly people well-known to He Luting, but there were just as many who were strangers to him. The style of the period was to recruit critics from all walks of life. Workers from local factories and peasants from nearby communes had been bused in for the spectacle. On a single day, a soldier from the local garrison, a worker from the Yangshupu Power Plant, a police clerk, a music publisher, and a suburban propaganda team member all lambasted He Luting. On another day, the struggle came from two other soldiers, a middle-school student, and staff of the cultural

25. John Chinnery and Tieyun, edited by Stuart Schram. *Chairman Mao Talks to the People*. New York: Pantheon Books, Random House, Inc., 1974.

26. Thurston, *Enemies of the People*: 121.

center in a suburban county. On yet a third day, the denouncers were two more military men, a worker in an electric appliance factory, a commune representative, and musicians from the Shanghai Philharmonic and the Shanghai Choir.²⁷ What electrical appliance workers or soldiers who had never met He Luting knew about his “political crimes” was anyone’s guess, and it hardly mattered. Most who saw the absurdity of the situation were too frightened to speak their minds. They were incapable of rational thinking in those days, too cowed and contorted by fear and indoctrination. Deviating from the path laid down by Mao would have been inconceivable. They had been overwhelmed by deceptive rhetoric, disinformation, and hypocrisy, which made it virtually impossible to see through the situation and to form an intelligent judgment.²⁸

Even without knowing the victim of the struggle session, the audience on that day would have already deduced several facts about He Luting. It was almost a foregone conclusion that he was an “intellectual.” Intellectuals were major victims of Shanghai’s Cultural Revolution.²⁹ Chairman Mao said that intellectuals were like evil spirits in human form when they pretended to support the Communist Party.³⁰ During the Cultural Revolution, all intellectuals, whether Party members or not, were denounced as “the stinking ninth category” of enemies.³¹ The ninth category, the intellectuals, included not

27. White, Lynn T. *Policies of Chaos*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989.

28. Chang, *Wild Swans*: 304.

29. The literature in English on the 1966-68 persecution of intellectuals is extensive. White, *Policies of Chaos*: 1989.

30. Cheng, *Life and Death in Shanghai*: 16.

31. The eight other categories of enemies were landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, bad elements, rightists, traitors, foreign agents, and “capitalist-roaders.” Ibid: 178.

only people with degree working as professors or research fellows but also schoolteachers, technicians, and white-collar office workers. The word “stink” used as a Chinese slang word also meant “unjustified pride.” Because intellectuals were often thought to be arrogant and proud of their superior knowledge or training, and because they enjoyed positions of honor in traditional Chinese society, the Revolutionaries called them the “stinking” ninth category to show their contempt for both the intellectuals and the Chinese tradition.³²

That He Luting was in fact a highly-respected professor would have come as no surprise to anyone in the assembled audience that day. Chairman Mao’s unexplained paranoia and contempt where university professors were concerned was widely known by that time.³³ In practically every school in China, teachers were abused and beaten, sometimes fatally.³⁴ Those intellectuals allowed to remain in the cities were assigned the work of common laborers in their organizations. It was the practice of that time to have medical doctors emptying bedpans in the hospitals, professors cleaning toilets in the universities, and artists and musicians building walls and repairing roads. While they were doing these things, they had to attend struggle meetings and political indoctrination classes at which they had to abuse themselves by “confessing” to their “crimes.” Indeed, Mao’s abuse of intellectuals reached an unprecedented level of cruelty during the

32. Ibid: 178.

33. “He has to pay a price for being a professor whenever there is a political campaign. Professors always seem to become the targets.” Ibid: 23.

34. Chang, *Wild Swans*: 282.

Cultural Revolution. It very nearly destroyed China's tradition of respect and scholarship.³⁵

The audience would not have been surprised when they learned that He Luting was not only a professor, but head of the Shanghai Academy of Music, an institution whose national prestige was perhaps only rivaled by the Central Conservatory in Beijing. The talent and intellect which had garnered He Luting such a position, a position which would have engendered respect and even reverence under a different era, would prove to be his downfall. In an era which prized conformity and where one strove to remain invisible, the conspicuousness of such an important and influential position was certainly a liability. By 1957, the Communist Party (in power since 1949) had come to exercise considerable power within Chinese universities. Full authority over all aspects of university life, academic and administrative alike, was vested in the central party committee, and academic departments in turn were controlled by their branch party secretaries, who stood as direct links in the chain of command from center to department. Both academically and administratively, Chinese universities came frankly and fully under direct party control.³⁶ As the regime in the schools and universities came under increasing attack and criticism from Chairman Mao, it was not unusual for the presidents and principals to be singled out for struggle sessions.³⁷

35. Cheng, *Life and Death in Shanghai*: 188.

36. Thurston, *Enemies of the People*: 73.

37. "Anyway, in the last analysis, the more senior you are the more likely you are to get into trouble. 'A big tree catches the wind' is a true saying." Cheng, *Life and Death in Shanghai*: 27.

The audience might not have guessed that He Luting was acquainted with party officials of the highest national levels, or that he had been honored with meeting Chairman Mao himself, to the mutual satisfaction of both men. Had the audience known, they would also have been astute enough to recognize that these associations would not save He Luting. Political commitment was hardly a reliable indicator of who would be cut down by the Cultural Revolution's scythe. Each new phase of the movement, each change in the prevailing line, brought a new wave of persecutions, as the "revolutionaries" of one phase became the "counterrevolutionaries" of the next. People became victims for a wide variety of reasons, at very different times.³⁸ Indeed, the people of China had been witness to the purge of their president, Liu Shaoqi, who had undergone notorious and highly-publicized struggle sessions himself. He became not only a target of attack, but also a scapegoat and a symbol of opposition against which the Cultural Revolution was waged. For the past two years, his treatment had epitomized the escalating polemics of the Cultural Revolution.³⁹

When He Luting was finally dragged to the stage before the assembled crowd that day in 1968, he was almost sixty-five years old. No one in the audience would have been surprised at this point to see a dignified, older gentleman singled out for verbal abuse and physical punishment. A society that was known for its respect for age now persecuted the elderly, a living reminder of the "Four Olds," which were meant to be swept away. Those brought up to be courteous and respectful to anyone older than their elders now knew that

38. Thurston, *Enemies of the People*: 39.

39. Changgen, Barbara Barnouin and Yu. *Ten Years of Turbulence*. London: Kegan Paul International Ltd., 1993.

to be revolutionary meant being aggressive and militant. Gentleness was considered “bourgeois.” They had been taught to be ruthless to class enemies. Failure to do so would make them class enemies themselves.⁴⁰

Perhaps some of the audience may have felt justified in their participation; perhaps they believed He Luting to be an imperialist spy (as they were told.) It seemed that every day people were exposed as evil ones lurking behind Revolutionary masks. Friendly people were hidden serpents, revolutionaries became counterrevolutionaries, and trusted officials might actually be murderers. It was confusing because the charges came so fast. The Cultural Revolution was getting more complicated. It was hard to keep track of who was right and who wrong.⁴¹ But it hardly mattered; one was not free to do or think what one wanted. The Communist Party said black was white and white was black, and everyone agreed with alacrity. There was not a single murmur of dissent.⁴²

On that day at the end of April, 1968, the thousands gathered to struggle against He Luting reasonably knew what to expect from him. He would be forced onto the stage in a posture of obsequiousness. He would be pushed, beaten, and subjected to continued harangues until he was forced to confess to his “crimes.” There would probably be no dramatic, tearful declaration of repentance. But he would read a long statement he had prepared in advance, full of self-abuse and exaggeration. He might even raise his fist and join the crowd in shouting the same slogans, including those against him.⁴³ He might

40. Chang, *Wild Swans*: 290.

41. Heng and Shapiro, *Son of the Revolution*: 45.

42. Wong, Jan. *Red China Blues*. Toronto: Doubleday Canada Limited, 1996.

43. Cheng, *Life and Death in Shanghai*: 17.

behave as one professor of Chinese did, who became so frightened that he got down on his knees and begged to be forgiven, only to be sneered at as a pitiful spineless wretch.⁴⁴ Or he might “accidentally” be killed as the audience watched, powerless even in their vast numbers to prevent it. Death caused in this way came to have a special term in Chinese: *po-hai zhi-si* – “persecuted to death.”⁴⁵

The room was already unbearably hot, and the audience was getting restive. The struggle session would be barely concluded before the majority of them would be heading for the exits.⁴⁶ In some work units, the struggle sessions and various other political meetings were so numerous and lasted so far into the night that those who lived a distance away often could not return home in the evenings.⁴⁷ Perhaps they would be able to grab a snack on the way home, or perhaps they would make it home in time for dinner. For the time being, at least, they had managed to escape being led to the stage themselves.

44. Ningkan, Wu. *A Single Tear*. New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1993.

45. Chang, *Wild Swans*: 391.

46. Cheng, *Life and Death in Shanghai*: 15.

47. Thurston, *Enemies of the People*: 121.

The Assailants

It is up to us to organize the people. As for the reactionaries in China, it is up to us to organize the people to overthrow them. Everything reactionary is the same; if you don't hit it, it won't fall. This is also like sweeping the floor; as a rule, where the broom does not reach, the dust will not vanish of itself.⁴⁸

– Chairman Mao, August 13, 1945

When the Party officials organized the struggle session against He Luting at the end of April, 1968, they knew what to expect. After all, they had been preparing for this particular struggle session for weeks, even months, one could say. He Luting was one of the earliest targets of the Cultural Revolution in Shanghai.⁴⁹ Big-character posters (typically the first indicator of the Party's intent to attack) criticizing Mr. He had appeared at the conservatory early on.⁵⁰ But by June 1966, Shanghai's newspapers criticized him by name, indicating a high-level decision to concentrate the movement against him.⁵¹ Similar articles were published and then re-published, not only in Shanghai, but throughout the nation. The quantity of articles criticizing He Luting was sizeable enough to be collected and released as a book called *Collection of Articles Criticizing He Luting*. Despite the professor's popularity with his colleagues and students, the abundance of information concerning his crimes and counterrevolutionary tendencies could not be ignored. Certainly, the Party had done everything in its power to expose this class enemy to the people.

48. Lin Biao, editor. *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-Tung ("The Little Red Book")*. Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1966.

49. Kraus, *Pianos & Politics*: 121.

50. Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 236.

51. Kraus, *Pianos & Politics*: 121.

The Party had spared no expense in preparation for this struggle session against He Luting. They knew that vigilance against class enemies could not be relaxed. They knew Chairman Mao's quote: "After the enemies with guns have been wiped out, there will still be enemies without guns; they are bound to struggle against us, and we must never regard these enemies lightly. If we do not now raise and understand the problem in this way, we shall commit the gravest of mistakes."⁵² Following Party procedure, the Red Guards from the conservatory had gone to He's native city of Shaoyang, Hunan, to gather old information against him.⁵³ In those days, every "capitalist-roader"⁵⁴ had one or more teams investigating his or her past in minute detail, because Chairman Mao wanted the history of everyone working for him thoroughly checked. Compiling detailed files on people's backgrounds had been a crucial part of the Communists' system of control even before they came to power.⁵⁵ Following leads into an accused person's activities in the past might involve journeys of a thousand miles or more, searching out people who had been his or her friends, colleagues, or enemies forty years earlier.⁵⁶ Investigators were sent everywhere He Luting had ever lived to gather "evidence" against him.⁵⁷

A standard technique in China to bring a person down was to draw together different charges to make the case appear more substantial. "Where there is a will to

52. Lin Biao, *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-Tung*: 1966.

53. White, *Policies of Chaos*: 1989.

54. In Maoist thought, a capitalist-roader was a person from the political left who demonstrated a marked tendency to bow to pressure from bourgeois forces and subsequently attempted to propel the Revolution in a capitalist direction.

55. Chang, *Wild Swans*: 196.

56. Chen, Jack. *Inside the Cultural Revolution*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1975.

57. Cai and Melvin: *Rhapsody in Red*: 238.

condemn, there is evidence,” as the Chinese saying has it.⁵⁸ As this was an intensely personal and vindictive form of politics, anything about one’s past might be seized upon and turned into an accusation. But the plethora of evidence gathered in the extensive background check on He Luting left the Party officials with more than enough information to denounce He Luting as a serious counterrevolutionary and an enemy of Chairman Mao. His classification as a bourgeois intellectual and his promulgation of Western capitalist music would have been more than enough to vilify him as a traitor. But He Luting had committed a reactionary crime so great as to render all the rest of the evidence superfluous: he had actually interrupted the infallible Chairman Mao while he was speaking at the August 24, 1956 “Talk with Music Workers.” There was only one other in all of China it seemed, with the audacity to do such a thing: President Liu Shaoqi.⁵⁹ It seemed almost probable that He Luting would suffer an even worse fate than that of the now-deposed president. Officials could see that no matter how high up you were and no matter what your standing, if you offended Mao you would fall into disgrace.⁶⁰

He Luting and his apparent inability to remain silent (a fatal offense in Maoist China) had given the Party officials more than they needed to convict him. The only thing they had not yet received was a confession, which was mandatory. Insisting on confessions was a standard practice. Forcing victims to admit their “guilt” was vital in

58. Chang, *Wild Swans*: 323.

59. “My father was at the conference and when he returned he said to my mother: ‘I fear Comrade Shaoqi is going to be in trouble.’” Ibid: 235.

60. Ibid: 229.

crushing their morale.⁶¹ The policy of the Great Leader Chairman Mao was: “Lenient treatment for those who confess, severe punishment for those who remain stubborn, and reward for those who render meritorious service by denouncing others.”⁶²

The Party officials were by now experts in extracting these “confessions,” even from the most stubborn and unwilling class enemies. If the presence of the over-zealous and brutal Red Guards and their “methods” proved unsuccessful, there were certainly other means by which a “confession” could be obtained. Coercing or assailing the accused’s family, for example, often achieved effective results. Once one member of a family came under attack, so too did all its members, spouse and children alike. Traditional Chinese law held not just the perpetrator accountable and punishable for crime, but also his family members. Thus in capital offenses, even the family of the criminal were subject to execution.⁶³ As with all class enemies, He Luting’s children were supposed to “draw a line” between themselves and their father. Many children of class enemies changed their surnames to demonstrate that they had disowned their fathers, and some even took part in denunciation meetings against their parents.⁶⁴ Wives were expected to draw a line of demarcation from their counterrevolutionary husbands by divorcing them.⁶⁵ Enormous pressure was placed on the families of the accused to

61. Ibid: 347.

62. Cheng, *Life and Death in Shanghai*: 182.

63. Thurston, *Enemies of the People*: 109.

64. One of President Liu Shaoqi’s daughters wrote wall posters “exposing” her father. Chang, *Wild Swans*: 363.

65. “We expect you to make clear at the next session how you’re going to draw a line of demarcation from your rightist husband.” The few women who occasionally stopped me on the way would urge me to get a divorce. Ningkan, *A Single Tear*: 80.

publicly denounce them and take part in their struggle sessions. When the spouse and the children refused to join as persecutors, they were often forced to accompany the accused, reluctant witnesses to the humiliation of the relative they refused to betray. They were given mandatory front-row seats in the struggle sessions against them.⁶⁶ He Luting's wife, daughters, and nieces had all steadfastly refused to denounce him. The officials in charge of the struggle session took care that his family, seated on the stage, was the first thing that He Luting saw as he was dragged to the struggle session.

The Communist Party officials were taking no chances with the behavior of the unrepentant He Luting. His family's presence was not the only means by which they hoped to control him. To bring him to his knees and to increase the likelihood that he submitted readily, they would make sure that he was mentally and physically exhausted. Weeks were spent constantly questioning him, attempting to confuse him. The officials took turns exerting pressure on him without allowing him to sleep. It was common knowledge that in these circumstances the victim usually broke down and submitted when he was on the verge of physical collapse and mental confusion. The Maoists named these inhuman tactics "exhaustive bombardment." When there was excessive cruelty that resulted in death, the officials would disclaim responsibility for an "accident" resulting from "mass enthusiasm."⁶⁷ He Luting may have been sixty-five years old, but the Party could not afford to be lenient to class enemies. Besides, his defiant attitude at his last struggle session was a scandalous occurrence, and an embarrassment to the Shanghai Revolutionary Committee. They could not afford any mistakes this time.

66. Thurston, *Enemies of the People*: 112.

67. Cheng, *Life and Death in Shanghai*: 20.

For this was to be no ordinary struggle session. This struggle session was conceptualized and organized at the highest level, by Madame Mao's right-hand man, Zhang Chunqiao: the director of the Shanghai Revolutionary Committee and the leader of the Communist Party in Shanghai. As a member of Madame Mao's "Gang of Four," Zhang acquired enormous power during the Cultural Revolution, almost succeeding Chairman Mao upon his death. (Indeed, many held the infamous "Gang of Four" responsible for the inception of the Cultural Revolution in the first place.) He Luting's fate was pursued and controlled by those at the highest level, whose ambitions aimed still higher. As He's "crimes" against Chairman Mao and the people were both uncontested and visible, they had picked the perfect scapegoat for an experimental struggle session engineered by Zhang Chunqiao.

The Chinese Communist Party has a tradition of believing that situations can be stabilized merely by relying on the "revolutionary masses" to haul out a few bad individuals. Involved in this thinking are other threads of thought, such as "killing one to teach a hundred," or "killing a hen to frighten the monkey."⁶⁸ With this belief firmly in mind, Zhang Chunqiao decided to broadcast major struggle sessions on live television. This would not only be more humiliating for the victim (and what would presumably break He Luting's spirit at last), but it would be more than effective to adequately frighten future protestors or enemies of the people.⁶⁹ There was precedent for this as well: on August 5, 1967, a movie camera had been sent by the revolutionaries to record the struggle session against the ex-President Liu Shaoqi and his wife in the courtyard of their

68. Gao and Yan, *Turbulent Decade*: 82.

69. Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 237.

home.⁷⁰ Surely, a live broadcast would make a greater and more immediate impact upon the masses.

To ensure that the session would go smoothly, several run-throughs were held. On this historic occasion, Zhang Chunqiao decided to oversee the live broadcast himself. He delegated the task of running the criticism session to Yu Huiyong:⁷¹ a former student and teacher at the Shanghai Conservatory, and a former colleague of He Luting. His animosity towards the conservatory and He Luting in particular was well-established, and he was a reliable and logical choice to lead the struggle session against his former superior. Acting on such long-held grudges was not rare in the Cultural Revolution.⁷² Many officials used the campaign to settle personal scores.⁷³

After weeks of preparation, and after months of endless campaigning, they were finally ready. This would be their finest hour, and there would be no mistakes. All across Shanghai, work units gathered their employees together to watch the struggle session against the musician, He Luting, unfold on live television.⁷⁴ And everyone thought they knew what to expect.

What happened was what no one expected. No one could have foreseen that one musician's courage would impact millions of lives in China.

70. By the end of the struggle session, Liu Shaoqi's face was swollen and bruised. Many of the beatings had been administered with Chairman Mao's little red book of revolutionary quotations. Thurston, *Enemies of the People*: 124.

71. Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 238.

72. Kraus, *Pianos & Politics*: 122.

73. Chang, *Wild Swans*: 217.

74. Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 237.

CHAPTER TWO: FROM PEASANT TO PRESIDENT

The wealth of society is created by the workers, peasants, and working intellectuals. If they take their destiny into their own hands, follow a Marxist-Leninist line and take an active attitude in solving problems instead of evading them, there will be no difficulty in the world which they cannot overcome.⁷⁵

– Chairman Mao, 1955

One of the more salient characteristics of Maoist China was the ability of its officials to uncover surreptitious and treacherous meanings in the most casual of actions and the slightest of utterances. The revolutionaries unscrupulously twisted seemingly insignificant events from one's past, recasting them in a sinister, counterrevolutionary light. "Where there is a will to condemn, there is evidence."⁷⁶ However, it would require considerable investigation and innovative adroitness of propaganda techniques to discover any real defect in the early life and career of He Luting. The first half of his life depicts only the exemplary and infallible mission of a musician, educator, and Communist.

In an era where the people were continually exhorted to "Learn from the Peasants!" and informed that the "landlords" and well-to-do were unvaryingly "class enemies," the humbler one's origins, the more politically reliable one was considered to be. Even the most fervent Maoist would have had difficulty in finding fault with He Luting's background. He was born on July 20, 1903 in Xiangyang, a remote village in the mountains of south central Hunan. (The Hunan province, located in southern China, was also the home province of Mao Zedong.) Prior to entering an elementary school, He Luting received his education from a local tutor. As a child, he was fond of folksongs,

75. Lin Biao, *Quotations from Mao Tse-Tung*: 198.

76. Chang, *Wild Swans*: 323.

Chinese instrumental music, and Chinese opera.⁷⁷ Mr. He's father was a member of an amateur local opera troupe that performed at weddings and funerals, so music was a part of the family's life.⁷⁸ He Luting learned to play the harmonica as well as the Chinese bamboo flute at an early age.⁷⁹ He was also exposed to organ music in a local elementary school (1912-1918.) After Mr. He finished elementary school, he learned to work with industrial machines while studying at a technical school (1918-1919), an experience that sparked an interest in modern machinery. After the technical school was closed, He Luting transferred to a local junior high school and graduated in 1921.⁸⁰

Mr. He's introduction to Western music came indirectly via his third brother, who travelled to France in the early 1920's and left behind a music textbook. Mr. He began reading the book and soon became so fascinated by Western music that he taught himself staff notation and dreamed of being a music teacher.⁸¹ It is worth noting that the construction and "science" of Western music is what initially captivated and intrigued Mr. He. After graduating from junior high school, he became an elementary school teacher, teaching music and painting while looking for chances to further his education.⁸² In pursuit of this dream, he applied to the Yueyun School of Arts in Changsha (the provincial capital of Hunan), a prestigious new school that was also attended by Mao

77. Yan, Cheung Joys Hoi. *Chinese Music and Translated Modernity in Shanghai, 1918-1937*. Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 2008.

78. Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 112.

79. Brian Morton and Pamela Collins, ed. *Contemporary Composers*. Chicago: St. James Press, 1992.

80. Yan, *Chinese Music and Translated Modernity in Shanghai*: 201.

81. Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 116.

82. Yan, *Chinese Music and Translated Modernity in Shanghai*: 202.

Zedong's first wife, Yang Kaihui.⁸³ Mr. He applied to the school in 1923 and was accepted.

Soon after his arrival at his new school, Mr. He saw his first piano and became obsessed with learning how to play it. He spent as many hours in the practice rooms as he could (sometimes acquiring entry by furtive means) and, according to his roommate, once fell out of bed in the middle of the night with his hands moving, as though over a keyboard.⁸⁴ At Yueyun, between 1923 and 1925, he received formal training in Western music theory, piano, and violin performance. Apparently, he did not abandon his childhood interest in Chinese music, either: he organized a music study club that gave regular performances on different Chinese musical instruments, including the *huqin*, *sanxian*, *yueqin*, and *dizi*.⁸⁵

He Luting worked almost as hard at drawing as at music, and he soon gained a reputation for qualities that would one day make him famous: diligence, talent, stubbornness and outspokenness. One particular anecdote from this period captures his personality particularly well: A new drawing teacher was hired at the Yueyun school, and Mr. He, upon evaluating his work, found it lacking. Mr. He announced to his fellow students: "He's not very good – I am better." Mr. He was then asked how he dared to say such a thing of a teacher, whereupon he tersely replied, "I am telling the truth." Although his friends advised him that there was nothing that could be done about the problem, he insisted that there *was* something he could do. He went straight to the school principal to

83. Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 112.

84. Ibid: 116.

85. Yan, *Chinese Music and Translated Modernity in Shanghai*: 203.

inform him that the new teacher was not qualified. Remarkably, in a short time the new teacher was dismissed. Upon graduating, perhaps out of recognition for his high standards, Mr. He was hired to teach music to the entire school.⁸⁶

Obviously, Mr. He's behavior was unusually assertive for a student who was little more than a neophyte in the academic sphere himself. It was a risk that ultimately worked in his favor; however, it is easy to discern the ways in which his most striking personality traits (bluntness and a stubborn adherence to the truth) could not possibly mesh well in a regime that engendered silence and self-preservation at all costs.

He Luting's next startling career choice, however, was one of many which vouched for his political worth and commitment to the Communist Party. After reading Karl Marx's *Das Capital*, Mr. He stunned his friends by leaving his highly desirable position at the Yueyun School after only one year. He did so in order to return to his hometown and participate in the peasant movement, also leading social protests for the factory workers. He became a member of the Chinese Communist Party and spent the next three years (1926-1929) traveling among cities and villages to participate in revolutionary movements, most notably the Communist-led peasant revolt in Guangdong in 1927. He was captured by the Nationalist government in 1929, and kept in jail for a year.⁸⁷ That Mr. He enthusiastically joined the Communist party while it was still an underground movement and was active to the point of being imprisoned on its behalf must have endeared him to its leaders and ensured them of his political value for the following decades.

86. Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 116.

87. Yan, *Chinese Music and Translated Modernity in Shanghai*: 205.

Like many radicals facing the Kuomintang's counterrevolutionary terror, Mr. He dropped out of political activity after his release from prison.⁸⁸ During his revolutionary years (1926-1929), he had supported himself (and his new wife, Jiang Ruizhi) by teaching in primary and middle schools in Changsha and Shaoyang. His first compositions (songs for children) and educational essays date from this period, including an introduction to elementary music theory (later published in Shanghai.)⁸⁹

After his release from prison in 1930, He Luting heard about the National Conservatory of Music (now known as the Shanghai Conservatory of Music), which officially opened on November 27, 1927. He left his teaching jobs and travelled to Shanghai in the hopes of attending. He did not have enough money to pay the tuition, so he taught at an elementary school in Shanghai for a year.⁹⁰ In 1931, he was admitted to the National Conservatory as a part-time student. While taking courses in music theory, composition, and piano performance at the conservatory, He Luting continued to work as a school music teacher in order to support himself.⁹¹ He taught at the Wuchang Art College, where he attempted to meet the pressing need for a Chinese-language textbook on harmony by translating Ebenezer Prout's *Harmony: Its Theory and Practice* (1903.)⁹² As He Luting struggled to pursue his musical studies at the conservatory, he received

88. Kraus, *Pianos & Politics in China*: 104.

89. Penhai, *Personalities in World Music Education – He Luting*: 42.

90. Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 116.

91. Yan, *Chinese Music and Translated Modernity in Shanghai*: 205.

92. Penhai, *Personalities in World Music Education – He Luting*: 42.

personal help and encouragement from his composition professor, the popular and influential Huang Zi (1904-1938).⁹³

Huang Zi had traveled to the United States in 1924 to study psychology and music at Oberlin College, and he continued his studies in composition and piano at Yale University, graduating in 1929. On his return to China he taught first at Shanghai University and then at the Shanghai Conservatory, where he remained until his death. Perhaps best known for his teaching activities, it has been suggested that Huang Zi “was responsible for training every well-known musician of his era in theory and composition.”⁹⁴ He Luting was devoted to his teacher, but it was through the indirect influence of another future mentor, Alexander Tcherepnin (1899-1977), that his tireless struggle for musical status finally began to bear fruit.

Alexander Tcherepnin was one of several White Russian émigrés who were instrumental in introducing Western music to Shanghai in the 1930's; however, his achievements with regards to the future of music in China set him apart from the rest. Born in St. Petersburg, his formative musical years were marked by the influence of composers such as Cui, Rimsky-Korsakov, Stravinsky, and Prokofiev, who were associates of his father, Nicolai Tcherepnin. A number of Communist takeovers caused the family to move several times to different regions in the Soviet Union (including Georgia) before their ultimate move to Paris, where Alexander Tcherepnin studied piano

93. Yan, *Chinese Music and Translated Modernity in Shanghai*: 205.

94. Chang, Chi-Jen. *Alexander Tcherepnin, His Influence on Modern Chinese Music*. Ed.D., Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1983.

with Isidor Philipp. The experience of absorbing the culture of many different areas may have contributed to Tcherepnin's preoccupation with the study of folk music.

In his first trip to China in 1934, Alexander Tcherepnin was seen as a composer, pianist, and modernist who came to collect and study Chinese folk art forms mainly to serve his own need. He was then active as a concert pianist, who performed his own music for the Western community in China.⁹⁵ He quickly became a passionate sinophile, and was so enamored of his unique encounter with Chinese culture that he adopted a Chinese name, Qi Erping, which he used not only in China, but everywhere else. He was the first foreign artist to perform Chinese works, and also the first to insist that his concert programs be printed in both Chinese and English (despite the fact that during the 1930's, those who attended concerts in China were almost exclusively Westerners.) Tcherepnin, who became known as a "faithful propagandist of modern Chinese music," developed a genuine sense of mission to assist Chinese musical development, and he eventually served as a musical advisor in the Chinese Ministry of Education, the first Westerner to be named to this influential position.⁹⁶

Alexander Tcherepnin's primary goal in fostering young Chinese talent was to encourage these burgeoning musicians to look to their own heritage when writing their compositions, quite in the manner of Nadia Boulanger. After visiting the National Conservatory in Shanghai, he viewed the prevailing European influence in the Conservatory as a dangerous threat to the future of Chinese art music. He was disheartened to find Chinese compositions reflecting the powerful domination of Western

95. Chang, *Alexander Tcherepnin*: 1983.

96. *Ibid*: 83.

styles to a degree that seriously affected the originality and naturalness of the music. Perhaps the most important influence upon Chinese music that should be attributed to Tcherepnin is the stimulus he brought to several Chinese composers: the “stimulus” being the value and validity of looking into traditional Chinese folk music for inspiration.⁹⁷

With the object of assisting in this responsibility, Tcherepnin decided to initiate a competition for young Chinese composers. On May 21, 1934, he wrote a letter to the president of the National Conservatory, Dr. Xiao Youmei, to propose the competition.⁹⁸ It was to be open to Chinese composers, and their manuscripts were to be submitted anonymously. The submissions were limited to piano pieces, the duration of which was not to exceed five minutes. Tcherepnin emphasized that the pieces must utilize “Chinese characteristics” (the indigenous pentatonic scale was one such trait.)⁹⁹ Tcherepnin concluded his proposal by stating: “I hope this competition will result in my being able to take with me a piano piece that will give me the opportunity to make known in other countries Chinese music, which I have learnt to appreciate very sincerely.”¹⁰⁰

The judges for the competition were an illustrious panel of French composers that included Arthur Honegger, Jacques Ibert, and Albert Roussel. The results were announced on November 26, 1934.¹⁰¹ First prize was awarded to He Luting for a piece entitled *Buffalo Boy's Flute*, a piece of striking simplicity. The piece was inspired by a

97. Ibid: 84.

98. Ibid: 84.

99. Tcherepnin wrote his *Technical Studies on the Pentatonic Scale* in 1936.

100. Chang, *Alexander Tcherepnin*: 85.

101. Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 125.

scene familiar to Chinese peasants: a little shepherd boy is improvising with his little bamboo flute while riding on a buffalo's back. According to Tcherepnin, the work showed "originality, clarity, and a sure hand in counterpoint and form."¹⁰² The work bears a certain resemblance to the two-part inventions of Bach, but the "subject" is unmistakably Chinese in its use of pentatonicism. When Tcherepnin founded his own publishing company ("Collection Tcherepnin") in 1935, which specialized in printing and promoting the works of young Chinese and Japanese composers, *Buffalo Boy's Flute* was among the first works published, and the image of a buffalo boy playing a flute was chosen as the logo for the firm.¹⁰³ The piece captured the spirit, simplicity, and color of Chinese folk music and has become an important piece in the Chinese piano repertoire.¹⁰⁴

For He Luting, the honor of first prize carried with it enormous benefits, both to his recognition as a composer and to the future of his career. Due to lack of funds, He Luting had been on leave from his studies at the conservatory. The cash award made his return to the conservatory for further study possible.¹⁰⁵ The competition was reported in the local Chinese press, and Mr. He was asked to write a short article about himself for publication:

102. Yan, *Chinese Music and Translated Modernity in Shanghai*: 208.

103. Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 125.

104. Morton and Collins, *Contemporary Composers*: 1992.

105. Chang, *Alexander Tcherepnin*: 87.

My father passed away in June of this year and at home there is a big hunger. My third brother is ill and has to stop his profession to recover. In order to live, I may have to temporarily stop my studies. My journey of life will always be circuitous. Most of my knowledge of music I learned from Huang Zi. The harmony book I translated he also read many times to correct and point out mistakes. So, I must say that Huang Zi is my most compassionate teacher and the director of my future journey. I will never forget this.¹⁰⁶

The award was also largely instrumental in helping He Luting secure recognition in the musical network of Shanghai. His translation of the British music theorist Prout's *Harmony* (which he mentions in the article above) was immediately accepted by a publisher that had earlier rejected it.¹⁰⁷ As the first Chinese language work on the subject, Mr. He's translation of Mr. Prout's work was used by musicians for decades to come.¹⁰⁸

After winning this award, He Luting was offered the music directorship for numerous sound film productions in the following three years (1934-1937.) This could be regarded as a rather abrupt career move for the composer, but this was in fact that path taken by several iconic Chinese composers such as Nie Er and Xian Xinghai (dubbed "The People's Musician" by Chairman Mao.) These composers also combined a similar odd mixture of activism for revolutionary change with an enthusiasm for European classical music.¹⁰⁹ Intriguingly, both of these seemingly antithetic qualities worked in one's favor in order to write film scores in 1930's Shanghai, and to do so was hardly considered irreverent to the ideals of either position. Early Western sound films commonly used European classical music. Chinese sound films, such as *Crossroads*

106.Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 125

107.Yan, *Chinese Music and Translated Modernity in Shanghai*: 210.

108.Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 113

109.Kraus, *Pianos & Politics in China*: 103

(1937) and *Spring Silkworms* (1933,) also used European classical music throughout.¹¹⁰ And most films that He Luting musically directed were leftist productions, which were influential in the 1930's. The leftists, a broadly and loosely defined intellectual group, consisted of Communists and non-Communists who were critical of the Nationalist government. The films He Luting musically directed criticized social problems, and the diverse story-lines of these films caused him to employ various musical styles, ranging from that of the Chinese folk song, school song, revolutionary song, Western art song, Western classical music, to the American musical.¹¹¹

He Luting arranged instrumental music for no less than twenty films; certain pieces (such as “Song of the Seasons” from *Street Angel*) are still celebrated today as classics in the evolution of Mandarin modern song. The melody of this song came from a popular urban folksong, but its instrumental accompaniment – played by Chinese musical instruments exclusively – embraced Western contrapuntal elements.¹¹² Some consider these works to be quite distinctive for the manner in which they invoke not the turgid strains of Western (and specifically Soviet) martial music (as in other Chinese films), but the mellifluous (and some would say “decadent”) melodic material of traditional urban folk song forms.¹¹³ Yet Mr. He’s political reliability was not jeopardized by his foray into film music; rather, it was enhanced. Not only was Mr. He becoming more widely known, but the Communists had also long recognized the usefulness of films for the purposes of

110. Yan, *Chinese Music and Translated Modernity in Shanghai*: 150.

111. Ibid: 153.

112. Ibid: 155.

113. Jones, Andrew F. *Yellow Music: Media Culture and Colonial Modernity in The Chinese Jazz Age*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001.

propaganda. But perhaps the most remarkable feature of He Luting's musical directorship of these films was the collaboration between the most diverse forces in the musical network of Shanghai. Due to the need for vastly different musical styles in these films, He Luting was responsible for promoting complex interactions among all of the major musical institutions in Shanghai, from the stronghold of European classical music (the Shanghai Conservatory) to popular song-and-dance troupes. Through film music directorship, He Luting brought different musicians of the Shanghai network together to collaborate in unprecedented ways, demonstrating administrative and creative skills that would soon render him indispensable in the realm of Communist music.

When war broke out in 1937, a new wave of composers began writing "revolutionary songs," a genre of Chinese Communist music that soon grew to number in the thousands. Galvanized by the Japanese invasion, He Luting joined the mass song movement and became well-known for his efforts in this area as well. His *Song of the Guerillas* became so popular that many Chinese can still sing it to this day.¹¹⁴ Mr. He was once again eager to leave a lucrative position in order to join in the patriotic efforts; nevertheless, he hesitated this time because it would mean leaving his family. His wife encouraged him, however, and so he boarded a plane for Nanjing and from there a boat to the wartime capital of Wuhan. Soon after he arrived, his *Song of the Guerillas* was performed to great acclaim. The audience at one performance included none other than the Red Army Commander-in-Chief Zhu De, who personally asked Mr. He and his

114. Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 130

troupe (Shanghai's Save the Country Performance Troupe) to go out to the army units and teach them the song.¹¹⁵

After Wuhan fell to the Japanese, Mr. He moved to the new Nationalist capital of Chongqing. Students and intellectuals from around the country were gathering in this city, and Mr. He was soon in demand as a teacher and a composer.¹¹⁶ He taught theory and music composition to wartime music cadres at the Central Training Course in Chongqing, and he returned to one of his earliest pursuits: teaching elementary school (at the Yucai School, where he made such an impression on the children there that they remembered him with emotional gratitude well into their old age.)¹¹⁷

By 1940, the city of Chongqing possessed such marked musical talent that the Soviet Union offered seed money to found an orchestra that could play at diplomatic functions. The orchestra, which eventually became known as the Zhonghua (China) Symphony Orchestra, grew to include roughly fifty musicians. Its ranks included no foreigners; it was the first all-Chinese professional symphony orchestra.¹¹⁸ This was a noticeable advancement from the celebrated Shanghai Municipal Orchestra, which had no Chinese musicians until 1927 (and the violinist who was finally accepted, Tan Shuzhen, was not paid for his work.) The Zhonghua Symphony Orchestra's repertoire included works of Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Mussorgsky, He Luting, and other Chinese composers. On one occasion, Ma Sicong (the future president of the Beijing Central

115.Ibid: 139.

116.Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 139

117.Penhai, *Personalities in World Music Education – He Luting*: 43

118.Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 139

Conservatory) conducted He Luting's works before an audience that included Zhou Enlai and his wife and a host of officials from the USSR embassy.¹¹⁹ He Luting was becoming known in the highest echelon of the Communist Party in China.

Although Mr. He was very productively occupied in Chongqing, his situation there had become increasingly dangerous after 1941, when the relations between the Nationalists and the Communists took a turn for the worse. Mr. He asked the Party if he could go to the Communist base Yan'an and was told that he would be welcomed, but that it was currently quite difficult to travel there because of Nationalist Army blockades. However, since women and children were generally permitted through, Mr. He's pregnant wife and their children could go first, and he could follow later. Mr. He and his wife agreed to the plan. As it happened, the bus on which Mr. He's family was travelling was stopped by the Nationalist Army and ultimately allowed to continue to Yan'an only after Zhou Enlai personally called Chiang Kai-shek to insist that it be let through the blockade.¹²⁰ Obviously, Zhou Enlai was pleased with what he had heard of He Luting's music in Chungking, and no one could be in any doubt of the Party's growing regard for Mr. He as an educator and musician.

He Luting's journey to Yan'an was much longer than expected. He took his first detour to Shanghai, where he visited the widow of his much-loved mentor, Huang Zi. The Party had given him five hundred yuan for his travels but he had managed to spend only two hundred, giving the remainder to his professor's bereaved and financially-strapped wife. He then boarded a boat out of Shanghai that took him to a liberated area

119.Ibid: 139.

120.Ibid: 170.

called Liuzhuang that was controlled by the Communist New Fourth Route Army.¹²¹ Upon arrival, Mr. He was met by General Chen Yi (the commander of the army), who would later become mayor of Shanghai, vice premier, foreign minister, and loyal patron of He Luting. Chen Yi greeted Mr. He, saying cheerfully “Comrade He Luting! I’ve known your name for a long time. Your *Song of the Guerillas* is great!”¹²² The nation’s future president, Liu Shaoqi also came out to personally greet He Luting, mentioning that “Enlai” had telegraphed that they could expect Mr. He en route to Yan’an.

Liu Shaoqi then gave Mr. He the difficult news that due to the precarious political situation, he would be unable to travel on to Yan’an and would have to stay in Liuzhang for the time being.¹²³ Mr. He (who had not met his third daughter or seen his family for months) was understandably disappointed, but he told the general and the future head-of-state that he wanted to work if he had to remain there, and offered to train the music workers. Chen Yi and Liu Shaoqi were delighted (there was a fervent belief at the time that a good Communist always puts his work for the Party over his family), and Mr. He immediately began working at the Lu Xun Academy, teaching violin, music theory, and composition. His cantata *Prelude to a New Era* (1942) was written to demonstrate composition techniques to students of the Lu Xun Art Troupe, and his *First Lessons in Harmony* was written for the same students that year.¹²⁴ Zhou Enlai and other

121.Kraus, *Pianos & Politics in China*: 89

122.Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 171.

123.Ibid: 171.

124.Penhai, *Personalities in World Music Education – He Luting*, 42.

high-ranking Communist officials at Yan'an telegraphed that they needed him in the spring of 1943, and he finally arrived there in July of that year.¹²⁵

Yan'an was the seat of government and the center of Communist life for more than a decade (1937-1948.) Chinese Communists celebrate Yan'an as the birthplace of the revolution. It became the center for intensive training programs for party members and army troops. As the endpoint of the famed Long March, it was also the place where many prominent Western journalists such as Edgar Snow and Anna Louise Strong met with Chairman Mao and other leaders. The Yan'an period not only proved decisive for the Communist victory of 1949 but bequeathed to the victors a heroic tradition of revolutionary struggle that was to be canonized as the "Yan'an spirit."¹²⁶ For Chairman Mao and his followers, the Yan'an experience was not to become simply an object for commemoration but a living revolutionary tradition that provided a model for the future. The values that the Maoists derived from the Yan'an era (and which are attributed to that heroic revolutionary past) are those of hard work, diligence, self-denial, frugality, altruism, and self-discipline. In the Yan'an decade these values were, in fact, practiced by Chinese Communists, for they were imposed by the harsh imperatives of revolutionary struggle and they were considered essential to bring about the socialist society of the future. Politically, Yan'an symbolizes for many a utopian period in modern China's history where Chinese Communists sought to realize their idealized vision of life, culture, and social justice, and thus it stands for a former "golden age" when communist

125. Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 171

126. Meisner, Maurice. *Mao's China and After: a History of the People's Republic*. New York: The Free Press, 1977.

principles and ideals were actively pursued by many sincere, youthful supporters.¹²⁷ The importance of He Luting's presence in Yan'an cannot be underestimated; to have a claim of being present at this legendary revolutionary society was impressive in itself. To be a vital and prominent member of this momentous period in Chinese Communist history seemed tantamount to an assurance of future success and safety.

The benefits of He Luting's experience at Yan'an began to manifest themselves shortly after his arrival, although it did not seem possible at the time that this particular advantage would be not to his career, but to his life. This particular experience was his meeting with Chairman Mao. The meeting was quite cordial, and as they discovered that they were from the same region (Hunan province), they also found that Mr. He's older brother and Chairman Mao had once been classmates. The meeting concluded with a tremendous compliment from Chairman Mao, who said to Mr. He: "Your *Song of the Guerillas* is very well written – you have done a great service for the people and they will never forget you."¹²⁸

The musical life of Yan'an was quite varied over the decade of revolutionary zeal, both in terms of the resources and the music itself as the burgeoning government attempted to establish the place of the arts in their new society. By the mid-1930's, the performing arts were such a regular part of life at Communist bases that many foreign journalists wrote about it in dispatches overseas.¹²⁹ Edgar Snow described the audience at the premiere of Xian Xinghai's popular *Yellow River Cantata* as "roughly-clad students

127. Meisner, *Mao's China and After*: 49.

128. Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 171.

129. Ibid: 160.

and soldiers of the Eight Route Army, and an overflow crowd of peasants.”¹³⁰ (Chairman Mao was, of course, in attendance as well.) Yan’an was also the site of the premiere of *The White-Haired Girl*, the first of the ubiquitous “model-operas” produced by Madame Mao.

Chairman Mao delivered his widely-quoted *Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art* in May of 1942.¹³¹ As He Luting arrived in Yan’an over a year later, the musical atmosphere at Yan’an had already shifted considerably leftward. Chairman Mao’s speech was followed by the *yangge* movement: *yangge* was a combination of dances, songs, and variety acts that was adopted for revolutionary purposes.¹³² Mr. He’s first occupation in Yan’an was as a violinist for a propaganda troupe which was largely dedicating itself to the creation and staging of *yangge*. The members of the orchestra were sometimes required to perform onstage, which left them so short in numbers that their ensemble could hardly be called an orchestra – on one occasion, fifteen people went onstage, leaving a drummer, a gong player, and Mr. He.¹³³

He Luting was persistent in his tireless efforts to promote music education at Yan’an, and by 1946 Zhou Enlai was convinced that the area possessed enough musical talent to warrant a symphony orchestra. After a tremendous effort to acquire both instruments and financial backing, He Luting became the president of the newly established Yan’an Central Orchestra. However, Mr. He’s challenges were only

130. Snow, Edgar. *The Other Side of the River*. New York: Random House, 1962.

131. Chen, *Inside the Cultural Revolution*: 181.

132. Holm, David. *Art and Ideology in Revolutionary China*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991.

133. Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 171.

beginning; Zhou Enlai's estimation of the abundance of musical talent at Yan'an (at least with regards to symphonic music) was overly optimistic. Since the original recruitment did not produce enough people to complete an orchestra, He Luting travelled to numerous nearby villages hoping to find young people with both interest and potential. Many of the teenagers he attempted to audition were too shy to speak at all; in one instance, when a young peasant boy agreed to sing a song, Mr. He accepted him at once.¹³⁴ The majority of the recruits for the orchestra had never heard of a symphony orchestra or seen Western instruments before, and found their new enterprise to be one of almost insurmountable difficulty. Furthermore, many of them expected Yan'an to be invaded at any point during this period, so learning or practicing their instruments could not have been a high priority. But in less than two months, He Luting managed to lead the orchestra in its inaugural concert, which featured (among other pieces) three works by Mr. He and a Bach minuet.¹³⁵

Life in Yan'an was exceedingly harsh. Although the Communist Party provided food, clothing, and shelter for the hundreds of young idealists who thronged to the mountainous region, the fortitude of many was still pushed to the limits. Chairman Mao thrived in such living conditions, and graciously entertained the visiting foreign journalists in the caves that housed everyone in Yan'an. He Luting's infant daughter, however, died of illness, and Mr. He became so ill himself that he was forced to relinquish the training of the orchestra members to a newly-arrived musician. By this time, Mr. He was spitting up blood and too weak to stand; he had to be carried on a

134.Ibid: 174.

135.Ibid: 175.

stretcher.¹³⁶ Nonetheless, Mr. He patiently advised the new (and understandably frustrated) director of the orchestra and generously listened to his litany of justifiable complaints. The dangerously ill musician was also required to report to the Party on the status of the musical direction of the Communists. Mr. He was no doubt acquainted with the concept (promulgated by those who undertook the Long March) that “suffering will make you a better Communist;” however, perhaps the best that could be said about Mr. He’s final experiences in Yan’an is that they ultimately became preparation for what lay ahead.

When the Communists were finally victorious and the People’s Republic of China was officially founded on October 1, 1949, everyone knew that the country would undergo great changes that would affect all elements of society, regardless of class or profession. For classical musicians, this meant reviving existing music institutions and establishing new ones which would together serve as the basis for professional education and performance, all the while proceeding to decipher the direction that classical music should take in Communist China.¹³⁷ It was for the Party to say where one was to be appointed, but the musicians of Shanghai hoped that He Luting would be appointed president of the Shanghai Conservatory. Not only was Mr. He held in high regard for his character and his musicianship, but he was now better known and acclaimed as a music educator above all else. He had demonstrated time and again that he possessed extreme patience, both in educating elementary school children and in his unparalleled strides in the education of the peasants in various Communist military outposts. Moreover, his

136.Ibid: 176.

137.Ibid: 189.

supervision of diverse musical organizations (including the musicians in the film industry) confirmed his administrative skills. The fact that he had been at Yan'an (and the political connections he had made there would likely serve Shanghai's music scene well in the years to come) added greatly to Mr. He's desirability for such a position.¹³⁸

General Chen Yi, whom He Luting had met so long ago in Liuzhang, was appointed mayor of Shanghai to the great relief of its musicians, as he was known to hold a great regard for the arts and recognized the importance of their place in the new regime. Neither Chen Yi nor Premier Zhou Enlai had forgotten He Luting, and he was appointed director of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music in 1949.¹³⁹ Tan Shuzhen, the first Chinese to play with the Shanghai Municipal Orchestra, was chosen as one of the conservatory's vice presidents.¹⁴⁰

After the trials of educating the peasants in Yan'an and the limited resources of his position there, He Luting's promotion to head of his former alma mater must have seemed like the ultimate reward for years of patient effort. He immediately set to work. In 1949, the Shanghai Conservatory had seventy-three students, sixty-five staff members (among whom thirty-three were teachers), twenty-two pianos, some forty pieces of orchestral instruments, nine hundred phonograph records, and six thousand copies of music and books.¹⁴¹ Because the conservatory's predominantly foreign teachers were gradually leaving China as the political climate changed, Mr. He found himself having to

138. Ibid: 186.

139. Kraus, *Pianos & Politics*: 104.

140. Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 192.

141. Penhai, *Personalities in World Music Education*: 42.

hire many new professors.¹⁴² He eagerly recruited the best Chinese musicians available: old classmates from the conservatory and distinguished performers, almost all of whom (unlike He Luting) had been educated or worked abroad in Europe and the United States. He asked his old friend Ding Shande (who had sent him a congratulatory telegram from Hong Kong upon learning of his appointment as director of the conservatory) to teach and made him head of the composition department. Yang Jiaren was made head of the conducting department, and Li Cuizhen (who distinguished herself by playing all thirty-two of Beethoven's sonatas by memory) was appointed to the piano department. Two overseas-educated violinists, Chen Youxin and Zhao Zhihua were appointed to the faculty as well.

The vice-president, Tan Shuzhen, was concerned at the paucity of violins available to the students, and knew that the school had no foreign currency to purchase them from abroad. With He Luting's help, they started a factory for instruments at the conservatory, sending people to northeast China to buy wood.¹⁴³ It was soon turning out violins, which were given to the students for free, and the factory developed into a workshop responsible for the maintenance and repair of all the instruments of the conservatory.¹⁴⁴

The under-developed music publishing enterprises of Old China left a miserable dearth of reading materials, and few could read in the original, even if the books were obtained in spite of the embargo. He Luting solved the problem by establishing a

142. Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 190.

143. Ibid: 192.

144. Penhai, *Personalities in World Music Education*: 43.

translation center in the conservatory, which translated the much-needed books and materials from English, French, Russian and German, and published the first music theory and technique series in China. Mr. He also initiated a special program of study for minority students in the Shanghai Conservatory during his early years there. Unfailing in his devotion to elementary education, he began a Children's Music Class in the early 1950's which later developed into a three-year music primary school and a six-year middle school. This initiative not only made up for the scarcity of new recruits to the conservatory, but also upgraded the quality of candidates and the level of professionalism in the conservatory as a whole.¹⁴⁵

From a peasant origin to president of the country's oldest and finest musical institution, it would seem that He Luting had reached the zenith of his career. Mr. He had acquired his success through his intelligence, his strength of will, his dedication to high standards, his fortitude in daunting situations, and his steadfast commitment to the Communist Party. None of these qualities would be enough to save him from the political battles and purges that lay ahead.

145. Ibid: 43.

CHAPTER THREE: ENTICING THE SNAKES FROM THEIR LAIRS

The Making of a Revolutionary Musician

Pay attention to uniting and working with comrades who differ with you. This should be borne in mind both in the localities and in the army. It also applies to relations with people outside the Party. We have come together from every corner of the country and should be good at uniting in our work not only comrades who hold the same views as we but also with those who hold different views.¹⁴⁶

-Chairman Mao, 1949

One of the chief cultural struggles of nineteenth-century Europe was a conflict that historians refer to as “the War of the Romantics,” in which a number of great ideas competed with one another for the allegiance of musicians everywhere: program music versus absolute music, form versus content, the oneness versus the separateness of the arts, newness versus oldness, revolution versus reaction. These issues had often been debated before, but never all at the same time, never with such passion, and never with the firm conviction that the very fate of music depended on their correct resolution.¹⁴⁷ Whenever art came under attack, the composer Franz Liszt was prompted to pick up his pen and defend it, and he constantly urged his pupils to do the same on behalf of their work. For Liszt, criticism was too important to be left to critics. He once told the pianist Anton Rubinstein that if artists were not prepared to take up the pen in defense of art, “they will have to bear the consequences and pay *their* damages.”¹⁴⁸

146. Lin Biao, *Quotations from Mao Tse-Tung*: 113.

147. Walker, Alan. *Franz Liszt: The Weimar Years, 1848-1861*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1989.

148. Walker, *Franz Liszt: The Weimar Years*: 395.

The Chinese Cultural Revolution has been ruefully referred to as the “Cultural Annihilation” or the “Cultural Famine” by the intellectuals who survived it. By the time it began, most artists and intellectuals had been effectively silenced by the various political campaigns that had preceded it. With the Cultural Revolution, China’s cultural life came to a virtual standstill, but this was certainly not the case in the years leading up to it. Indeed, as the nascent Communist Party strove to create “a new China” that served the people and conformed to their social ideology, the future of the arts in this new society was paramount among their discussions and concerns. Unlike the nineteenth-century European musicians embroiled in the War of the Romantics, however, participation in the fervent debate on the future of the arts was mandatory for the Communist musicians of Maoist China. Even today, there is a strong feeling among China’s artists that politics will find (or perhaps even attack) them, even if they don’t want to act as political persons.¹⁴⁹ And unlike the War of the Romantics, the collateral damage for these musicians and their families could result in anything from the loss of their reputations to the loss of their lives. Clearly, the stakes were much higher during the polemical debate on the future of music in Maoist China; however, prominent musicians found that they were not given the option of remaining silent and declining to participate in it.

No encouragement or pressure in any form was ever required for He Luting to offer his opinions regarding music, whether it pertained to the Communist Party or the general future of music in China. His letters, journal articles, textbooks, and translations of Western sources probably outnumber his musical compositions (although this was fairly common for Communist composers during this period, at least with regards to the

149. Mittler, *Dangerous Tunes*: 53.

first two items.) Like Franz Liszt, He Luting was an ardent and relentless defender of his musical beliefs. In a time when holding personal opinions regarding anything was becoming increasingly dangerous, He Luting's retention of stalwart opinions, and the impatience and zeal with which he expressed his opinions was all the more astounding. It is easy to dismiss the youthful He Luting's outspokenness regarding an art teacher's deficiencies as the overconfidence and impetuosity of a young man barely out of his teens.¹⁵⁰ But whether the success of that early risk with authority emboldened He Luting further or his implacable bluntness was simply an inalterable facet of his personality, it was a characteristic that he would retain, and one that would eventually work to his disadvantage.

Almost immediately following his first encounters with Western art music, He Luting took up his pen to write about it. His writings express both his admiration and his dedication to his chosen profession. His essays are not mere academic discussions; they spring from his experience in composition and reflection upon the issues of the time. They testify to He Luting's judgment and ideas on major issues and tendencies that affect the course of modern Chinese music. His *On Music Composition and Music Criticism* (1954) and *What Is Expected of Critics* (1963) (both of which would have resonated with Franz Liszt!) are considered fine examples of He Luting's exceptional insight and courage, as "great uproar exploded after their publication."¹⁵¹

Not all of He Luting's writings and contributions to music education were inflammatory, however. In addition to his indispensable translations of renowned

150. See Chapter Two.

151. Penhai, *Personalities in World Music Education*: 41.

textbooks on music theory and other topics (such as his translation of Prout's *Harmony: Its Theory and Practice*), He Luting authored many textbooks and treatises for students of all levels and abilities. He wrote to suit the needs of whatever occupation or teaching position he found himself in, seeking to mend the deficiencies he found in the lack of teaching materials and to meet the needs of the students themselves. For example, he wrote an introduction to elementary music theory while he was teaching children in Yucai, and his *First Lessons in Harmony* was geared towards the music students in the New Fourth Army. He Luting's ability to impart Western musical knowledge and techniques to neophyte musicians of all backgrounds and ages certainly marks him as one of the foremost music educators in China, and his passionate commitment to music education (no matter how harsh or discouraging the circumstances, as at Yan'an) is nothing short of inspirational.

In addition to his vast legacy of loyal students, He Luting's letters from his period in Yucai depict him as a generous teacher deserving of his students' devotion. The principles and philosophies of his teaching (as shown in these letters) were to remain unaltered throughout his life. Unfortunately, most of these principles, prized by his students and other teachers, would later be seen as counter-revolutionary and distinctly in opposition with Communist ideals. Among these would be He Luting's stress on rigorous systematic training in technique and his method of inspiring his students with stories of great musicians. But it is his genuine concern for his students that is continually evident, particularly in one letter written to them after he had left Yucai:

I hope you students will abide by the principles of unity, fraternity and mutual help. Be strict with yourselves in self-introspection and ready to sacrifice personal interests and help others....Music is a common cause that requires the efforts of many an individual. One man can do little. Be modest and open-minded and work hard. Make the school your home.¹⁵²

The kindness that He Luting demonstrated towards his students was not afforded to all musicians of his acquaintance. He had little respect for musicians associated with other Chinese institutions of music that did not always promote the Western classical tradition, and he was never so forceful or uncompromising in stating his opinions on these musicians and institutions as during the formative years of his career in Shanghai. He Luting could not have been exposed to as many different and opposing forces of Chinese music in any other city in China as in the cosmopolitan “Paris of the East,” and he did not hesitate to condemn those musicians who he felt worked against the modernizing influences of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music and the Shanghai Municipal Orchestra. In regards to Li Jinhui, called by some the “Father of Chinese popular music,” He Luting stated: “If Li Jinhui really is the kind of artist who represents the Chinese national character, then those foreigners who say the Chinese people are the most degenerate people on earth are entirely correct.”¹⁵³

Li Jinhui was a composer and songwriter who initially worked with the founder of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, Xiao Youmei. He was a respected authority on Chinese folksongs with an intellectual background that was greatly admired; however, his relationship with virtually all serious musicians became antagonistic when he adopted

152. Penhai, *Personalities in World Music Education*:43.

153. Jones, *Yellow Music*:73.

jazz and created popular love songs. He was further condemned for his establishment of the Bright Moon Ensemble, which performed his works incorporating both Western and Chinese elements, but in a stereotypical manner that was seen to pander to foreigners and make a mockery of both traditions. Jazz music, or “yellow music,”¹⁵⁴ was cautioned against by many musicians schooled in the Western tradition, including Xiao Youmei. Defenders of China’s ancient musical tradition also rejected the new popular love songs as “yellow music.” Using strong rhetoric of which any ardent Communist might be proud, He Luting offered his views on the subject:

There are two types of people to whom we should pay serious attention: the first are those who write obscene songs and who broadcast sexually obscene songs over the wireless. They are prostitutes in disguise, whose only talent is for poisoning society. The second are these shameless music merchants, who talk a good line about promoting music for the masses, but who actually take advantage of their special position to sell as much vulgar and salacious music as they can in order to poison the Chinese people. We must rise up together to overthrow these kinds of people.¹⁵⁵

The Bright Moon Ensemble was rejected by all other institutions in the musical network of Shanghai, even those in direct opposition to strongholds such as the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. One such conflicting organization was the Great Unity Music Society, founded in 1921. Its goal was to maintain and develop Chinese music in the modern age. It provided traditional Chinese music instruction to its members, reconstructed ancient Chinese music and musical instruments, and created new ensemble works for traditional Chinese musical instruments. The Great Unity’s contention was that

154. To this day, the Chinese may refer to pornographic material or any material deemed obscene as “yellow.”

155. Ibid: 116.

there existed well-developed musical elements and practices in Chinese culture that should continue to prevail in the modern age.¹⁵⁶

The defensive agenda of Great Unity, which contended that Chinese music (as it had developed historically) had to be the foundation of modern Chinese musical development, clashed with the Conservatory's identification of Western classical music as the essential modern foundation. The conflicting nature of these two organizations became more pronounced when Shanghai Conservatory founder Xiao Youmei, declining Great Unity's invitation to join its administrative committee in 1930, openly criticized that institution. Xiao Youmei rejected Great Unity's imitative re-constructions of ancient musical instruments as blind-sighted, and as ignoring issues of scientific theory and performance practice.¹⁵⁷

He Luting also published a disapproving review of Great Unity's performance at a Confucian sacrificial ceremony in a temple in Shanghai. His essay, published in the periodical *Music Magazine* in 1934, condemned far more than merely the group's performance on that day. He Luting's essay proceeded directly and staunchly into the foremost issue concerning Chinese musicians: the future of music in China.

He Luting attacked the Chinese instruments used in the performance because they presented a myriad of deficiencies and coarse noises to his ears: imprecise tuning, weak sounds, limited range of pitches, and unrefined timbres. These backward musical instruments, He Luting argued, could not represent the national character of Chinese

156. Yan, *Chinese Music and Translated Modernity in Shanghai*: 163.

157. Ibid: 161.

music. Thus, He Luting rhetorically urged musicians to replace the Chinese *dizi* and *huqin* with the Western flute and violin. Musical instruments were just tools, He Luting argued; what defined the national identity of Chinese music, he declared, depended on expressions of “national essence,” not the use of tools.¹⁵⁸

The most striking feature of this essay occurs when He Luting draws parallels between music and scientific advancement. Seeing musical instruments as mechanical tools, He Luting regarded Western musical instruments as better tools than Chinese musical instruments: they had greater dynamic power, more precise intonation, and more refined timbres.¹⁵⁹ He Luting compared musical instruments to airplanes, which had great transportation capacity and efficiency in terms of physical size, moving speed, and mobile accessibility. In He Luting’s view, Western musical instruments were like airplanes, where Chinese musical instruments were like horse-carts: “China’s horse-carts are far more inferior than airplanes; we’d better use airplanes instead.”¹⁶⁰ He Luting’s technological call was based on his experience of the cultural and military war unfolding in China. From this experience, he connected airplanes to warships, and to Western musical instruments, which were cultural “cannons.”¹⁶¹ It is also easy to trace He Luting’s fascination with modern machinery back to the experience he gained as a teenager, working with industrial machines while studying at a technical school (1918-1919.)

158.Ibid: 241.

159.Ibid: 242.

160.Ibid: 239.

161.Ibid: 242.

Recognizing the power of Western science and the far-reaching consequences of its achievements, and realizing their own technological weakness, Chinese intellectuals generally regarded science and technology as essential for modern China. Like He Luting, Xiao Youmei measured Chinese musical development against that of the West. He concluded, and complained, that China's technological condition had lagged behind the West for five hundred years. Appearing as a message of urgency, the metaphoric connection of music and modern machines called for an immediate Chinese emulation. Western musical instruments were the right tools because they embodied scientific and verifiable progress.

The advanced development of musical instruments was only one manifestation of Western musical progress. Many Chinese regarded Western functional harmony as a crucial sign of modern science and progress – not only of the West, but of the world. The evolutionary development of Western music from monophony to polyphony and to functional harmony was taken as a universal path of progress. In Xiao Youmei's view, the absence of functional harmony in Chinese music was a sign of backwardness; he declared boldly that Chinese music had not progressed for the past thousand years. Searching for reasons to explain this evolutionary absence, Xiao Youmei identified three Western musical inventions that drove the emergence of functional harmony, all of which were absent in China. They were the practice of equal temperament, the emergence of keyboard instruments, and the use of staff notation.¹⁶²

162.Ibid: 243.

These statements could be perceived as highly offensive in a nation somewhat known for its xenophobia, but prior to the Cultural Revolution, this pursuit of scientific and technological progress was taken seriously by many in the Communist Party. It was important to Chairman Mao to build a strong, self-sufficient “new China,” and if studying and “learning from the West” was necessary in order to do so, he condoned it (or so his writings would claim.) The arts were not exempt from his quest for a modern China that would soon overtake the United States in its technological achievements. “We must admit that in regard to modern culture, the West is at a higher level than we are, and we have lagged behind.”¹⁶³ During the ten years prior to the Cultural Revolution, Edgar Snow reported that “there were literally hundreds of orchestras.....the armed forces, most large municipalities, universities and great factories (unlikely places such as shipyards and steel mills) had orchestras and choruses of varying quality. With a decade of teaching and practice behind them, some were now quite good.”¹⁶⁴ The piano, one of the Western musical inventions that signified progress for many musicians, was soon being manufactured in China. When the People’s Republic of China was founded on October 1, 1949, the Shanghai Conservatory of Music had twenty-two pianos; by 1960, it held more than five hundred. Much of this musical progress may be attributed to the conservatory’s leadership (He Luting), but the clear preference and emphasis on Western music study and instruments could not have been obtained without the express permission and knowledge of the Party.

163.Kau, edited by John K. Leung and Michael Y.M. *The Writings of Mao Zedong 1949-1976*. New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1992.

164.Snow, Edgar. *Red China Today*. New York: Random House, Inc., 1961.

When the Cultural Revolution materialized in 1966, it dictated an unrecognizably different environment: foreign musicians had long since been expelled from China, the piano was referred to as “the coffin of the bourgeoisie,” and citizens were arrested for unfortunate accidents of birth such as having distant relations living in the West. In light of this climate that disparaged any references to Western culture whatsoever, He Luting’s view of the superiority of Western instruments was regarded as nothing short of traitorous. His enemies certainly lost no time in condemning what they saw as his slavish devotion to all things Western. It is not surprising to learn that the first generation of native-trained graduates of the Shanghai Conservatory (such as He Luting) were devoted overwhelmingly to Western music, since almost all their teachers were either European or European-trained Chinese.¹⁶⁵ Yet it would be inaccurate to identify He Luting and his like-minded contemporaries with that class of intellectuals who, as Chairman Mao put it, “reject their own national characteristics and blindly worship the West; they hold that everything in the West is better and even going to the extent of advocating ‘wholesale Westernization.’”¹⁶⁶

Despite the absurdity of such an identification, it was often made at the time, and even today, scholars attempting to place He Luting firmly on the side of the Western sycophants find new and ingenious labels for him: “cosmopolitan intellectual,” (as opposed to the “populists”); “reformer” (those who denigrated pre-existing Chinese music as backward, and through a series of musical reforms, promoted Western art music as the modern musical foundation of China), and even a “snob,” suggesting that his

165.Chang, *Alexander Tchernin*:1983.

166.Kau, *The Writings of Mao Zedong*:95.

eventual persecution was due at least in part to his misplaced sense of musical superiority.¹⁶⁷ These assertions are nearly as faulty as the research of the Communist officials who attempted to gather “evidence” against He Luting.

Despite his public criticism of both Great Unity and the Bright Moon Ensemble, He Luting maintained a working relationship with individual members of both organizations in his film productions. His last film score was composed in 1937, only three years after his article condemning the musical practices of Great Unity. Whatever He’s personal feelings may have been, they did not take precedence over his desire to create a film score that would be both accurate and innovative. As in other modern Chinese musical works, many songs in the scores of these films blended different Chinese and Western musical styles to create new practices that worked for the modern filmic and musical imaginations.¹⁶⁸ In He’s most famous score (for the movie *Street Angel*) Great Unity musicians accompanied the singing of a former Bright Moon member in order to depict the life of a sing-song girl in the film. The Bright Moon Ensemble shared part of the same pool of popular and commercial cultural resources with the film industry, which He Luting and the leftists could not totally ignore in their film productions. The year after He Luting denounced the Bright Moon Ensemble from a leftist point of view, he collaborated with one of its graduates and even complimented her performance. Scholars today may speculate on what motivated He Luting to collaborate with artists from institutions that he publicly denigrated; whatever his incentive, a sense of musical superiority or “snobbery” did not deter him from doing so.

167. “But eventually snobbery would be their undoing.” Kraus, *Pianos & Politics in China*: 106.

168. Yan, *Chinese Music and Translated Modernity in Shanghai*: 150.

The appearance of “straddling the dividing line” between two opposing musical ideologies may be construed as illogical, and although it does make these musicians difficult to classify, this “duality” was quite common for Chinese musicians in the first part of the twentieth century. The pioneering leftist songwriter Nie Er, for example, was a member of the Bright Moon Ensemble before becoming its opponent. He Luting never vacillated or wavered in his viewpoints throughout his life, but there were demarcations in his musical positions that scholars and his Communist peers have chosen to ignore. Despite his extreme rhetoric with regards to “horse-carts” and “airplanes,” for example, He Luting never abandoned Chinese music or his advocacy of a national Chinese essence. It was his composition, after all, that won first place in Tchernin’s competition for a Chinese piano piece exhibiting “national characteristics” (although there were no Chinese musicians on the judging panel, so it was perhaps a foreign acknowledgement of what “Chinese musical characteristics” actually were!) And while He Luting’s interest in Chinese folk music does not appear to match his enthusiasm for Western art music, he could hardly be said have discarded his advocacy for it altogether. Even during his first serious training in Western music at the Yueyun School of Arts in Changsha, he took the initiative to organize a traditional Chinese music study club that gave regular performances on different Chinese musical instruments. Indeed, He Luting’s interest in traditional music dated from his childhood, and may have derived from his father’s membership in a local opera troupe; and it was even reported that He Luting once sang an aria from the opera *Wu Family Hillside* in his sleep!¹⁶⁹ While the revolutionary years spent “educating the masses” in Yan’an and elsewhere did not grant He Luting enough

169.Ibid, 150.

time to adequately pursue this interest, he certainly devoted time to study folk music and traditional Chinese music at other points in his career. His *On Chinese Scales and Modes* was written for the journal of the Society for Asian Music. And during Edgar Snow's visit to the Shanghai Conservatory in 1961, its director He Luting was not present as he was "off on a visit to Kiangsi with some students recording folk music."¹⁷⁰ Most significantly of all, during his first years at the conservatory he started a Chinese Music Research Center and the Department of Chinese Traditional Music to collect, study and put into full use the vast wealth of traditional as well as folk music.¹⁷¹ These pioneering projects proved efficient in protecting the Conservatory against the growing tide of resentment towards all things Western, and conservatories in other cities of China quickly followed suit.

He Luting may have publicly broadcast his views regarding the inferiority of Chinese musical instruments as adequate "tools," but throughout his life he remained an enthusiastic proponent of traditional Chinese music itself. His compositions depict his promotion of Chinese music perhaps more thoroughly than anything else. Writing in style best identified as "pentatonic romanticism," (the idiom that unified the oldest generation of composers in the People's Republic of China), He Luting retained elements of Chinese folksongs in his compositions because he believed that they truly represented the Chinese national essence. During an interview towards the end of his life, He constantly emphasized the beauties and the superiority of Chinese melody.¹⁷² It would be plausible to assume that at this point in his life He Luting spoke out of unease or even

170. Snow, *Red China Today*:538.

171. Penhai, *Personalities in World Music Education*:43.

172. Mittler, *Dangerous Tunes*: 28.

intimidation, especially after years of abuse and accusations of being a sycophant of the West. But in reality, He Luting never wavered in his opinions. Nothing anyone would say or do could induce him to change his beliefs, or recant his previous statements.

“Music for the Masses”

He Luting’s statements regarding his visions for the future of Chinese music and the role of Western music training had the propensity to be misconstrued, and at times they were deliberately misinterpreted to suit his enemies’ aims. But there are two prominent beliefs that he abided by (and that run like a leitmotif throughout his writings and his life) that could not be altered or misunderstood in any way. The first was He Luting’s immovable argument for a consistently high standard of quality in music, no matter what the genre. The second was his inexorable and undaunted protection of his students as they sought to produce the highest quality of music.

In most rational societies, these creeds would mark one as an enthusiastic and competent teacher. In Maoist China, these beliefs would mark He Luting as a target for persecution. Private individuals, even artists, could not determine what the standards of quality could be for their work, nor could they do so for anyone else. It was the role of the Party to impart what the standards for “good” music would be, and it was almost a given that their standards would be vastly different from that of educated musicians like He Luting. By the time of the Cultural Revolution, political reliability was the standard by which quality in everything was judged; talent and skill had long since been beside the point.

One of the first debates concerning “new” Chinese music (where He Luting’s relentless commitment to a high level of quality was featured) occurred before the Communists were in power. An indigenous movement to develop and promote China’s own modern music began in Shanghai around 1930, although it took a different path than Tcherepnin might have envisioned. It was closely tied to China’s political situation and accelerated after the Japanese bombed the city’s Zhabei district in 1932.¹⁷³ The movement was known by several different names over the course of the decade: the National Salvation Song Movement, the National Defense Song Movement, the New Music Movement – but all were essentially part of one revolutionary music movement that originated in Shanghai. Although many of its proponents had connections with the Shanghai Conservatory, their primary inspiration came from outside academia in the real world of poverty, imperialism, and impending war.¹⁷⁴

One of the first composers of revolutionary songs was the composer Nie Er, who was deeply affected by the January 1932 bombing in Shanghai. He felt that composers and musicians should play an important role in China’s development, but was initially unsure how he could best serve his patriotism:

That’s the question I’ve been thinking about all day, but I haven’t come up with any concrete plans yet. Isn’t so-called *classic* music just a plaything of the leisure class? I spend a few hours every day slaving over my basic exercises. After a few years, even a decade, I become a *violinist*. So what? Can you excite the laboring masses by playing a Beethoven sonata? Will that really be an inspiration to them? No! This is a dead end. Wake up before it’s too late.

173.Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 126.

174.Ibid: 126.

Nie Er died an early and tragic death and was soon beatified as a great revolutionary composer. His revolutionary song *The March of the Volunteers* became the national anthem of the People's Republic of China in 1949. His words regarding the futility and pointlessness of Western classical music, instruments, and training would reflect the views of the Communist Party frequently in the years to come.

Conservatory professors and students who fervently disagreed with Nie Er's views regarding Western art music were no less patriotic, however, and even those who did not belong to the inner circles of leftist associations began to compose these songs. The Yale-educated Huang Zi (He Luting's composition teacher) wrote more than a dozen revolutionary songs and arranged for Conservatory students to participate in fund-raising drives for anti-war efforts. Even the venerable Xiao Youmei tried his hand at the genre.¹⁷⁵ He Luting wrote dozens of revolutionary songs; his *Song of the Guerrillas* certainly afforded him more recognition (and ultimately, protection) within the Communist Party than his other compositions, even his prize-winning *Buffalo Boy's Flute*. Revolution and foreign invasion forced modern urban intellectuals to apply their music explicitly to political purposes.¹⁷⁶ The political crisis masked the tensions between "populist" and "cosmopolitan" art by forcing the two to join in political action, at least initially.

A revolutionary composer who was deified in a similar fashion to Nie Er but even more strongly venerated was Xian Xinghai, the composer of the Yellow River Cantata. By 1938, he had written nearly four hundred revolutionary songs.¹⁷⁷ Xian Xinghai,

175.Ibid: 130.

176.Kraus, *Pianos & Politics in China* :69.

177.Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 130.

beatified by Chairman Mao as “the People’s Musician,” was a composer who perhaps managed better than any other to successfully straddle the line between the two sides of his musical heritage: Paris Conservatory educated-symphony composer and Communist composer who sought to serve the peasant revolution. He saw the revolutionary songs as a way of linking “modern” musical art from Europe to revolutionary demands for new techniques of mobilizing the masses.¹⁷⁸

Because this music was meant to awaken the masses to action, much of it was unaccompanied song intended to be sung in the streets by thousands of people. The songs used Western tonality and were usually written in major keys. They had short and simple melodies, lyrics that intended to motivate resistance to Japan or sympathy with the plight of the common Chinese people, and they often sounded like battle marches.¹⁷⁹

With so many musicians involved in writing these songs, it is perhaps not surprising that a debate on the future of music in China eventually developed.¹⁸⁰ It was largely spurred by several articles that the leftist composer Lu Ji wrote in 1936. Inspired by an article in the League of Left-Wing Writers’ literary magazine, which argued against the idea of music for music’s sake, Lu Ji attempted to establish several principles for revolutionary songs, namely that they should use the vernacular language and lean towards the style of folk music. He also suggested that everything associated with them – lyrics, notation, teaching methods, and conducting – should be easy for the broad masses

178.Kraus, *Pianos & Politics in China*: 66.

179.Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 126.

180.Ibid: 130.

to understand. Most controversially, he referred to the revolutionary song as “Chinese new music.”¹⁸¹

He Luting, by now an established composer of revolutionary songs, immediately entered the ensuing debate surrounding Lu Ji’s remarks. He supported the premise that governed his life as a Communist and career as a musician by replying that revolutionary songs had to be evaluated as *music*, rather than mere propaganda. While he supported the national song movement, he disagreed with Lu Ji on specific issues. Many of the revolutionary songs that were being produced sounded alike, demonstrated poor mastery of technique, and were disorganized in structure. One of his oft-quoted remarks bluntly stated that many songs were just “revolutionary poetry or slogans with some Arabic numerals added” [for simplified notation.]¹⁸²

Xian Xinghai joined in the debate, essentially taking the same view as He Luting when he wrote,” Of course the songs have their strong points, but they often have too many weak points.”¹⁸³ But most musicians found Lu Ji’s assertion that these mass songs were now designated as “the new music of China” to be the most fallacious statement of all. There was nothing really “new” about them; even the idea of using songs for revolutionary change was deliberately modeled on the French Revolution. The more erudite composers even challenged the banal tonality of the revolutionary songs; hardly

181.Ibid: 130.

182.Ibid: 131.

183.Ibid: 131.

“new,” they contended, when the “new” music of Europe had by this point rejected the tonal system.¹⁸⁴

He Luting’s criticism of the label “new music of China” took an even more expansive perspective, and focused again on his educational beliefs. He stated that any discussion of new music required a broader vision, since music is far more than just songs. China needed to have symphonies, orchestras, opera and more, and in order to have these things it needed technique. Technique was often criticized by people who supported revolutionary songs, but the truth was that every art requires technique which does not just fall from the sky – it has to be learned.¹⁸⁵

He Luting’s emphasis on technique (and the systematic practice needed to achieve it) would prove to be constantly at odds with the Maoist culture that was soon to overtake China. Time spent perfecting the art of the “plaything of the leisure classes” when one’s time might be better spent learning from the peasants or inciting social insurrection was not only to be discouraged, it was to be considered a serious political flaw.

Lu Ji was not bothered by the criticism, believing that these “problems” lay not with the revolutionary songs, but rather with the people who had for so long been “poisoned” by other musical forms such as local opera. But many of the revolutionary composers were Conservatory graduates, and most had at least some formal conservatory training. If they could not ignore the needs of their country in time of war, neither would

184.Ibid: 131.

185.Ibid: 131.

they be able to ignore the demands of their art when time and space permitted.¹⁸⁶ It was a concern that would continually threaten the intellectuals of the music industry as the Communists proceeded to gain power.

The leftist view of the usage of these revolutionary songs was foreshadowing the kind of music Chairman Mao would soon prescribe in Yan'an: music as a tool for politics. Chairman Mao's "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Arts and Literature" had an immense impact on musicians in China during his regime; it was held up as a general blueprint for all workers in the field of culture. In the future, whenever any artist, writer, musician, or arts bureaucrat had doubts about the direction he should take in his art or in his approach to propagating art, it was to Mao's "Talks" that he would be referred for guidance.¹⁸⁷

Basing himself in the orthodox Marxist definition of the function of art in society, Mao contended that all culture, all art and all literature, was the expression of the ideas and strivings and interests of particular classes and was geared to definite political lines. He ridiculed the belief that there could be an "art for art's sake, an art that stands above the classes, that is detached from or independent of politics."¹⁸⁸ This statement was to have serious repercussions for both the works of Chinese artists and the treasures of Western art music, even including works such as Franz Schubert's *Unfinished Symphony*. If music cannot be composed without directly or indirectly promulgating the agenda of a specific class or society, then any significance may be attached to it by either learned or

186.Ibid: 131.

187.Ibid: 183.

188.Chen, *Inside the Cultural Revolution*: 182.

unschooled persons (most particularly in the case of absolute music.) It also meant that any music that did not serve the revolutionary society, from “yellow” love songs to Mozart symphonies, risked being condemned as “bourgeois.”

Chairman Mao attached great importance to the role of the arts for this very reason: the ideas they expressed were direct expressions of specific classes and people. Just as the army defends the revolutionary cause of its people on the battlefield, so in the ideological field, the revolutionary cultural army of the working people – their intellectuals, artists, and craftsmen – battles the hostile ideas of the feudal and capitalist classes, “the landowners” and the bourgeoisie, to win victory for the ideas of the revolutionary classes. This is the class struggle in the realm of culture. And since an artist is going to serve a class anyway, he might as well decide which class he is going to serve: the exploiters or the exploited, the oppressors or the oppressed.¹⁸⁹

Mao went on to caution that many artists and writers who had received their education in the old society retained and expressed the feudal or capitalist outlooks of the old society to some extent, and to that degree they served the old society. That needed to change, if they wanted to take a positive part in the revolution. Practical experience, Mao asserted, had shown that there is no shortcut to artists thus transforming themselves and their art: they must go out among the masses, into the thick of the revolutionary struggle. Integrated with the masses, the art of such artists could become “a powerful weapon for uniting and educating the people and for attacking and defeating the enemy.”¹⁹⁰

189.Ibid: 182.

190.Ibid: 183.

These statements had a direct impact on the lives of musicians and other intellectuals alike, although some aspects of that impact did not manifest themselves for several years following the “Talks.” One was the political movement of sending artists and intellectuals to the countryside to “learn from the peasants,” following Mao’s directive to “go out among the masses, into the thick of the revolutionary struggle.” And from Mao’s frequent references to shunning “feudal” and “ancient” classes, it soon became obvious what type of music was to be avoided at all costs. Despite whatever disagreements the composers of revolutionary songs may have had, they were at least united in their attempts to seek music for a “modern China.” To many musicians, the “Talks” made it apparent that the sharpest tension within Chinese musical culture was not between the symphonies of the Conservatory and the mass songs of the revolution, but between the apostles of modern music (of whatever form) and their true enemy: the parochial and feudal music of traditional Chinese culture.¹⁹¹ In the decades to follow, the Communist government was to occupy itself with Peking opera reform more so than any other aspect of music.

The political trend following the revolutionary song movement was to continue leftward at Yan’an. Mao’s “Talks” were followed by criticism of the lack of Chinese music in the curriculum of the Lu Xun Academy. Soon folksongs (derived “from the masses”) were adopted and set to revolutionary texts. The music workers made a virtue of necessity, writing their music for combinations of Chinese and Western instruments

191. Kraus, *Pianos & Politics in China*: 105.

and thus making up for the lack of professional musicians trained on Western instruments.¹⁹²

He Luting naturally had an opinion when it came to the leftward trend and its impact on cultural life. Time spent among the masses was definitely important; he knew from experience that he could never have composed works like *Song of the Guerillas* had he not spent time living with soldiers and peasants. However, neither could he have written these works if he had not had his conservatory education in Shanghai; time among the masses had to be balanced with a sound music education.¹⁹³

In Maoist China, “correct” music, named “music for the masses,” did not demand that the “ignorant masses” would undergo a learning process. The idea was not to elevate the audience to the high standard of elite arts but to “massify” the arts and artists, and to make them appreciate the artistic value of the masses’ lives. The Communists realized that the artists who had originally thought that they were serving the laboring masses if they performed Beethoven sonatas for them assumed that it was up to the latter to learn to enjoy them. But such works were now seen to propagandize the individualism and humanism of the bourgeoisie, so they were in fact not serving the masses at all, but rather undermining the ideological foundations of the socialist revolution.¹⁹⁴

This epitomized the leftward trend that politics would take, and withstanding it was understandably difficult for musicians trained in Western art music. When the

192.Mittler, *Dangerous Tunes*: 30.

193.Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 171.

194.Mittler, *Dangerous Tunes*: 48.

political pendulum swung leftward (such as in Yan'an and during the Cultural Revolution), the musician's task was to adopt national forms into modern music that served the revolution. In periods of greater stability, musicians were asked to make Western forms "Chinese," or to show Chinese mastery of "international" music technique, as Mao stated when he spoke to the music workers over ten years later.

Let a Hundred Flowers Bloom

Exploiting the field of culture for usage as propaganda had served the Communist Party well in warfare, and Party leaders did not forget it when the Communists came to power in 1949. The First National Congress of Artists and Writers was held in Beijing on July 2, with seven hundred fifty three artists in attendance, among them He Luting.¹⁹⁵ The continuing importance that the future government would place on arts and culture work was underscored by the appearance of top political leaders at this first Congress. During a speech made by Zhou Enlai, Chairman Mao himself made an unannounced appearance on stage, as the delegates instantly leapt to their feet and began cheering. Chairman Mao said only, "The people need you, so we welcome you!" whereupon Zhou Enlai then resumed his speech.¹⁹⁶

The First Congress had a generally relaxed and affable atmosphere; however, there were several thematic undercurrents that alarmed the more educated musicians. Many Communist leaders wanted to continue the cultural policies of Yan'an, but were unsure how to adapt music of rebellion to music of the establishment. In Shanghai there

195.Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 183.

196.Ibid: 183.

was a series of meetings for conservatory faculty and symphony members on topics such as “Does music have a class nature?” and “Is there any value in concerts for workers, peasants, and soldiers?”¹⁹⁷ It was suggested that symphony orchestras could not serve the workers, peasants and soldiers, and that they should simply be disbanded or converted into cultural work troupes that would only promulgate the propaganda of the Party. It was also suggested that music education should be shortened to one year – living in an ivory tower for too long was not conducive to thought reform.¹⁹⁸ Chairman Mao would echo these thoughts during the Cultural Revolution, when he said:

At present, there is too much studying going on, and this is exceedingly harmful. There are too many subjects at present, and the burden is too heavy, it puts middle-school and university students in a constant state of tension. This can't be allowed to go on unchanged.¹⁹⁹

Mao specifically targeted the arts the following year when he said:

We should reform university education. So much time should not be spent attending classes. Not to reform arts faculties would be terrible.....We must reform the arts faculties in the universities.²⁰⁰

The delegates from Shanghai were alarmed enough by these comments heard at the First Congress to immediately begin their campaign to appoint He Luting president of the Shanghai Conservatory, feeling that if there was anyone with an irreproachable Communist background and the proven ability to stand up for the musical standards that

197.Kraus, *Pianos & Politics*:77.

198.Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 184.

199.Chinnery and Tieyun, *Chairman Mao Talks to the People*: 1974.

200.Ibid: 965.

he believed in, it was He Luting. He Luting's subsequent appointment to the position was due in part to Shanghai's mayor Chen Yi, a longtime fan of He Luting and his work from their days together when Chen Yi was general of the New Fourth Route Army.

The musicians of Shanghai were very fortunate to have Chen Yi appointed as their mayor. He was one of the only high-ranking bureaucrats to hold a genuine interest in Western art music. Chen Yi (the future foreign minister of China) had sent the first piano to remote Yan'an. One of his first actions after taking control of Shanghai was to invite the city's artists and writers to a meeting about the future of the arts under Communism, and he gave the ninety-seven Congress delegates from Shanghai a celebratory banquet prior to their departure for Beijing.²⁰¹

The political movement for music in the early 1950's promised great change and was fundamentally benign,²⁰² at least compared with what was to come in the next decade. But even before the political campaigns escalated to affect all intellectuals, what began to happen was sufficient enough to alarm many musicians, foremost among them He Luting.

In 1951, a small political rectification movement was started in arts and literary circles, and musicians were required to go to the countryside so they could better understand the lives of the peasants. The celebrated soprano Zhou Xiaoyan described her experience to Edgar Snow at the Shanghai Conservatory:

201. Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 185.

202. Kraus, *Pianos and Politics*: 76.

You should see me in my working clothes on the farm. We all spend a month a year helping the peasants and learning from them. I was frightened to death of it the first time, but now we look forward to it as the best fun we have. We are better artists and composers and closer to the people.²⁰³

Numerous articles in musical journals show pictures of happy and vigorous musicians, toiling and learning from the masses.²⁰⁴ The bureaucrats who knew very little about Western art music assured those who did that the experience would produce better musicians. This theory was the antithesis of everything that He Luting knew to be true about producing good musicians. He argued that “we cannot use general political theories to substitute for specific music theory and technique....To experience life is very important for composers, but it cannot solve all problems of creativity....Music is the art that most needs technical practice.”²⁰⁵ Moreover, he stated pointedly that musicians are not like government cadres who sit in an office all day – it took years of training and practice to become a good musician.²⁰⁶

In short, to become a good musician, one needed to practice, something that would have been impossible to do while toiling with the peasants (however politically valuable the experience may have been). He Luting could certainly and justly have been accused of placing high musical standards ahead of Communist values. He immediately began to defend in practice the values he prized so greatly: high musical standards and the protection of his students at all costs. In addition to publicly criticizing the policy of

203. Snow, *Red China Today*: 539.

204. Mittler, *Dangerous Tunes*: 49.

205. Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 196.

206. Ibid: 196.

sending musicians to factories and villages for political work, He Luting did not abide by the standards set in place for this campaign. He sent the students to the countryside for less than the amount of designated time stipulated by the Party, and sometimes not at all. This would later be one of the charges leveled at He Luting during the Cultural Revolution. He never denied this charge, nor did he ever apologize for it.

Several of a series of political campaigns launched by the Communist Party shortly after the liberation further complicated the position of both foreign and Chinese musicians. The “Resist America and Aid Korea” campaign that started with the Korean War targeted all those foreigners who remained in China and anyone who had contact with them.²⁰⁷ This was particularly difficult for the musicians of Shanghai, many of whom had foreign colleagues or had themselves been educated abroad. In late 1951, Chairman Mao began a campaign known as “the Three Antis,” targeting embezzlement, waste, and “bureaucratism.” The primary aim was to scare anyone with access to government money from pocketing it.²⁰⁸ This specific campaign did not appear to affect He Luting directly, but it certainly affected the musical atmosphere in Shanghai. The Italian conductor of the Shanghai Orchestra, Arrigo Foa, became a target. Although he was not subjected to physical torture like so many of the accused, he was subsequently expelled from China. He was accused of being “a fascist, sent to bully the Chinese.”²⁰⁹

He Luting was somewhat unusual among the notable musicians of Shanghai and the rest of China in that he was never educated abroad, nor was he the recipient of any

207. Ibid: 195.

208. Halliday, Jung Chang and Jon. *Mao: The Unknown Story*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005, 327.

209. Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 195.

formal musical training at foreign hands. This may have spared him somewhat during the “anti-foreign” campaigns, although he was later to come under attack for his association with Tcherepnin. Tcherepnin had safely left China prior to these campaigns, but despite his tireless efforts on behalf of the pursuit for a “national Chinese music,” any Chinese musician who enjoyed his patronage would certainly fall under suspicion as having worked with a “foreign spy.”

Proclamations against “foreign music” in any form were already growing at an alarming rate during the 1950’s. Opponents complained that the works were “too technical and not revolutionary enough,” even works like Tchaikovsky’s *1812 Overture*.²¹⁰ The frustrated musicians could not see how unchecked performances of Beethoven symphonies might somehow restore China’s bourgeoisie to power. However, the leftist view held that it was not unreasonable to wonder if European classical music might distract the urban middle class from the problems of China’s workers and peasants.²¹¹

In the autumn of 1953, the Second National Congress of Artists and Writers was convened in Beijing with the avowed mission of developing more creativity in the arts.²¹² Although the atmosphere was generally relaxed and open to debate, the Congress had little effect on the musicians themselves. In the beginning of 1954, He Luting decided of his own accord to address the matter directly. He sent a highly critical report to the Ministry of Culture in Beijing that included a litany of complaints. He deplored the lack

210.Ibid: 194.

211.Kraus, *Pianos & Politics*:112.

212.Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 196.

of funding allocated to the Shanghai Conservatory, which he claimed was so inadequate that some students became sick from the living conditions and poor nutrition and had to drop out. He also lamented the treatment of the musicians in the Shanghai Orchestra, and dared to defend the foreign musicians.²¹³ Most troubling of all to He Luting was the government's placement of political attitude over music theory. He Luting contended that the atmosphere was such that students who attempted to master technique were seen to have political problems, and he claimed to have seen students practicing in secret for fear that they would be criticized for it.²¹⁴ This attitude of "political mindset" over technical practice was disseminated by musicians like Lu Ji, whose attitude towards the revolutionary songs, as we have seen, was so far removed from that of He Luting. He Luting asserted that these musicians' level of professionalism was not high and their knowledge of technique and theory was lacking; rather than attempting to overcome these deficiencies, they were compensating for them by stressing political reliability as the most important factor in musical success.

He Luting acknowledged the musical situation that had existed for some time now: the musical circles were divided into two camps. One faction believed that musical standards and technique were crucial to the development of music, and the other believed that the value of music was measured primarily by its political usefulness.²¹⁵ His letter, however, could not have been graciously received, as he was clearly implying that unskilled musicians were opposing those with training out of sheer jealousy.

213.Ibid: 196.

214.Ibid: 197.

215.Ibid: 195.

Lu Ji convened a meeting in June 1954 to discuss the relative importance of technique and theory learned in Conservatory classrooms versus political and social content that came from living among the people.²¹⁶ Naturally, He Luting was present and characteristically outspoken in his views, giving a speech and later contributing his comments to the official music magazine, *People's Music*. Soon the journal was filled with articles both opposing and supporting the opinions of He Luting. At first, the debate was both thought-provoking and polite, but the arguments from the opposing side grew disquieting, with insidious accusations of He Luting's "bourgeois" tendencies. Some writers even claimed that they could trace a line through everything He Luting had ever written which demonstrated that he thought technique to be more important than anything else.²¹⁷

Most frightening of all were the comparisons to the well-known writer Hu Feng, who was to be imprisoned from 1955 until 1979 for his outspoken criticism of Chairman Mao's insistence that literature should serve his political ends.²¹⁸ The journal of the Musicians' Association warned that many had regarded music as immune to counterrevolution, but people like Hu Feng resisted changes in music education: they "opposed opening the schools' doors to workers, peasants, and soldiers; they spread among their students the reactionary theory of cosmopolitanism."²¹⁹

216.Ibid: 197.

217.Ibid: 197.

218.Zhisui, Dr. Li. *The Private Life of Chairman Mao*.(New York: Random House, Inc., 1994, 198.

219.Kraus, *Pianos & Politics*: 83.

He Luting was taken to Beijing and directly to Zhongnanhai, the huge imperial compound with watertight security that housed Chairman Mao and the rest of the country's leaders. He was met by his old friend and patron, Chen Yi, who was now a vice premier. Chen Yi organized a meeting of the leaders of music circles because they were not united and there were too many conflicts.²²⁰ He Luting was the first to speak, stating bluntly that his "old friend" Comrade Lu Ji had done much work for music in China, but that he also had many faults, one of which was to always believe that his way was right and an inability to accept the ideas of others. He Luting spoke on a variety of subjects, including the importance of remembering the important contributions of his teacher Huang Zi, and not just those of the much-acclaimed Xian Xinghai and Nie Er. Lu Ji responded that Comrade He's evaluation of Nie Er and Xian Xinghai was too low and his opinion of Huang Zi and Xiao Youmei was too high, and he talked far too much about the technical aspects of music.²²¹ Others participants expressed their views after He Luting and Lu Ji finished speaking and the heated discussions lasted for a week. Chen Yi finally ended the meeting by insisting that both sides must see the whole issue and maintain an attitude of openness towards their colleagues. He made a point of stressing that the personal attacks on He Luting, such as the comparisons to Hu Feng, were unacceptable.

He Luting's respect for Chen Yi led him to his first known attempt at making a self-criticism. Confessions and self-criticisms were an integral part of Maoist culture, and for most citizens they constituted part of their regular routine. Chairman Mao insisted that

220. Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 197.

221. Ibid: 198.

“Criticism and self criticism is a kind of method. It is a method of resolving contradictions among the people and it is the only method. There is no other.”²²² He Luting only apologized for his behavior, however, not his remarks. He avowed that he could not go against his conscience or his beliefs.

The meeting left all of the issues unresolved, and they remained unresolved until the First National Music Festival was organized in September 1956. Over two thousand musicians gathered at Zhongnanhai, where Chairman Mao spoke informally with leaders including Chen Yi and Zhou Enlai. Chairman Mao included the musicians in his conversation, and his words were recorded and immortalized as Chairman Mao’s “Talk with the Music Workers.”

Chairman Mao stated that “on no account should China’s art, as more effort is spent on it, relapse more and more into the old style or become more and more Westernized. With more effort, it should take on more and more the characteristics of its own time and national identity.”²²³ Mao advocated the use of studying foreign music for the purposes of advancing Chinese music. “Try to have a command of things both Chinese and foreign, absorbing the strengths of both Chinese and foreign arts, fusing them together to create a new art with a unique national form and national style.”²²⁴ In his discussion of this “fusion,” Mao continually cautioned against placing too much emphasis on either Chinese music or foreign music:

222. Chinnery and Tieyun, *Chairman Mao Talks to the People*: 1974

223. Kau and Leung, *The Writings of Mao Zedong*: 97.

224. *Ibid*: 97.

We must be good at absorbing the fine things from foreign countries in order to overcome our own weak points. It would be no good if we stopped moving forward and held fast to the old ways, and if we did not study and introduce foreign literature, or if we did not know how to listen to or how to play foreign music. Do not behave like the Empress Dowager Cixi who blindly rejected everything foreign. The blind rejection of all foreign things is in no way different from the blind worship of them. Both are incorrect and harmful.²²⁵

Although Mao condemned those who advocated “wholesale Westernization,” it must have been gratifying for the musicians such as He Luting to hear his parting words: “You are students of Western things, ‘Western doctors’ so to speak; you are our treasures and we should pay heed to you and rely on you. It’s wrong to exclude those who study foreign things.”²²⁶ Chairman Mao even unconsciously echoed He Luting when he said, “Musical instruments are tools.”²²⁷ But he may have taken exception with Mao’s next remark: “We can make use of foreign musical instruments but must not copy foreign music in our musical composition.”²²⁸

As usual, Mao’s remarks were wonderfully vague, leaving much room for interpretation on either side of the opposing issue. However, musicians who favored the study of technique and the performance of foreign music together with Chinese music could find ample support and validation for their stance in Mao’s words.²²⁹ After the meeting, He Luting offered his opinions, which had remained unchanged:

225. Ibid: 96.

226. Ibid: 104.

227. Ibid: 99.

228. Ibid: 100.

229. Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 208.

To create a modern national music, I think, we should study Western technique and apply it to traditional Chinese music. We can certainly adopt traditional Chinese music....Chinese music can be played on Western instruments, we can use them all....In such things as harmony and counterpoint, Chinese and Western music have basic principles. But only we ourselves can devise our own national style and enrich the texture of our music.²³⁰

Over seven hundred pieces of music and song were presented at nearly a hundred concerts during the First National Music Festival. The works of a number of contemporary composers were performed, including those of He Luting. Folk music also played an important role in the festival, spurring discussion regarding the reform efforts for traditional music. Modifications were encouraged because of the supposedly “unscientific” principles used in making folk instruments.²³¹ The reform of instruments accelerated as most musical leaders considered it an urgent need. He Luting still maintained that China’s traditional folk instruments were unscientific because they could not produce precise pitches. He proposed that the Ministry of Light Industry help by systematically investigating how to produce reformed national instruments, which could then be modernized in the European manner.²³² He said, “At present each nation has its own national musical instruments, national orchestras, but all civilized nations have pianos, violins, and symphony orchestras.”²³³

Chairman Mao’s “Talk with Music Workers” was decidedly less leftist in its stance than his “Talks at the Yan’an Forum,” but the Communists were no longer

230.Chang, *Alexander Tcherpnin*: 1983.

231.Kraus, *Pianos & Politics*, 115.

232.Ibid: 116.

233.Ibid: 116.

struggling in wartime conditions, and the political climate during 1956 was as stable as it would be until well after the end of the Cultural Revolution. It was perhaps a false sense of security, then, that led He Luting to commit what may have been the most serious and unforgivable offense of his life: he impetuously interrupted Chairman Mao's speech. He had not wanted to comment on Mao's remarks, but to ask a legitimate question about the role of history.²³⁴ It is probable that He Luting regretted his spontaneous behavior instantly, but the damage was done: all the musicians present (advocates and opponents of He Luting alike) witnessed his gaffe and were not likely to forget it. The moment the meeting ended, Zhou Enlai immediately reprimanded He Luting, as the premier understood all too well the fate of Party members who had committed far less serious errors. It would not be an exaggeration for anyone in attendance that day to assume that He Luting's recklessness would ultimately result in fatal consequences for the musician.

He Luting may have been over-influenced by the current political campaign that was the chief impetus for the First National Music Festival. Chairman Mao devised a campaign whereby he hoped to revive the revolutionary spirit of the Party, which was seen to be degenerating into a conservative bureaucracy. It was more to revitalize the Party than because of any desire to liberate intellectuals from ideological and political discipline that Mao announced the campaign to "let a hundred flowers blossom, let a hundred schools of thought contend" in a speech delivered on May 2, 1956.²³⁵ In theory, it meant greater freedom for the arts, literature, and scientific research. The phrase "let a hundred schools of thought contend" applied to scientists, whereas "let a hundred flowers

234.Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 208.

235.Meisner, *Mao's China and After*: 165.

blossom” was directed to writers and artists.²³⁶ Artists would be free to create, scientist to investigate, intellectuals to critique and everyone would ostensibly benefit from the receptive environment.

Chairman Mao was deeply suspicious of China’s intellectuals. Publicly, he advocated uniting with and using them, but he continued to doubt their loyalty. This new policy of encouraging intellectual debate was a gamble, based on a calculation that genuine counterrevolutionaries were few, that rebels like Hu Feng had been permanently intimidated into silence, and that other intellectuals would follow Mao’s lead, speaking out only against the people and practices Mao himself most wanted to reform.²³⁷

The criticisms Mao called for were slow in coming, as most intellectuals by this point were afraid to speak out. Mao insisted, however, that the more one loved the Party, the more one would speak out in criticism against it.²³⁸ Chairman Mao assured the intellectuals that there would be no retribution, no struggle sessions, and no humiliating public meetings.²³⁹ For a good member of the Communist Party, it would seem that remaining silent and keeping one’s opinions and complaints to oneself was no longer an option.

As musicians responded to the Party’s invitation for criticism, they raised a broad range of complaints. There was no proper concert hall in Shanghai, and there were too few concerts by Chinese artists, in contrast to visitors from eastern Europe. Others

236.Ibid: 166.

237.Zhisui, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao*: 199.

238.Ibid: 199.

239.Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 213.

complained of the difficulty of getting certain composers published. He Luting protested that *People's Music* was not professional enough, and should be turned into a specialized music journal.²⁴⁰

As the days went on, the “mistakes” of the party were subjected to increasingly ruthless criticism. Soon the Communists’ monopoly of power was challenged, which one critic described as “the source of all ills.” The Communists’ exercise of authority was compared to that of Hitler’s.²⁴¹ Referring to the Party’s smothering methods of controlling everything, a well-known playwright asked: “Why is it necessary to have ‘leadership’ in the arts? Who led Shakespeare, Tolstoy, Beethoven, Moliere?”²⁴² In the end, Mao’s own leadership was criticized. The Communist Party was likened to a Buddhist monastery where the abbot (Mao) dictated the “scriptures” that were then echoed by the monks – the leaders under Mao. Some people complained that they were allowed to criticize only the minor monks and not the abbot himself.²⁴³

Mao was shocked, as it had never been his intention for any of the criticism to be directed at him or for the Party as an institution to come under attack. Nothing about Mao’s presence, in public or in private, encouraged dissidents to speak the truth and so he believed that his popular support was nearly universal. Accustomed as he was to the

240. Kraus, *Pianos & Politics*: 88.

241. Halliday and Chang, *Mao: The Unknown Story*: 417.

242. Ibid: 418.

243. Zhisui, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao*: 200.

flattery of everyone he met, certain that his real enemies had been eliminated or put in jail, he had not realized the depth of the intellectuals' dissatisfaction.²⁴⁴

The Hundred Flowers campaign came to an abrupt halt as Mao launched a vicious counterattack: the 1957 Anti-Rightist campaign. Mao had plotted his revenge, asking for open criticism of the party as a means to “entice the snakes out of their lairs.” The intellectuals were still encouraged to speak out, but the leaders at the highest levels knew that they were about to be trapped. The “hundred flowers” soon became “poisonous weeds” that needed to be rooted out and destroyed.²⁴⁵ In an article written by Mao on June 8, 1957, he accused the newly-christened “rightists” of attempting to overthrow the socialist government and called upon the masses to begin a counterattack.

Just as Mao felt betrayed by the intellectuals who had spoken out, now it was the intellectuals' turn to feel grievously betrayed by Mao. His message to speak out had been echoed in the newspapers and work units everywhere in China. Reluctantly, they had voiced their criticisms. And when they did, Mao turned against them.²⁴⁶

Chairman Mao set a quota for victims, that is, the identification of these so-called “rightists:” between one and ten percent of intellectuals, who numbered some five million at the time. The leaders of the work units were ordered to fulfill the quota, or risk being labeled as rightists themselves. As a result, at least 550,000-plus people were labeled as

244.Ibid: 200.

245. “‘We want to coax the snakes out of their holes,’ Mao told me around this time. ‘Then we will strike. My strategy is to let the poisonous weeds grow first and then destroy them one by one. Let them become fertilizer.’” Ibid: 201.

246.Ibid: 202.

rightists. While many had spoken out, some had not said anything against the regime, and were pulled in specifically to fill Mao's quota.²⁴⁷

Most of those branded as rightists were forced to undergo mass denunciation meetings. Their families became outcasts, their spouses were shunted to undesirable jobs, and their children lost all hope of a decent education. To protect their children – and themselves – many people divorced their spouses when they were labeled as rightists. Chairman Mao revealed later to his top echelon that his home province, Hunan, “denounced 100,000, arrested 10,000, and killed 1,000. The other provinces did the same. So our problems were solved.”²⁴⁸

Scientists and technicians were largely exempted from persecution – “especially those who have major achievements,” a September 1957 order decreed; these “must be absolutely protected.”²⁴⁹ Writers, artists, and historians, however, were superfluous. Those who managed to escape harassment now knew that they could no longer trust either Mao, or the Party. A popular saying summed up the atmosphere: “After the Three Antis no one wants to be in charge of money; after the Anti-Rightist Campaign no one opens their mouth.”²⁵⁰

He Luting, who was by now notorious in his penchant for audaciously speaking out against his Party's policies, ironically escaped being labeled a rightist. The campaign was largely aimed at non-Party intelligentsia, and He Luting's Party membership (in

247.Halliday and Chang: *Mao: The Unknown Story*: 419.

248.Ibid: 420.

249.Ibid: 419.

250.J. Chang, *Wild Swans*: 218.

addition to his long career of service, particularly at Yan'an) played a large role in sparing him this fate. Moreover, as president of the country's most important musical institution, He Luting yielded substantial power and influence. The fate of the arts in China was still unstable, and it was probable that he was still of considerable use to the Party. And once again, Chen Yi had intervened on his behalf at the highest level.

By the time the Anti-Rightist campaign had ended and the next campaign had begun (the Great Leap Forward), Chairman Mao had accomplished exactly what he had set out to do: silence the voices of dissent. Those who were most likely to voice their opinions and alert others to the ominous absurdities of the Great Leap Forward and the impending atrocities of the Cultural Revolution (namely, the intellectuals and the artists) were effectively suppressed. Everyone who managed to escape being accused during the Anti-Rightist campaign had learned a valuable lesson about the importance of remaining inconspicuous and silent.

Everyone, that is, but He Luting.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE DILETTANTE-HATER

The Killer with a Poison Pen

There are some comrades who cannot bear to listen to ideas contrary to their own, and cannot bear to be criticized. This is very wrong.²⁵¹

- Chairman Mao, 1962

Yao Wenyuan was a Shanghai art critic who wrote for *Wen Hui Bao*, a newspaper read primarily by intellectuals. He wrote many leftist articles on cultural topics, and was said to possess the sharpest polemical pen in modern Chinese letters. A 1962 speech by writer Ba Jin at the Second Shanghai Congress of Writers and Artists had criticized Yao, while not naming him, as a man who, “holding a hoop in one hand and a club in the other, goes everywhere looking for men with mistakes.”²⁵²

In May of 1963, Yao Wenyuan suddenly decided to target the composer Claude Debussy. Debussy came to Yao’s attention not by way of music – he openly acknowledged that he knew nothing about Debussy or his music – but via a translation of Debussy’s music criticism called *Monsieur Croche, the Dilettante Hater*. The translation was put out by the Music Publishing House as part of a Hundred Flowers project to translate and publish works by many important Western composers.²⁵³

Only about a year before his death, Debussy prepared for publication in book form a selection of critical articles, some twenty-five in all, variously adapted from his

251. Chinnery and Tieyun, *Chairman Mao Talks to the People*: 62.

252. White, *Policies of Chaos*: 274.

253. Cai and Melvin: *Rhapsody in Red*: 220.

writings of the preceding sixteen years. They were introduced by two essays of a conversational, disputatious character, built about an alter ego whose imaginary identity gives the book its name, *Monsieur Croche, the Dilettante Hater*. Paul Valery's *Soirees avec M. Teste* had supplied Debussy with the idea. M. Croche says he tries to forget music because it obscures his perception of what he does not know or will know only tomorrow. M. Teste remarks that he hasn't read any books in twenty years and has burned his papers; the difficult thing is to remember what he will want tomorrow. Though Debussy sent proofs of his articles to G. Jean-Aubry in 1917, difficulties due to the war held up actual publication until 1921, at which time Debussy had been dead three years.²⁵⁴

The collection includes music criticism (such as Debussy's reviews for the *Revue Blanche*), commentary, and a few essays in which Debussy makes flippant, even cutting, comments on such topics as the Prix de Rome, the administration of state opera houses, and Wagner's music. Monsieur Croche serves as something of an alter ego for Debussy. He appears in eight essays and then disappears from Debussy's writings.²⁵⁵

Debussy's doctrine proclaims his fervent love of music, nature, and liberty, his contempt for that type of criticism that indulges in the dissection of compositions, and his hatred of academic prejudices.²⁵⁶ The beauty of a work or art, he contended, must always remain mysterious. "Let us at all costs preserve this magic peculiar to music, since of all arts it is the most susceptible to magic." Analytical dissection of music, he said, "is

254. Thompson, Oscar. *Debussy: Man and Artist*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1967.

255. Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 221.

256. Vallas, Leon. *Claude Debussy: His Life and Works*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1973.

practically what Thomas de Quincey, the celebrated opium eater, calls ‘murder as a fine art.’”²⁵⁷ Debussy’s writing demonstrated a lively and aggressive hostility to labored intricacy of style, exaggerated sentimentality, and all adherence to false traditions. He urged the return to a simpler, more discreet type of art, more in keeping with the character of the French nation and with its past history. Thus, almost unintentionally, he took up a nationalist attitude. Although they often took the form of the humorous chaff, Claude Debussy’s harangues were serious in intent. They were a continuation and development of the philosophies that he had begun to disseminate at the Paris Conservatoire, and that he continued after his return from Rome for the benefit of a limited circle of composition students at the Conservatoire.²⁵⁸

Though many of Debussy’s writings were controversial in the time and place in which they were written, it is initially unclear as to why they would upset a Chinese leftist on the eve of the Cultural Revolution. However, as with most extreme ideologies, the proponents of the Cultural Revolution were nothing if not adroit at managing to twist any remark (no matter how inconsequential or irrelevant to the subject at hand) to further promulgate their agenda.

Yao Wenyuan would have needed to look no further than the opening paragraph of *Monsieur Croche* to find material for the beginnings of a derisive article:

257. Thompson, *Debussy: Man and Artist*, 180.

258. Vallas, *Claude Debussy: His Life and Works*: 120.

It was a lovely evening. I had decided to idle. I mean, of course, that I was dreaming. I do not want to imply that anything of great emotional value was happening or that I was laying the foundations of the Future. I was just enjoying that occasional care-free mood which brings peace with all the world.²⁵⁹

To an ardent Maoist, this paragraph smacks of bourgeois sensibilities. To “idle,” to “dream,” and to even take notice of a “lovely evening” were precisely the aspects of a bygone feudal era that the Maoists were attempting to eradicate. When in the process of building a new, revolutionary society, there was no time to “idle” as though one were a landlord from the exploiting classes! And the older, revered generation that had been through the Long March and the deprivations of Yan’an had widely disseminated the notion that “laying the foundations of the Future” was only possible through constant struggle and hardship. The concept of “peace with all the world” was not only unrealistic to the Maoists, it was essentially offensive.

As illogical as most of China had become by this point, it is still difficult to conceive how an educated person (as Yao Wenyan undoubtedly was) could become so mired in Maoist ideology as to not allow for the most obvious facts: Debussy was writing in an entirely different society, era, and continent, far removed from Maoist China. But even so, as Yao asks in his article: Why were the Chinese publishers now introducing and promoting the works of this bourgeois musician?²⁶⁰

Debussy was quite opinionated on the subject of other composers, both towards the colleagues of his generation and those that preceded it. He described Bach as “that

259. Claude Debussy, trans. B.N. Langdon Davies. *Monsieur Croche the Dilettante Hater*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1962.

260. Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 220.

benevolent god, to whom musicians should offer a prayer before starting to work, so that they may be saved from mediocrity.”²⁶¹ This quasi-religious rhetoric, even in jest, hardly seems startling to any musician familiar with the writings of the late-Romantic composers, particularly those of the Germanic tradition. (Debussy’s resentment of the supremacy of that tradition to the exclusion of all others gives his comment a somewhat facetious tone; however, there is no reason to suppose that he was insincere.) Perhaps the best known example of the “deification” of one composer by another is Robert Schumann’s “New Paths” article in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, in which he hails the young Johannes Brahms as the new “Messiah” and describes him as “sprung fully armed from the head of Minerva.” This would lead to more religious rhetoric (some of it derisive) when other composers referred to “heiligen Brahms.”²⁶²

But Chairman Mao had already begun to sow the seeds for his own deification, and Maoists were considerably lacking in both humor and understanding of late-nineteenth century European allusions. A year after Yao Wenyuan’s opening article on Claude Debussy was published (under the pen name of Chu Lan), Lin Biao published a collection of Chairman Mao’s quotations which became famously known as “The Little Red Book.” The test of loyalty to Mao was no longer measured by revolutionary acts inspired by his thought but by the ability to recite his sayings and by the size of portraits carried in streets or hung in homes. In households there were often “tablets of loyalty” to Mao’s thought around which families gathered to pay reverence, much in the fashion with which they traditionally venerated their ancestors. Schoolchildren no longer began

261. Thompson, *Debussy: Man and Artist*: 187.

262. Walker, *Franz Liszt: The Weimar Years*: 350.

the day by saying “good morning” but by chanting, “May Chairman Mao live ten thousand times ten thousand years” (a traditional greeting for the former emperors of China). Throughout the land exhibition halls, decorated with traditional religious symbols, were built to chronicle the life and commemorate the deeds of the Chairman, and people came on organized pilgrimages to pay homage at what the official press termed “sacred shrines.”²⁶³ The practice, loaded with religious overtones, of asking Chairman Mao’s instruction every morning in front of his picture, and confessing one’s “mistakes” to him in the evening, was one such ritual, which symbolized the attribution of political and moral virtue to Mao alone.²⁶⁴

Yao Wenyuan seems less offended by Debussy’s veneration of Bach or his views on the future of music than his “bourgeois” background and lifestyle and the fact that he wrote “impressionist” music. In *Wen Hui Bao*, Yao asks “what did they [the publishers] expect to come of introducing Western bourgeois music theory to China, especially impressionism?”²⁶⁵ Debussy’s roots were hardly typical bourgeois – his father had joined the Paris Commune and was subsequently arrested and jailed after its fall,²⁶⁶ although Debussy sought to attain the trappings of a bourgeois life, frequently living beyond his means. And Debussy’s abhorrence of the “impressionist” label is well-documented; however, Yao was either unaware of these facts or did not care to examine them too closely. His agenda was far greater than a mere attack on a French composer.

263. Meisner, *Mao’s China and After*: 347.

264. Changgen, Barbara Barnouin and Yu. *Ten Years of Turbulence*. London: Kegan Paul International Ltd., 1993.

265. Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 220.

266. Ibid: 221.

Claude Debussy was not the first European composer to be attacked in Maoist China. As early as 1959, a *People's Music* article named some harmful twentieth century composers: Schoenberg (“reflects the emptiness and cruel heartlessness of capitalist society”), Stravinsky (reactionary in both content and musical form), and Hindemith (expresses capitalism’s “declining character and coldness of interpersonal relations.”)²⁶⁷ The growing political weight of these articles resulted first in attacks on specific composers for being unhealthy, then upon the entire repertory. The campaign against “absolute” instrumental music (versus “program” music) is well known, as is the later campaign against Beethoven.²⁶⁸ From the early 1960’s, Chinese musicians had to be very careful about selecting politically safe music for their programs.

But Debussy was the first European composer to merit his own political campaign. While most of *Wen Hui Bao*’s more open-minded or musically-educated readers no doubt read Yao Wenyuan’s essay with disdain and then promptly forgot it, the article riled He Luting so much that he could not put it out of his mind.²⁶⁹ Never one to suffer fools with regards to musical knowledge, and never one to remain silent when musical ideals were oppressed or attacked, He Luting called *Wen Hui Bao* and invited one of its reporters to come to his office so he could set the venerable newspaper straight on the subject of Debussy. Before the journalist had even sat down, Mr. He told him, in

267. Kraus, *Pianos & Politics in China*: 111.

268. “China was in the midst of a campaign against Beethoven, whose chief crime was “composing bourgeois music.” I couldn’t exactly see how Beethoven could rot your mind, but I persuaded myself that China had the right to restrict influences it considered harmful.” (Wong, *Red China Blues*: 73.)

269. Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 221.

essence, that Yao's column was a misguided display of ignorance and that an influential paper like *Wen Hui Bao* discredited itself by publishing it.²⁷⁰

When the reporter was finally able to take a seat, he took out his notebook and wrote down everything Mr. He said: Yao had taken Debussy's writing completely out of context. He did not understand when the composer was being ironic or sarcastic. He took sentences from *Monsieur Croche* and let his imagination run wild – the result was a joke. It was also absurd to use the standards of Marxism to judge the composer; Debussy had his limitations and Mr. He did not agree with everything he did or like everything he composed, but his ideas were unique for the era in which he lived.²⁷¹

He Luting, predictably, was entirely correct in his assessment of Yao Wenyuan's article. Although Mr. He neglected to mention it to the reporter, even Debussy's friends did not take his writing this seriously. Much of his writing was haphazard and last-minute, and Debussy frequently admitted his reluctance to write at all: he typically did so when it was absolutely necessary to earn some money. In examining his writings, one should also allow for Debussy's spirit of contradiction, his love of mockery, his attitude of boyish impertinence towards all established reputations, and all those personal elements that prompted him to exaggerate his opinions.²⁷²

At the end of the interview, the reporter asked Mr. He if he would write up his views for *Wen Hui Bao* to publish as a response to Yao's polemic. Mr. He, of course, had

270.Ibid: 221.

271.Ibid: 221.

272.Vallas, *Claude Debussy: His Life and Works*: 119.

already gotten into serious trouble for voicing his opinions in print, but he saw no reason to hide his views on Debussy. He wrote a response entitled “A few requests for art critics,” in which he commended Comrade Yao for taking the time to read about Debussy but added that it was unfortunate he had so badly misunderstood *Monsieur Croche*. Unfortunately, Comrade Yao was clearly unfamiliar with the arts activities in turn-of-the-century European bourgeois society and did not understand impressionist painting or music. When one is unfamiliar with a subject, Mr. He noted, one should be very cautious and study harder to get to the truth. The bulk of his response was then devoted to parsing Yao’s interpretation of *Monsieur Croche*, and explaining what Debussy had actually said and what Mr. He thought he meant.²⁷³

Mr. He’s response was published under a pseudonym, not an atypical practice for a Chinese artist (He Luting’s award-winning composition *Buffalo Boy’s Flute* was originally published under the pseudonym Ho Rodin.) He Luting originally intended to use his own name, but the journalist suggested using a pseudonym and He Luting eventually agreed, deciding that it would be too harsh for someone of his reputation and position to criticize Yao Wenyuan’s opinion directly. The pen name that he chose – Shan Gu – was that of a poet-official from the Northern Song Dynasty, Huang Tingjian (1045-1105), who was known for remonstrating the government.²⁷⁴ Yao Wenyuan himself had published his critique of Debussy under a pen name, but He Luting had managed to

273. Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 222.

274. Mittler, *Dangerous Tunes*: 80.

reveal Yao's identity when he referred to him as a "bruiser, who would use a club to knock down anything" (a reference to the speech by the writer Ba Jin.)²⁷⁵

After his response was published, the editors of *Wen Hui Bao* invited Mr. He to attend a meeting with them about Debussy. Mr. He assumed that it was a discussion in the manner of the Hundred Flowers Campaign and again aired his views freely. He talked about the importance of studying Debussy and of learning about foreign culture in general. He suggested that in evaluating the past, it was wise to use a historical viewpoint rather than an ideological one, while in arts education it was necessary to recognize the importance of the bourgeois artistic legacy. As for Debussy's music, it was a bit like the paintings of the famous artist Qi Baishi – it showed lots of interest in life, but little struggle. It was poetic and based on Debussy's feelings about nature, not a direct attempt to imitate the natural world.²⁷⁶

About a week later, *Wen Hui Bao* ran another article on Debussy – and then another and another. A few articles were defenses of the composer and his music, but most simply branded him as a bourgeois impressionist. It soon became clear to He Luting that the paper was running a smear campaign. Yao Wenyuan retaliated by writing that Debussy didn't truly understand the French peasants – he thought their lives were idyllic, when in reality they were a constant struggle of blood, sweat, and tears. The landlords were constantly cheating them – how could they possibly feel peaceful?²⁷⁷ It is unclear what the plight of the French peasants had to do with Debussy's writing, but to claim that

275. White, *Policies of Chaos*:274.

276. Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 222.

277. Ibid: 222.

an artist did not understand the “working classes” was sufficient enough to condemn him. Another critic noted that Debussy’s instrumental work – suggestive of such things as the dialogue between the wind and sea – was written for rich old ladies who sat around and ate all day.²⁷⁸ Clearly, the campaign had taken on an extreme life of its own, and it had long since forgotten its original stimulus: *Monsieur Croche the Dilettante Hater*.

After each article was published, a journalist would come to He Luting’s home or office to record his response. What about Qi Baishi’s paintings, asked Mr. He – by painting shrimp, insects, and leaves, how did he help the revolution? Debussy was dead, and no one could ask him now his opinions regarding class feelings. One could only acknowledge that he was a very influential composer. After the publication of an article called “What is Music?” Mr. He told the reporter that by the standards of that article, only *The Internationale* could really be called music.²⁷⁹ The “Internationale” was a revolutionary hymn written in 1888 (contemporary with Debussy) by Pierre Degeyter, setting Eugene Pottier’s poem from the Paris Commune of 1881. It had been an important song of the Chinese revolution ever since Qu Qiubai translated it into Chinese in 1923. Chinese cultural officials treated it not just as a stirring revolutionary anthem, but as one of the highest points in the history of world culture.²⁸⁰ Mao encouraged all of China to learn to sing the “Internationale,” and Chinese listeners were told that this was an

278. Ibid: 222.

279. Ibid: 222.

280. Kraus, *Pianos & Politics in China*, 173.

example of “good” European music.²⁸¹ From the perspective of Mao and his followers, the “Internationale” became “the emblem of the rise of proletarian music,” but Debussy became “the emblem of capitalist music already on the road to decline and decadence.”²⁸² In the current climate, He Luting concluded, if you criticized Debussy, you were right; and if you didn’t, you were accused of worshipping the West.²⁸³

Mr. He was asked to write another article after this conversation, but declined. Slowly but surely, he was beginning to suspect that he had been trapped; later, he was told that everything he said was reported back to high-level officials in Shanghai, some of whom were delighted that he had finally “come out of hiding.” Frustrated and exhausted, he wisely announced that he was requesting a two-year leave of absence from his Conservatory duties so he could read, write and compose. With He Luting refusing to speak, the wave of anti-Debussy articles dissolved.²⁸⁴

But the damage was already irreparable, not only to He Luting’s career and livelihood, but to his actual safety and that of his family’s. Yao Wenyuan’s ultimate scheme was accomplished: he had primarily used Debussy to attack such supporters of Western classical music as the editors at Music Publishing House, and he had ferreted out others, such as He Luting. Yao Wenyuan was unlikely to soon forget his public castigation at the hands of He Luting, nor was his new patroness, Jiang Qing, the wife of Chairman Mao. Jiang made use of Yao as she had made use of other young writers as she

281. “‘The Internationale’ says that we must unite until the day comes when Communism will certainly be realized. Learn to sing ‘The Internationale.’” (Chinnery and Tieyun, *Chairman Mao Talks to the People*, 74.)

282. Kraus, *Pianos & Politics in China*, 173.

283. Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 222.

284. *Ibid*: 223.

ascended in power: the journalist or scholar wrote an article that departed from the usual interpretation of a book or historical event. Chinese readers understood that historically the writer could not be acting alone, but as the hired pen of a heavy political cannon.²⁸⁵ Yao's father, an author and businessman, had met Jiang Qing in the 1930's, and it was not long before Yao was promoted from artistic and literary critic to the senior editor of the *Liberation Daily*. As Jiang Qing's rose to prominence, so did Yao Wenyuan. A well-known expert at nursing long-held grudges, sometimes for decades before exacting revenge, it seemed unlikely that Jiang Qing would forget He Luting's insult towards her protégé. He Luting was almost certainly destined to become another casualty of the next inevitable political purge.

Why Did He Do It?

Even before one is made fully aware of the hideous outcome of He Luting's defense of Debussy, one is still stunned by the reckless actions of this outspoken musician. He Luting must have been fully aware of the potential consequences of his words and deeds. He had lived through numerous campaigns and purges by this time, and he had witnessed the political pendulum swing from right to left, seemingly at the whim of the administration. He had witnessed the Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1957, and saw what happened to intellectuals who were seduced by a more relaxed political climate into speaking their minds and offering their opinions. He Luting himself was on exceedingly thin ice for his inability to silence his thoughts. He had been personally brought to Zhongnanhai by the vice premier to be warned for his blatant outspokenness. He was

285. Terrill, Ross. *The White-Boned Demon: A Biography of Madame Mao Zedong*. New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1984.

reprimanded by no less than Zhou Enlai for daring to interrupt Chairman Mao during his speech. Did He Luting's inability to keep his mouth shut (a characteristic well-documented since his youth) override any sense of caution for his personal safety and welfare? Did Yao Wenyuan's flimsy, unresearched article on Debussy really warrant the time and energy of an intelligent response from one of the most prominent musicians in China? How could he not have known that he was walking into a trap?

He Luting may have made the innocent mistake that so many long-time Communists made: placing his faith in the Party. He had followed the Party's directives and apologized for his bluntness (as much as he would allow himself to do so), and believed himself to be forgiven. He had made both verbal and written self-criticisms, particularly with regards to his interruption of Chairman Mao. He undoubtedly believed these incidents to be in the past, and could have no way of knowing that extensive files were being compiled on his history and that of every Party member for the purpose of launching future attacks against them.

Furthermore, the intellectuals who were targeted during the Anti-Rightist campaign suffered because they had spoken out against the government (albeit during another government-sanctioned campaign.) He Luting plausibly believed there to be no harm to himself in criticizing the writings of a Shanghai literary critic, particularly one whose reputation did not remotely approach He Luting's position and prestige. Certainly, it could not in any way compare with openly challenging a national deity; He Luting had committed far worse crimes than defending Debussy.

Even if He Luting had become aware of Yao Wenyuan's growing association with Jiang Qing (and it is highly unlikely that he was acquainted with that connection), this would hardly have provided him with any reasonable cause for caution or concern. Jiang Qing held no official position at that time, and she had been forbidden since the Yan'an days from participating in politics. She was looked down upon by the political elite. Actresses were traditionally despised in China, and an actress who furthered her political ambitions by manipulating a marriage with the leader was particularly deplored.²⁸⁶ No one could have foreseen that tens of thousands of Party officials, artists, writers, scientists, and common people who fell under the shadow of her suspicion would be cruelly persecuted, nor that scores of them would die at the hands of her trusted "Revolutionaries."²⁸⁷

Despite his shortcomings with regards to his outspokenness, He Luting possessed an infallible background as a Communist Party member. He had not only been jailed and persecuted on its behalf in his early years, but he was a veteran of Yan'an and had borne witness to the Party in its formative stages. He was personally acquainted with Party members at the highest level, and he could not be blamed for supposing that no real harm could befall him with these exalted connections. The country had yet to witness the downfall of its highest-placed and most beloved leaders, such as Marshall Peng Dehuai and President Liu Shaoqui. He Luting had yet to realize that no one's standing in the Party or connections therein were high enough to save them once they had fallen into disgrace.

286. Zhisui, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao*: 442.

287. Cheng, *Life and Death in Shanghai*: 38.

Perhaps the only factor that could have silenced He Luting's beliefs would have been prior knowledge of the danger into which he unwittingly placed his family. A Chinese proverb has it that a calamity that strikes one member of a family will reverberate to nine of its branches (*huo yan jiu zu*), whereas good fortune will smile even on the household chickens.²⁸⁸ But no one could have foreseen the Maoists' practice of holding families accountable for crimes of one of its members, or the persecution of innocent family members to the extent of murder and suicide. As with most totalitarian regimes, no one could have predicted how bad things would become.

Even the advent of the Cultural Revolution gave few people (even those highly placed) real cause for immediate alarm or concern for their safety. The Chinese people had lived through numerous political campaigns thus far; sooner or later, when it had gone too far, corrective measures would be taken. The people would have a few months or a few years of respite until the next political campaign. Mao believed that political campaigns were the motivating force for progress, thus many believed that the Cultural Revolution was just one of an endless series of upheavals the Chinese people must learn to endure.²⁸⁹

No one could have predicted the scale and scope of the tragedy of the Cultural Revolution, so vast as to be almost incomprehensible. In the ten years from when Mao started the Purge until his death in 1976, at least three million people died violent deaths, and post-Mao leaders acknowledged that 100 million people, one-ninth of the entire

288. Thurston, *Enemies of the People*: 107.

289. Cheng, *Life and Death in Shanghai*: 14.

population, suffered in one way or another.²⁹⁰ The Cultural Revolution was a human tragedy of untold proportions, a catastrophe that brought China to the brink of collapse.²⁹¹

Certainly, no one could have predicted the outcome of the He Luting's skirmish over Debussy; even in a country where logic and sense seemed to be gradually departing, it was too fantastic to be believed. It would have been laughable, had it not been so horrific. He Luting's defense of Debussy was to be labeled the most serious counter-revolutionary incident prior to the Cultural Revolution.

The Gathering Storm

Shortly after He Luting returned from his two-year sabbatical, an article appeared in the *Wen Hui Bao*, a critique of a play written by Beijing vice-mayor Wu Han. Published on November 10, 1965, the play in question was the popular *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office*. Written five years before by the historian and Party official Wu Han, the allegorical drama set in the Ming dynasty celebrated the heroism of a virtuous official deposed by a tyrannical emperor for having protested the seizure of peasant lands by rapacious landlords and corrupt bureaucrats.

Mao himself had promoted the traditional operas about Hai Rui, and he had often asked his own party officials to emulate the hero. Wu Han, in addition to being a vice-mayor of Beijing, was a professor at Peking University and one of the country's leading

290. Halliday and Chang, *Mao: The Unknown Story*: 547.

291. Thurston, *Enemies of the People*: 87.

Ming dynasty historians. Mao's longtime interest in Ming dynasty history had brought him into early contact with Wu Han.²⁹²

The play was denounced as an oblique attack on the "Great Leader" for his 1959 dismissal of the outspoken Marshall Peng Dehuai, who had protested the excesses of the Great Leap Forward and the People's Commune.²⁹³ Mao's dismissal of Peng Dehuai had been a frequent topic of private discussion, and many people believed that Peng's dismissal had been unfair. People began comparing the Jiajing emperor's unfair dismissal and imprisonment of Hai Rui with Mao's dismissal of Peng Dehuai. Peng Dehuai and Hai Rui were both impeccably honest and principled officials, devoted to the welfare of their leader; they pointed to shortcomings not to rebuke him but to add to his glory by improving his rule.²⁹⁴ And it took little imagination on the part of the politically astute Chinese reader to identify the tyrannical emperor as Mao Zedong.

The critique was written on the basis of an idea from Jiang Qing and one of her closest associates, Zhang Chunqiao. The ruthlessly ambitious woman who had been kept out of Chinese political life for decades now found an opportunity for advancement. Her suspiciousness, her new political persona, and her interest in literature and the arts lent a certain predictability to her discoveries of playwrights disloyal to her husband. However, Beijing mayor Peng Zhen, propaganda chief Lu Dingyi, and deputy propaganda chief Zhou Yang all refused her demand that a campaign be organized to criticize the play. Wu Han was their colleague and friend, a highly respected intellectual, and a man known to

292.Zhisui, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao*: 440.

293.Ningkan, *A Single Tear*: 192.

294.Zhisui, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao*: 441.

listen to Mao.²⁹⁵ For nineteen days after it was published in *Wen Hui Bao*, the Beijing newspapers adamantly refused to print the article until they heard from Mao directly.

The spring of 1966 saw an escalation of the critique of the playwright and two other high-ranking scholar-officials who had collaborated on a series of miscellaneous essays. Their writings were denounced as “great poisonous weeds” attacking the “Great Leader.” The upshot of the critique was summary dismissal not only of the three culprits, but of the powerful mayor of Beijing himself and his city Party Committee, which was accused of masterminding the conspiracy. Obviously, the critique of one historical play was but a pretext for another major political campaign, but nobody knew exactly what it was all about or how it would be carried out. During the past fifteen years, each major political campaign had invariably been spearheaded by vanguard action on the cultural front, and each new campaign had proved more violent and extensive than the previous one. The all-powerful “Great Leader” at the head of an all-powerful great party supported by an all-powerful great army had proved incredibly paranoid about literary and artistic works, or any form of intellectual expression, for that matter.²⁹⁶

Mao perceived intellectuals as a fundamental threat to the disciplined and homogeneous society he wanted to create.²⁹⁷ Aware of the intimate tie between literature and politics in China, Mao remarked that “the use of novels for anti-Party activity is a great invention,” and entirely without sarcasm went on to observe that “anyone wanting to overthrow a political regime must create public opinion and do some preparatory

295.Ibid: 441.

296.Ningkan, *A Single Tear*: 192.

297.Changgen and Barnouin, *Ten Years of Turbulence*: 29.

ideological work.”²⁹⁸ In late 1963 and in 1964, Mao went beyond criticizing certain forms of art such as novels and classical opera (of which he himself was a well-known amateur) and began to focus his attention on the cultural authorities, the “superstructure,” itself.²⁹⁹

The reluctance of the Beijing officials to embark upon a new campaign reflected the general mood among Party officials. Most of them were exhausted from the relentless political campaigns, and wanted to focus on improving living standards. Mao interpreted the reaction from the Party officials to his call for a witch-hunt as an indication that their loyalty to him was weakening.³⁰⁰ When the article condemning Wu Han’s play was finally published in Shanghai, it was there that the term “Cultural Revolution” first appeared.

Chairman Mao’s aim was to bring about the total reformation of the country’s political structure and the social life of the nation – and, moreover, the spiritual transformation of the people.³⁰¹ The underlying Maoist assumption in the Cultural Revolution was that the existing state and Party apparatus was dominated by “bourgeois ideology” and thus was producing capitalist-type socio-economic relationships in society at large. Only by raising the political consciousness of the masses, revitalizing the socialist spirit and ideals of the revolution, and re-fashioning a state structure guided by “proletarian ideology” could the danger of a regression to capitalism be forestalled. And

298. Meisner, *Mao’s China and After*: 313.

299. Barnouin and Changgen, *Ten Years of Turbulence*: 20.

300. Chang, *Wild Swans*: 275.

301. As with any political campaign of this magnitude, there was no singular leading cause. An important motive was also for Mao to regain power after the disaster of the Great Leap Forward.

by both Maoist preference and objective political necessity, those aims could be accomplished only by the mobilization of the people for Maoist-inspired revolutionary action. Mao called for no less than a “profound” revolution “that touches people to their very souls.”³⁰² What made this so remarkable a phenomenon in the history of post-revolutionary societies is that the call for rebellion against the existing political order came from those (Mao) who had built that order.³⁰³

The initial unwillingness (and in a few daring cases, outright refusal) to condemn the well-established playwright Wu Han also stemmed from the fact that the article that appeared in the *Wen Hui Bao* was written by a much lesser-known figure, both in artistic circles and within the Party. As always, however, the minor literary entities had the backing of powerful persons within the Party; this was how the political campaigns began. In the case of the author of this critique, his patrons were Jiang Qing, the newly-created leader of Shanghai (Zhang Chunqiao), and ultimately Chairman Mao himself.

This minor critic who wrote for the *Wen Hui Bao*, the man indirectly responsible for beginning the Cultural Revolution, was none other than He Luting’s nemesis and Debussy’s attacker: Yao Wenyuan.

Chairman Mao regarded the Cultural Revolution as his greatest achievement since taking power in 1949.³⁰⁴ Anyone who had ever criticized him would soon be ruthlessly purged. It had taken many years for Mao to reach the point where he was able to purge

302. Meisner, *Mao’s China and After*: 315.

303. *Ibid*: 321.

304. Halliday and Chang: *Mao: The Unknown Story*: 614.

his enemies, and the grudges he held often traced back to before liberation. To emerge victorious, he was willing to plunge the entire country into chaos.³⁰⁵

In order to carry out the Cultural Revolution directives, Mao utilized four leftist Party member and endowed them with limitless power: his wife, Jiang Qing; Zhang Chunqiao, “the Cobra;” the leader of the Shanghai Workers, Wang Hongwen; and the new media chief and head of Party propaganda, Yao Wenyuan. For those Mao dubbed the “Gang of Four,” the motivation for the Cultural Revolution had less to do with the spiritual revitalization of the people than with settling personal scores – some of the pettiest kind. The Cultural Revolution provided ideal opportunities for them to engage in victimization. The violence and merciless persecution began immediately.

They did not forget He Luting.

305. Zhisui, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao*: 472.

CHAPTER FIVE: LIFE AND DEATH IN SHANGHAI

Under Heaven, All is Chaos

A revolution is not a dinner party, or writing an essay, or painting a picture, or doing embroidery; it cannot be so refined, so leisurely and gentle, so temperate, kind, courteous, restrained and magnanimous. A revolution is an insurrection, an act of violence by which one class overthrows another.³⁰⁶

- Chairman Mao, 1927.

Mao regarded warfare not only as the supreme manifestation of conscious activity, but also as the supreme adventure and the supreme test of the human will. He tended to approach problems of every sort, including economic development and the psychological transformation of the Chinese people, with an emphasis on struggle and drama and a conviction that he who is resolute and fearless must ultimately prevail. These attitudes were likely to prove less appropriate to the solution of the complex problems of a modernizing society than they were to his experience at Yan'an, or in the Chungking Mountains.³⁰⁷

According to the Maoist view that developed in the early 1960's, the forces of conspiracy were still afoot throughout the world, fostered by imperialist powers and by dark forces within the socialist bloc. The proclaimed purpose of the Cultural Revolution was to unmask these hidden traitors, drag them out of their hiding places, and save socialism from domestic and international forces of subversion. Viewed with this in

306. Lin Biao, "Quotations from Mao Tse-Tung": 12.

307. Schram, Stuart R. *Quotations From Chairman Mao Tse-Tung*. New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1967.

mind, the political viciousness sometimes presented as an unfortunate but unintended consequence appears instead as a direct expression of Maoist political mentality. The ubiquitous charges made in the official press and Red Guard tabloids, the violent and incoherent factionalism, the endless accusations made in struggle sessions, the countless confessions extracted from prisoners held in isolation, often under extreme mental and physical torture, all were inspired directly by this image of conspiracy. As experienced by participants, bystanders, and victims alike, it is now commonly understood not as a pursuit of abstract ideals, but for what it turned out to be: an unprecedented wave of state-sanctioned (initially, at least) persecution, torture, gang warfare, and mindless violence.³⁰⁸

If he was to get the population to act, Mao would have to remove authority from the Party and establish absolute loyalty and obedience to him alone. To achieve this he needed terror – an intense terror that would block all other considerations and crush all other fears. He saw boys and girls in their teens and early twenties as his ideal agents. They had been brought up in the fanatical personality cult of Mao and the militant doctrine of “class struggle.” They were endowed with the qualities of youth – they were rebellious, fearless, eager to fight for a “just cause,” thirsty for adventure and action. They were also irresponsible, ignorant, and easy to manipulate – and prone to violence. A generation of teenagers grew up under Mao expecting to fight class enemies, and the vague calls in the press for a Cultural Revolution stoked the feeling that a “war” was

308. White, Lynn T. "The Cultural Revolution as an Unintended Result of Administrative Policies." In *New Perspectives on the Cultural Revolution*, by Christine P.W. Wong, David Zweig William A. Joseph, 83-104. Cambridge: The Council on East Asian Studies/Harvard University, 1991.

imminent. Some politically well-attuned teenagers sensed that their idol, Mao, was directly involved, and their indoctrination gave them no alternative but to take his side. Only they could give Mao the immense force that he needed to terrorize the whole of society, and to create a chaos that would shake, and then shatter, the foundation of the Party. One slogan summed up the Red Guards' mission: "We vow to launch a bloody war against anyone who dares to resist the Cultural Revolution, who dares to oppose Chairman Mao!"³⁰⁹

All policies and orders had formerly been conveyed through a tightly controlled system that was entirely in the hands of the Party. Mao now discarded this channel and turned directly to the masses of the youth. As he could see that the people were not responding to his repeated calls to attack the "revisionists," he needed the Red Guards to be his shock troops. He did this by combining two quite different methods: vague, high-flown rhetoric carried openly in the press; and conspiratorial manipulation and agitation conducted by the Cultural Revolution Authority, particularly his wife. It was they who filled out the real meaning of the rhetoric. Phrases like "rebellion against authority," "revolution in education," "destroying an old world so a new one could be born," and "creating new man" – all of which attracted many in the West in the 1960's – were interpreted as calls for violent action.³¹⁰

In June of 1966, Mao intensified the terrorization of society. He picked as his first instrument of terror young people in schools and universities, the natural hotbed for activists. These students were told to condemn their teachers and those in charge of

309.Chang, *Wild Swans*: 283.

310.Ibid: 283.

education for poisoning their heads with “bourgeois ideas” – and for persecuting them with exams, which henceforth were abolished. The message was splashed in outsize characters on the front page of *People’s Daily*, and declaimed in strident voices on the radio, carried by loudspeakers that had been rigged up everywhere. Teachers and administrators in education were selected as the first victims because they were the people instilling culture, and because they were the group most conveniently placed to offer up to the youthful mobs, being right there at hand.³¹¹ They were the most conspicuous targets, and many of them had already been victimized by work teams and school authorities in the last few months. Teachers were better targets than parents, who could only have been attacked in an atomized and isolated manner. They were also more important figures of authority than parents in Chinese culture.³¹²

The young were told that their role was to “safeguard” Mao, although how their teachers could possibly harm “the great Helmsman,” or what perils might befall him, was not disclosed. Nevertheless, many responded enthusiastically.³¹³ On August 5, in a Peking girls’ school packed with high officials’ children (which Mao’s two daughters had attended), the first known death by torture took place. The headmistress, a fifty-year-old mother of four, was kicked and trampled by the girls, and boiling water was poured over her. She was ordered to carry heavy bricks back and forth; as she stumbled past, she was thrashed with leather army belts with brass buckles, and with wooden sticks studded with

311. Chang and Halliday, *Mao: The Unknown Story*: 514.

312. Chang, *Wild Swans*: 284.

313. Chang and Halliday, *Mao: The Unknown Story*: 514.

nails. She soon collapsed and died.³¹⁴ Students at one high school actually beat to death every one of their teachers.³¹⁵

After the terror wrought in the schools, Mao directed his Red Guards to fan out into society at large. It was with the authorities' blessing that Red Guards broke into homes where they burned books, cut up paintings, trampled phonograph records and musical instruments – generally wrecking anything to do with “culture.” Fearing that the Red Guards might burst in and torture them if “culture” was found in their possession, frightened citizens burned their own books or sold them as scrap paper, and destroyed their own art objects. Mao thus succeeded in wiping out culture from Chinese homes.³¹⁶ In the summer of 1966, Red Guards ravaged every city and town, and some areas in the countryside. Many of those raided were tortured to death in their own homes. Some were carted off to makeshift torture chambers in what had been cinemas, theatres, and sports stadiums.³¹⁷

The Red Guards, urged to go out and make revolution, regarded the piano as a symbol of bourgeois affectation and loyalty to imperialism. Many urban middle-class families watched Red Guard mobs smash their pianos to pieces. Other families, eager to remove evidence of musical counterrevolution from their homes, sold their pianos to second-hand furniture stores for a fraction of their rapidly declining value.³¹⁸ Red Guard

314.Ibid: 517.

315.Sitson, Ma. ""Cruelty and Insanity Made Me a Fugitive"." *Life*, vol.62, no. 22. (June 2, 1967): 25-69.

316.Chang and Halliday, *Mao: The Unknown Story*: 521.

317.Ibid: 519.

318.Kraus, *Pianos & Politics in China*: 140.

raiding parties also enjoyed destroying recordings of European classical music.³¹⁹ One Guangdong music lover first buried his record collection. Later, when things had quieted down a bit, and he could no longer do without Mozart and Brahms, he unearthed some of his favorite recordings and listened to them with a rare pair of headphones. Even then, he stored the records atop kindling in his stove, so that he might claim that he was preparing to burn them, should Red Guard raiders reappear.³²⁰

The Central Conservatory's collection of records and instruments was saved by the faculty and students who divided them up for hiding.³²¹ However, one Red Guard's account of the prestigious Central Conservatory in Beijing provides a considerably bleak yet insightful glimpse into the music school's atmosphere during this period. Naturally, all classes had ceased in order to allow the students to "make revolution." As he made his way through the building, the first thing he noticed was that the museum of the history of musical instruments was boarded up and sealed.

The classrooms were all boarded shut, and signs hung on the doors reading FEUDALIST-CAPITALIST-REVISIONIST. Pianos had been pulled out into the corridors and sealed shut with the stamps of the Red Guards, and broken desks and chairs lay about everywhere. Sheet music of classical European composers was scattered all over the floors, some of it in charred remnants, and from ceiling to floor, from wall to wall, sometimes more than ten layers thick, were the words of struggle and criticism.

319. "When the Cultural Revolution began, I was studying music. But then my family came under attack, and the Red Guards came to search our home. They destroyed most of my phonograph records – not all of them, though. Some they took for themselves. And they ripped up all my musical scores. They tried to destroy my piano, too. With an ax." Thurston, *Enemies of the People*: 22.

320. Kraus, *Pianos & Politics in China*: 141.

321. Ibid: 141.

Often when I went to the bathroom I would notice two men sweeping the corridors and cleaning out the toilets. One day another child told me that the old one was Ma Sitson, the President of the Institute and a famous violinist, and the youngish one wearing heavy leather shoes and traditional clothes with cloth buttons was Liu Shikun, the famous pianist. I had seen enough of this kind of thing by then not to think much about it, but when it was explained to me that the pictures in the broadcasting room had been of Liu Shikun accepting First Prize in an International Youth Competition in the Soviet Union, I assumed that he must be an unusually bad man.³²²

Mao encouraged the Red Guards to pick a wider range of victims in order to increase the terror. Prominent writers, artists, scholars, musicians such as Liu Shikun, and most other top professionals, who had been privileged under the Communist regime, were now categorically condemned as “reactionary bourgeois authorities.” The targets at this stage were the custodians of culture, and culture itself.³²³ Liu Shikun came under attack as one of the great virtuoso pianists of the People’s Republic of China. His greatest distinction was in 1958 as runner-up in the first Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow (first prize was awarded to Van Cliburn.) In the eyes of the Red Guards, Liu’s crimes were manifold: he not only engaged in bourgeois activities such as playing the piano, but he had “out-Westernized the West” by lowering himself to compete with capitalist musicians and by actually winning awards in Western competitions. By demonstrating that he could play European music better than many Europeans, Liu was regarded no less than a lackey of the West, and allegations of spying for these imperialist countries were soon forthcoming.

322.Heng and Shapiro, *Son of the Revolution*: 116.

323.Chang and Halliday, *Mao: The Unknown Story*: 518.

Liang Heng recalls one struggle session against Liu Shikun, who was already weak from repeated beatings and malnourishment. Thoroughly cowed at this point, Liu was placed on a platform for interrogation, wearing a big paper hat labeled COUNTERREVOLUTIONARY MUSICIAN LIU SHIKUN. As the crowd threw stones and spat at him, Liu Shikun admitted to all of the charges hurled against him. Along with being a Soviet Revisionist Spy, it was said that Liu was an individualist, that he had tried to become famous, that he had lived a Capitalist lifestyle, and that he shook hands with Khrushchev, and that he smiled and “surrendered” to the Soviet Revisionists. The Red Guards also sang a special song they had made up for the occasion:

Liu Shikun you bastard,
 Now you can surrender,
 If you do not tell the truth,
 You may quickly die....³²⁴

The former Red Guard Liang Heng, who was ten years old at the time, recalled fetching Liu Shikun a much-needed glass of water after this struggle session and being fearful that this isolated act of charity would be discovered by his militant colleagues. Humanitarian considerations had been condemned by Mao as “bourgeois hypocrisy,” and it went without saying that there should be no mercy for “class enemies.”³²⁵ Ma Sitson claimed that later the Red Guards twisted Liu Shikun’s wrists so viciously that he could not play the piano.³²⁶ It was widely reported in the West that the Red Guards broke his

324.Heng and Shapiro, *Son of the Revolution*: 121.

325.Chang, *Wild Swans*: 352.

326.Ma Sitson, “Cruelty and Insanity Made Me a Fugitive,” *Life* 62 (1967) 28.

arms or fingers in order to destroy his ability to play the piano, but these rumors proved to be unsubstantiated.³²⁷

Conflicts were particularly sharp and long drawn-out where large numbers of intellectuals were concentrated: schools, colleges, theaters, film studios, publishing houses, and offices. Here normal activities ceased for months at a time.³²⁸ But the conflicts and tragedies were by far the most significant in the universities, and the professors who were the easiest prey were those who either specialized in foreign pursuits (English teachers, etc.) or those who were involved in “cultural” activities of any sort (philosophy faculty, art teachers, etc.) It is therefore not difficult to imagine the prevailing atmosphere in China’s conservatories, where the cultural ambience was self-consciously European and their occupants were engaged in the pursuit of the “leisure, bourgeois” music-making. The presidents of the conservatories were attacked with special force, as the Cultural Revolution unleashed long-repressed hostility and bitterness upon them.³²⁹

The president of the Central Conservatory in Beijing, Ma Sitson, was one of China’s most celebrated and respected musicians prior to the Cultural Revolution. Unlike his counterpart at the Shanghai Conservatory (He Luting), Ma Sitson never wrote articles or made any remarks that could be construed as inflammatory. He also never joined the Party, which may have worked against him. But he believed it was his privileged “exclusive” lifestyle (one of his accusers was his former chauffeur) which set him up to

327.Kraus, *Pianos & Politics*: 165.

328.Chen, *Inside the Cultural Revolution*: 245.

329.Kraus, *Pianos & Politics*: 121.

become a target, along with the indisputable fact that he was head of a decidedly bourgeois unit of higher education.

As with most citizens under attack, the first indication that Ma Sitson was about to be harassed came in the form of big-character posters, which were the hallmark of the Cultural Revolution. Scrawled on newspaper or butcher paper, they carried news, accusations, confessions, announcements, or simply praise for Chairman Mao.³³⁰ Almost overnight, the campuses were transformed into labyrinths of hastily erected fences lined with reed mattings, which were plastered with abusive big-character posters indicting arch “cow demons.”³³¹ These slogans were an integral part of life in China, and since the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, the number of slogans everywhere had multiplied by the thousand.³³²

After Ma Sitson and eighteen others from the Central Conservatory were sent to a camp for “thought reform,” they were returned to the Conservatory on August 9, 1966, for a mass criticism session.

We were prodded off and no sooner had I set foot on the ground than someone dumped a bucket of paste over my head. Others stuck big-character posters on my body and rammed a tall dunce cap labeled ‘Cow Demon’ on my head. A cardboard plaque around my neck said, ‘Ma Sitson, agent of the bourgeois opposition.’ Later another sign calling me ‘Vampire’ was added. Finally they gave each of us a copper basin – a ‘death bell’ – and a stick to beat it with.

It was a wild scene. Our assailants acted as if they had gone crazy. We were paraded across the campus to the din of shouted slogans. All the way people hit out at us and spit upon us, especially the children. I recognized the distorted faces of some of my own students.³³³

330. Ma Sitson, “Cruelty and Insanity Made Me a Fugitive,” *Life* 62 (1967) 26.

331. Wu, *A Single Tear*: 194.

332. Cheng, *Life and Death in Shanghai*: 14.

333. Ma Sitson, “Cruelty and Insanity Made Me a Fugitive,” *Life* 62 (1967) 28.

The persecution continued for months, during which Ma Sitson's life was threatened and he was beaten over his shaved head with a board full of nails. It was also common practice for administrators and faculty to be given demeaning work and often very physically demanding jobs with no regard for their age or health.

It was mostly filthy work. We cleaned latrines; we also chopped firewood and did a good bit of thoroughly pointless labor, such as making big piles of scattered stones and shifting the entire contents of one building to another.

None of this was pleasant but the most nerve-wracking thing was the random harassment. At any time revolutionary students, who by the middle of August were calling themselves Red Guards, could order us out of our rooms. The children were the fiercest of all. They made me crawl on my hands and knees. On several occasions, they tore up my room, pulled the bedding apart and scattered my books. One boy took my quilt and threw it up on the roof, remarking, 'So long as it is revolutionary, no action is a crime.' These Red Guards had no leaders, and we were fair game for any of them. It was anarchy.³³⁴

The Red Guards even devised special punishments for the musicians, designed specifically to irritate them and humiliate them.

Every morning and evening we had to sing together – and sometimes alone – a disgusting song composed by the son of the professor of conducting. It was called *The Howl of the Black Gangsters* and it went:

I am a cow-headed monster
 I have sinned, I have sinned.
 I must come under the people's dictatorship
 Because I am an enemy of the people.
 I must be very frank,
 If I am not, smash me to bits!³³⁵

334.Ibid: 29.

335.Ibid: 29.

The erudite musician added that the song ended on the seventh note of the scale with a crescendo “to make it sound ugly.”³³⁶ He was convinced that this was done intentionally as another means of torturing the musicians. He gives an abbreviated version of the song; interestingly, of the many teachers who were regularly forced to sing this song, none of them could remember all the words.³³⁷

Ma Sitson submitted to the abuse and degradation at the hands of the Red Guards, but in January of 1967 he became a figure of national interest and ignominy by fleeing the country, first to Hong Kong and ultimately to the United States. Groups of Red Guards in Beijing fought over his escape for a month, but none of them ever established how he managed to elude them. Ma Sitson and his family had disguised themselves as peasants (although his daughter was disguised as a Red Guard!) and made their way to the south, where they were smuggled to Hong Kong by speedboat. It was a perilous passage, and the only luggage they were permitted to bring was Ma Sitson’s violin. After a harrowing night-long journey, Ma Sitson had to clamber up the steep boulders clutching his violin, but his first act after his feet touched solid ground was to remove his mandatory Chairman Mao badge from his shirt and fling it into the sea (his family did likewise.) The officials from the American consulate in Hong Kong contacted President Johnson shortly thereafter, and the family was granted asylum in the United States.

Ma Sitson’s successful disappearance caused an uproar in China, and the Central Conservatory Red Guards began to hunt down everyone who had contributed to his

336. Ibid: 29.

337. Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 242.

audacious escape. In the end, they collected “evidence” – whether real or created – against more than fifty members of the extended family and its associates, many of whom had no idea that the Ma family was planning to escape China.³³⁸ Most of Ma Sitson’s family members were imprisoned, and many of them died under duress or committed suicide after being struggled against and labeled as traitors. Even a doctor who had seen Ma Sitson shortly before his escape (and knew nothing of his plans) was sentenced to eight years in prison.

Defection and escape were extremely rare in Maoist China, and those who managed to do so paid a heavy price: the legacy they left behind was the administration’s unrestrained vindictiveness upon their families still in China. Fou Cong was another pianist who was considered a national hero; he won third prize in the Chopin International Competition, held once every five years (the winner that year was Vladimir Ashkenazy.)³³⁹ The competition was held in 1955, and at this point Fou was the first Asian musician to be honored in an important competition by Westerners for playing European music.³⁴⁰ He remained in Warsaw to study, and in 1958 he was ordered back to China to undergo “criticism.” His father had been condemned as a rightist in the 1957 Anti-Rightist campaign, and Fou decided that under the circumstances it would be unwise to return to China. He sought and was granted political asylum in London.

Chen Yi, the former mayor of Shanghai who had done much to protect He Luting, was now the foreign minister of China, and among China’s leaders he was perhaps the

338.Ibid: 245.

339.The jury was made up of forty experts who listened to seventy-four pianists. The Chinese judge was the president of the Central Conservatory, Ma Sitson. Kraus, *Pianos & Politics*: 81.

340.Ibid: 81.

most sensitive to the issues facing the artistic elite. He expressed concern about Fou Cong's family, and cautioned against Fou Cong becoming labeled a public opponent of China. Nevertheless, the news of his Fou Cong's defection sent his father into seclusion for several months.

Fu Lei, Fou Cong's father, was even more renowned in China than his son. He was a noted writer, translator and essayist who had translated fourteen novels of Balzac, although he was best known for his Chinese version of Romain Roland's *Jean-Christophe*. (He also wrote a biography of Beethoven; another composer who, like Debussy, later came under attack.) As China turned leftward on the eve of the Cultural Revolution, the Shanghai literary critic Yao Wenyuan (notorious for attacking Debussy and opposing He Luting) declared *Jean-Christophe* to be a dangerous book. Yao Wenyuan's condemnation of this literary work may be more plausible than his condemnation of Debussy: it is clear throughout the book that only a sensitive and cultivated elite is capable of understanding true music, while ordinary people are attracted to the gaudy show of the moment.³⁴¹ Rolland's dedication must have incensed the Maoists as well: "To the Free spirits – of all nations – who suffer, fight, and will prevail."³⁴²

Fu Lei stated, "I was hurt by Yao Wenyuan during the Anti-Rightist movement, and now Yao is even redder, departing a little early would be better than falling into this guy's hands again."³⁴³ Fu Lei and his wife, Zhu Meifu indeed "departed a little early" by

341.Ibid: 72.

342.Ibid: 72.

343.Ibid: 92.

committing suicide on September 2, 1966, after repeated abuse, sleep deprivation, and humiliation at the hands of the Red Guards. Zhu Meifu took poison, then hanged herself. After writing ten suicide notes, Fu Lei took poison as well and was found the next morning sitting at his desk. Their ashes were claimed from the Shanghai crematorium by an unidentified woman, said to be a neighbor who had enjoyed listening to their son Fou Cong practicing the piano.³⁴⁴

The joint suicide shocked and saddened China's intellectuals. But within the next two years, similar incidents were to become so commonplace that almost no one was surprised at their occurrence anymore.

“I Did My Best for My Students”

The suffering of musicians in Shanghai was arguably the most extreme of anywhere in the nation. Shanghai was the birthplace of Western music in modern China, and it had more musicians who had studied overseas or been taught by resident foreigners than any other city. (Indeed, one of the many charges leveled against He Luting during the Cultural Revolution was his proud association with his Russian mentor, Tcherepnin.) Shanghai was also the city from which the Cultural Revolution was launched.³⁴⁵

Shanghai was not only the most populous city in China but also the most highly industrialized. Shanghai was the most culturally cosmopolitan of Chinese cities and also the most politically radical, the home of a mature working class and long the center of modern China's radical intelligentsia. The Chinese Communist Party was officially born

344.Ibid: 93.

345.Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 240.

in Shanghai in 1921, and Mao had called upon its radical intellectuals (such as Yao Wenyuan) to begin the Cultural Revolution in 1965. If China was to have a “proletarian cultural revolution,” Shanghai was its natural starting point.³⁴⁶

Chinese and foreign businessmen had turned Shanghai into a city of grandeur, the “Paris of Asia.” Prior to 1949, an expatriate community of sixty thousand foreigners lived in the British, French, and American quarters in Shanghai under protection of a multinational army. They had made the city look very different from other places in China. Foreign achievements had become – for better or worse – the standard for real “progress.”³⁴⁷ But the streets of Shanghai were also home to war refugees, vagrants in search of work, coolies and factory workers who suffered under harsh working conditions, and beggars who starved or froze to death out in the open. The town witnessed heart-rending scenes of civilian protest against Chinese and colonial rule.³⁴⁸

The Chinese who taught or studied music in pre-“liberation” Shanghai – future celebrities such as Huang Zi, Ma Sitson, He Luting, Ding Shande and Xian Xinghai, amongst others – presented a new class of artists: they combined their nationalist ideals with a cosmopolitan outlook and a Western-oriented taste in music. This brought them into conflict with the more populist perspective, even prior to the Cultural Revolution, when endless discussions over China’s prestige and identity took place. Westernization was perhaps a road to progress, but were not Westerners also China’s oppressors?³⁴⁹

346.Meisner, *Mao's China and After*: 325.

347.Kouwenhoven, A. Schimmelpenninck and F. "The Shanghai Conservatory of Music - History and Foreign Students' Experiences." *Chime*, No.6, Spring 1993: 56-90.

348.Ibid: 67.

349.Ibid: 65.

While these ideological questions were the subject of intense debate prior to the Cultural Revolution, it was thereafter made clear to the public that immediate action in the form of intense violence was to replace polite discussion. These “elitist” musicians became instant and uncomplicated targets for those in power attempting to fulfill their quotas of established enemies, or for Red Guards wishing to demonstrate their loyalty to Mao. The political isolation of the Westernized musical community made them easy people to sacrifice.

Yin Chengzong, an award-winning pianist who placed in the second Tchaikovsky competition, was beaten by the Red Guards with their belts and subsequently locked up. Like Liu Shikun, he was criticized for his status as a virtuoso pianist, but he was also criticized for his Christian family background. Shanghai pianist Li Mingqiang, fourth-prize winner in the 1960 Chopin Competition, was locked up early in the Cultural Revolution, and not allowed to perform publicly until after 1976.³⁵⁰

Gu Shengying was the piano soloist with the Shanghai Philharmonic and China’s most prominent female pianist. Her mother was a university graduate in French literature and her father was an interpreter (they were also Christians.) Fu Lei was a family friend, and their library boasted over twenty thousand books. She took prize in several international competitions, including the Geneva Tenth International Music Competition and the 1964 Queen Elisabeth International Piano Competition in Belgium.³⁵¹ Despite her loyalty to the leftward trend of Chinese politics (she performed Chinese music and accompanied the orchestra on its mandatory assignment to the countryside to perform for

350.Kraus, *Pianos & Politics in China*: 141.

351.Ibid: 142.

the masses), her success in her chosen career, her subsequent fame, her connections and her family background all made her a logical and visible target. She was accused of being a “secret agent,” and was beaten before the orchestra. Her mother became severely depressed, and her brother came under attack as well. Following the recent example of Fu Lei and his wife, Gu Shengying filled her apartment with gas on January 3, 1967, killing herself, her mother, and her brother.³⁵² Her father was serving a twenty-year sentence in exile, having been condemned during the 1957 Anti-Rightist campaign, and he did not learn of their deaths until years later.

Lu Hongen was a timpanist with the Shanghai Philharmonic who had been promoted to assistant conductor and later resident conductor. Like He Luting, he was known for being a demanding musician who was outspoken with his opinions on music and other subjects. When the Cultural Revolution began, he continued to speak his mind and by some accounts had a mental breakdown.³⁵³ This too was becoming quite commonplace; mental hospitals throughout China were soon filled with victims of the Cultural Revolution. Certainly nothing less than temporary insanity would account for the recklessness of Lu Hongen’s later actions. Whether due to genuine rage, mental distress, or both, one day in 1968 he took a copy of the “Little Red Book” and tore it to pieces.³⁵⁴ As this pocket anthology of Mao’s writings was regarded as sacred, Lu Hongen’s crime was considered so severe that he was shot in the head.

352.Ibid: 143.

353.Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 240.

354.Ibid: 240.

The Shanghai Conservatory is China's oldest music school, and arguably its most bourgeois unit of higher education.³⁵⁵ Located on a large campus in an old, well-to-do area of the city, this elite institution in the mid-1960's had only six hundred students but employed a staff of three hundred.³⁵⁶ Its students were overwhelmingly urban and middle class, and its Western-oriented education may never have fit into the Communist vision of a classless society. The clash of liberal and dogmatic views on art and music was a natural part of China's general, soul-searching conflict – the question of how to reconcile the country's native culture with “modern” foreign influences; however, this spiritual conflict eventually culminated in unprecedented violence and upheaval. Between 1966 and 1973, there was no music teaching at all at the Shanghai Conservatory, only political meetings and campaigns in which a growing number of people were persecuted.³⁵⁷ As with most educational institutions throughout China, the sole function of the school's occupants was to write big-character posters.³⁵⁸ Professors were forced to write self-criticisms and to read aloud other people's big character posters against them. In public struggle meetings, they were accused of political betrayal or a subversive love for Western music.³⁵⁹ Their homes were ransacked by the Red Guards, and their families

355. Kraus, *Arts Policies of the Cultural Revolution*, 221.

356. White, *Policies of Chaos*: 272.

357. Kouwenhoven and Schimmelpenninck, “The Shanghai Conservatory of Music,” *Chime* 6 (1993) 78.

358. “The writing of big character posters advocated by Mao seems to me a great waste. At the conservatory, a great deal of paper and thousands of writing brushes and bottles of ink have already been used. Yet when we needed extra lights in the classroom or additional musical instruments, there was never any money for them.” Cheng, *Life and Death in Shanghai*, 54.

359. Kouwenhoven and Schimmelpenninck, “The Shanghai Conservatory of Music,” *Chime* 6 (1993) 78.

were terrorized. The most common punishment for political incorrectness was to force them to clean lavatories and deprive them of the right to play their instrument.³⁶⁰

Tan Shuzen, the first Chinese member of the Shanghai Philharmonic and one of the conservatory's vice-presidents, was attacked by one of his students for "dressing like a Westerner." His valuables, including his violins, were removed from his home by the Red Guards. He was beaten at a large meeting and pushed down the stairs, then he was imprisoned in the conservatory, confined to a closet under the stairs. His work now consisted of repairing the conservatory's one hundred and twenty-two toilets. At one point, his family was allowed to visit him for five minutes.

My granddaughter called me grandfather and when I heard this, I broke out in tears. We were treated like criminals, like animals, like prisoners. We weren't allowed to talk. So when I heard this, I cried. My daughter didn't say anything. I just told her, tell your mother I am fine. I could not say they beat me often.³⁶¹

Professors and established intellectuals were most likely to be criticized and tortured by the Conservatory's Red Guards, but students and recent graduates also became victims.³⁶² The composer Wang Xilin was tortured due to voicing his opposition to the policy of art serving politics. He was sent to perform labor in order to "remold his thinking," then he was imprisoned and beaten regularly.

We all slept on the floor. We were bad people, all in one room. We couldn't have contact with anyone. In the day, they struggled against us – and they hit our ears. My left ear still has problems. They hit you with the right hand, so the left ears got hurt the worst. My tooth was knocked out, too. I had to stand on a tiny stool –

360.Ibid: 79.

361.*From Mao to Mozart*. Directed by Murray Lerner. Performed by Issac Stern. 1980.

362.Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 235.

you couldn't fall off it. Everybody spat at you and hit you and shouted at you. They struggled against me for a long time.

They blindfolded me and put a towel in my mouth and tied my hands behind me. They made me walk to the countryside; we walked very far. There were two or three of them, my jailers – I couldn't see. Then they put me in a hole and started burying me. I thought they were going to bury me alive. Then they pulled me out – they were just trying to scare me. They pulled my pants down and hit me for two hours. The next day my skin was raw – my clothes stuck to it. But I had to go to work the next day. This treatment – because we spoke the truth.³⁶³

Many teachers, such as middle school piano professor Wang Jiaen, died during imprisonment or forced labor, and still others because they were locked up and tortured to death.³⁶⁴ Pianist Fan Jisen was seriously ill at the time he was imprisoned. He was forced to carry out heavy labor and simply collapsed.³⁶⁵ The violinist Zhao Zhihua was tortured to death as well. Others barely survived, but none were left unscathed. Fan Jilin, the head of Shanghai Conservatory's piano department, was beaten by her former students.³⁶⁶ The composer Sang Tong was forced to alter his atonal style beyond recognition under political pressure. Later, young revolutionaries poured boiling water in one of Sang Tong's ears, causing him to become deaf on one side. Several professors were persecuted to such an extent that they went insane.

Struggle sessions were a great invention of the Communist Party. You had to stand there straight for a long time – six hours. Sweat poured off you and your legs shook till you would fall over. I was in a mental hospital for six months."³⁶⁷

363.Ibid: 236.

364.Ibid: 234.

365.Kouwenhoven and Schimmelpenninck, "The Shanghai Conservatory of Music," *Chime* 6 (1993) 79.

366.Kraus, *Pianos & Politics in China*, 141.

367.Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 235.

In August and September 1966, five conservatory teachers were killed or driven to death while as many as eighty were imprisoned. In the following year, another six people were driven to death and a hundred more were locked up. They were put either in genuine prisons or in the school's murky closets and storerooms (which were contemptuously referred to as "cowsheds.")³⁶⁸ Several were literally beaten to death, but the intimidation and endless humiliation drove far more professors to suicides, which accumulated at an astonishing rate at the conservatory.

The first professor to end his life as a response to the Red Guards' abuse was Lu Xiutang, an *erhu* master and teacher of Chinese folk music in the traditional music department who killed himself on August 31, 1966.³⁶⁹ Such was the irony of the Cultural Revolution: proponents of ancient, traditional Chinese music (a remnant of an undesirable, feudal past) were persecuted with the same viciousness as the purveyors of progressive, Western music. A week later, Yang Jiaren, a University of Michigan graduate who became head of the Shanghai Conservatory's conducting department, gassed himself with his wife in their Shanghai apartment because their son had been conducting a "hate campaign" against them (partly on account of the capitalist educations they had received in the United States.)³⁷⁰

Three days later, the pianist Li Cuizhen killed herself. Many of her former students worked as accompanists and teachers all over China, and several had won

368. Kouwenhoven and Schimmelpenninck, "The Shanghai Conservatory of Music," *Chime* 6 (1993) 78.

369. Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 233.

370. White, *Policies of Chaos*: 275.

international competitions and received recognition abroad. She was condemned for wearing Western clothes and for her education in England.

It's always how I taught decadent Western music to poison the minds of the young. They don't stop to think that I couldn't have done it if the government had forbidden it. All our teaching materials had to be passed by our Party secretary before we could use them for the students. And they seem to forget that they used to urge me to teach Western music in the early fifties when China was friendly with the Soviet Union.

When we were friendly with the Soviet Union, we were urged to teach Western music and train students to take part in international competitions. After we broke with the Soviet Union, Chairman Mao started to criticize Western music. We had to use Chinese compositions exclusively for teaching. But there are so few Chinese compositions. Half my time was spent looking for teaching materials. It's hard enough to carry on as a teacher already. Now my students are made to turn against me.³⁷¹

The Red Guards placed a pole across the gate of the conservatory less than four feet from the ground and made Li Cuizhen crawl under it to demonstrate that she was “a running dog of the British imperialists” because of her education in England. They then held a struggle session where they covered her with ink and compelled her to confess her “love for Western music.”³⁷² She was found dead the next day, dressed in her best clothes and seated at her piano, with the gas turned on. The note she left behind held one sentence: “I did my best for my students.”³⁷³

Another faculty member, Lu Zuzhen, took poison in November. Chen Youxin, a violinist who had been severely beaten; Cheng Zhuoro, vice director of the middle

371. Cheng, *Life and Death in Shanghai*: 55.

372. Ibid: 60.

373. In other accounts, Li Cuizhen's suicide note read, “I needed a rest.” Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 234.

school; and Li Shaobo, a middle school teacher of Western instruments all committed suicide. Another faculty member at the Shanghai conservatory attempted to hang himself but was interrupted by his wife. Later, he was more successful with the use of sleeping pills. The violin professor Zhao Zhihua killed himself with his wife by turning on the gas in their apartment. They left behind a note for their two small children: “In the morning, you won’t have a mother or father. Take your brother to your grandmother.”³⁷⁴ Shen Zibai, a music historian, committed suicide after Red Guards accused him of being a spy. In his final hour, he wrote a letter which ended with the words “all to no avail.”³⁷⁵ By the time the first few years of the Cultural Revolution were over, at least seventeen conservatory professors, spouses and students had been driven to take their own lives.³⁷⁶

Hard Bones Against the Devil

Even those who somehow managed to survive the Cultural Revolution had experienced a mental shock so profound that they would never be able to overcome it completely. People had suffered deep humiliation at the hands of others who had been their former students, colleagues or even friends. The violence had been beyond any framework of moral comprehension.³⁷⁷ The epidemic of suicides at the Shanghai Conservatory can only be understood in this light; the musicians felt that they had been punished beyond the limits of human endurance. When one considers the depth of their

374. Ibid: 234.

375. Kouwenhoven and Schimmelpenninck, “The Shanghai Conservatory of Music,” *Chime* 6, (1993) 79.

376. Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 234.

377. Kouwenhoven and Schimmelpenninck, “The Shanghai Conservatory of Music,” *Chime* 6 (1993) 80.

struggle, the story of He Luting's role in the Cultural Revolution is all the more remarkable and astonishing. His response to the indignities and tortures he was made to suffer was strikingly different from that of any other musician in China, so much so that all who witnessed it claimed that his courage was unparalleled during the Cultural Revolution.

As with most professors during this period, He Luting learned of his impending attack through the big character posters that began appearing at the conservatory very early in the Cultural Revolution. By June 1966, Shanghai's newspapers criticized him by name, indicating a high-level decision to concentrate the movement against him.³⁷⁸ His old nemesis, Yao Wenyuan, was now a member of the powerful Gang of Four, one of Madame Mao's closest allies. As with many people suddenly elevated to positions of influence and power, the Cultural Revolution provided the perfect opportunity for Yao to take his revenge on He Luting. The Gang of Four did so with all of the means at their disposal; the magnitude of the attack upon He Luting could not have been conducted by the teenaged Red Guards acting alone. On June 8, 1966, Mr. He heard on the radio that both newspapers *Liberation Daily* and *Wen Hui Bao* contained full page articles detailing how revolutionary faculty and students at the conservatory had identified the anti-Party, anti-socialist element He Luting. Similar articles were published in the June 9 papers, and these were then re-published all throughout China via the Xinhua News Agency.³⁷⁹ When

378. Kraus, *Pianos & Politics in China*: 121.

379. Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 236.

enough articles were published, they were collected and released as a book entitled *Collection of Articles Criticizing He Luting*.³⁸⁰

Everything learned about He Luting's character to this point in his life would suggest that he would refuse to admit to false accusations and illogical statements – if he was unable to read erroneous statements about the remote and long-deceased French composer Debussy without responding aggressively, he would doubtless have defended himself with no less courage. His first response was to refute the charges against him by writing “My First Big-Character Poster,” which he posted at the conservatory. On the poster, Mr. He called the accusations against him baseless and went on to refute many of them with specific evidence.³⁸¹

Many of the charges leveled at He Luting were obvious and irrefutable, and were charges that he shared with countless other musicians and intellectuals; innocuous details that were now considered “crimes” or evidence of political unreliability by the Maoists. Other accusations were more personal, and as they were discussed at length in Chapter Three, they do not need to be documented again here. Suffice it to say that Mr. He's chronic outspokenness provided the Gang of Four with more than enough information to convict him. Indeed, his skirmish with Yao Wenyuan alone would have been ample: Shanghai Communist Party Secretary Zhang Chunqiao (another of the Gang of Four) labeled Mr. He's defense of Debussy the most serious counterrevolutionary incident prior to the Cultural Revolution.

380.Ibid: 237.

381.Ibid: 237.

The next two years were an endless round of struggle sessions for He Luting and his wife, Jiang Ruizhi. She was attacked not only for being He Luting's wife, but in her own right as principal of the children's school of music. Their sufferings have been depicted in the Prologue; they were not noticeably different from the attacks on any other intellectuals in China in terms of their scope or intensity. The attacks upon musicians detailed in this chapter would have been a near-daily occurrence for Mr. He and his wife. What appears to have been conspicuously different about their case was that after two years of ongoing brutality, they refused to submit, either mentally or physically. Reportedly, Mr. He's attackers even served him poisoned tea at one point, an attempt upon his life which he survived.³⁸² Mr. He's defiance during these struggle sessions extended to even the smallest of details. "They tried to make him walk up the stairs backwards at one point," a composer recalled. "He wouldn't do it."³⁸³

Mr. He's conduct perplexed and infuriated the Gang of Four; their determination to single him out amongst all the musicians and intellectuals in China was doubtless fueled by his nonconformist behavior. They were resolved to make an example of him at any cost, and they soon devised a plan which they felt would humble and break him once and for all.

He Luting received forewarning of the impending assault. One of his loyal pupils, a conservatory graduate, obtained an important post in the information section of the Shanghai Conservatory's Cultural Revolution Liaison Office. This disciple warned He that far worse criticisms were being prepared against him. One of He Luting's daughters

382. White, *Policies of Chaos*: 272.

383. Anonymous interview with the author.

used her friendship with the former student to obtain copies of secret files assembled for her father's case. They became involved in "discussions of ideological problems," whereby she induced him to pass on "all the details of the secret investigation."³⁸⁴

He Luting thus obtained photocopies of the relevant documents. He learned that Red Guards from the conservatory had gone to his native city of Shaoyang, Hunan, to gather old information against him. One of their objectives in travelling to Hunan was to attempt to coerce his family members to testify against him. Mr. He's nieces were the investigators' targets. It was standard practice for the Maoists to pressure siblings, spouses, and children to denounce their families; it not only bolstered their cases against the accused, but it was decidedly instrumental in intimidating the victims into "confessing" their alleged "crimes." This practice had become so routine that families generally understood that their denunciation at the hands of their loved ones came only after extreme pressure and duress. Mr. He doubtless would have forgiven his nieces for doing the same; however, bravery and defiance seem to have run in their family. His nieces defended him to the investigators, thus jeopardizing their own safety as they refused to sacrifice that of their uncle.

The loyalty of He Luting's wife, children, and extended family was somewhat unusual, but not unheard of. Ma Sitson's daughter, Ma Ruixue, was so concerned about her father's suffering – which included several suicide attempts – that it was she who, with the help of other relatives, masterminded the plan for the family to defect to the United States. The devotion and support of one's family whilst undergoing constant stress and torture cannot be underestimated, and it probably accounts for much of He Luting's stamina during this period. The loyalty of his family also served another

384. White, *Policies of Chaos*: 273.

purpose: Mr. He was supplied with prior information concerning his attackers' intentions. The Red Guards confirmed this, noting that Mr. He had his own network of "lackeys and reactionary relatives, who shadowed the investigators."³⁸⁵ Unfortunately, this served to make He Luting an even more dangerous figure from the perspective of the Gang of Four. Despite He Luting's inside knowledge, he was unable to ward off their impending attack.

The Gang of Four had also not counted on the devotion of He Luting's former students and colleagues. A petition in support of He Luting was circulated entitled "Group for Reversing the Verdict on He Luting Active in Shanghai." These supporters gathered materials and prepared statements to release He Luting. This was finally more than the Gang of Four could tolerate. They decided it was time to put their plot designed for He Luting's downfall into action.

It was Zhang Chunqiao ("The Cobra"), the most powerful member of the Gang of Four, who masterminded the plan. As if the endless torture sessions inflicted upon the intellectuals in their homes and former places of employment weren't enough, he decided that even stronger measures were required. The ultimate act of cruelty and humiliation towards these proud reactionaries would be to televise their struggle sessions, and then force everyone within broadcasting range to watch them. This would not only finally break the more recalcitrant victims, but it would serve to strike fear throughout the general population, thus discouraging anyone else who might consider resisting in the future. It would establish the supremacy of the Gang of Four's influence and power.

385.Ibid: 273.

It was an extreme measure, but the Gang of Four apparently felt that nothing less was called for in the case of the troublesome He Luting, who refused to be humbled or silenced. They decided to use him for the pilot program.

On March 13, 1968, work units gathered their employees together all across Shanghai to watch the struggle session against the musician He Luting unfold on live television. The session began predictably, when Mr. He was dragged onstage by two Red Guards and forced to bow his head and shoulders in a submissive manner while the assembled crowd of thousands shouted slogans against him. This was followed by a direct, inquisitorial dialogue designed to make Mr. He admit his guilt. But instead of showing fear and defeat, as he was supposed to do, Mr. He straightened his shoulders and stared angrily ahead whenever the Red Guards relaxed their grip. Neither did he answer the questions posed to him in the humble and contrite manner expected – instead, he used the opportunity of the televised struggle session to publicly defend himself.³⁸⁶

When asked why he had attacked the proletarian headquarters in 1963 – a reference to his defense of Debussy – he told his questioner that Yao Wenyuan was not right about everything. Another question referred to a statement Mr. He had reportedly made – that the Nationalist Party had attacked him, the Japanese had attacked him, and now the Red Guards were attacking him, too. Such language was clear heresy, since it put the Red Guards on the same level as the Japanese and the Nationalists, but Mr. He simply acknowledged that he had said it and added that it was true.³⁸⁷ He Luting also repeatedly insisted on calling attention to his treatment at the hands of the Red Guards, claiming that

386. Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 237.

387. Ibid: 238.

ten Red Guards had once ganged up to beat him.³⁸⁸ It was unheard of to make a public remonstrance against one's attackers, and it took unfathomable courage. The Red Guards' worst behavior had the continued and publicized blessings of Chairman Mao – to insinuate that their actions were anything less than justified was regarded as an insult to Mao himself. The enraged Red Guard questioning him informed Mr. He that if he continued to behave this way, he would die. Undaunted, Mr. He replied that before he died, he had two requests – he wanted to finish his seven-section orchestra piece and he wanted to clear himself of all false accusations against him.³⁸⁹ The latter request was doubtless made for the benefit of He Luting's family. To be related to a political criminal, even a deceased one, meant that one had no hope of any sort of future and probably risked being labeled as a criminal oneself.

The televised criticism session of He Luting could not be regarded as anything but a failure. Mr. He's attitude was an embarrassment to the Gang of Four, who promptly imprisoned him. However, they felt that a second try at crushing the stubborn musician on live television was warranted. With adequate planning, their second try would undoubtedly prove successful; after all, they had succeeded in destroying thousands of other intellectuals with far higher status than He Luting.

The Shanghai Revolutionary Committee began at once to organize the second televised struggle session. They actually held several "run-throughs" to ensure that the session would go smoothly, although it is not known who was chosen to act as a stand-in for He Luting during these rehearsals. Zhang Chunqiao, leaving nothing to chance, decided to personally oversee the live broadcast himself. He decided that the role of the

388. White, *Policies of Chaos*:238.

389. Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 238.

interrogator was far too important to be trusted to a Red Guard, as had been the case in the first struggle session. If He Luting's family could not be compelled to stand against him, then the Gang of Four would use the next best thing: one of his colleagues.

Yu Huiyong had become something of a protégé of the Gang of Four; Madame Mao in particular had come to rely on him in musical matters. He joined the Communist party after Liberation, and he was subsequently admitted to the Shanghai Conservatory. Even prior to the Cultural Revolution, universities and colleges were forced to admit a certain quota of students on the basis of their political reliability, rather than their talent. The evidence would suggest that Yu Huiyong fell into the former category. He was shunted into the Department of National Music, where instruction was offered in traditional Chinese instruments and folk songs. Many regarded this department as artistically backward, used as something of a dumping ground for students whom the conservatory had not wanted to admit in the first place.³⁹⁰ After Yu graduated, he was retained as a composition teacher in the National Music Department. Other conservatory faculty presumed that he was there because of his political credentials and mocked him as the “melody composer” for his poor understanding of the European arts of harmony and accompaniment. Yu's cosmopolitan critics presumed that his interest in native music reflected his lack of ability to learn “real” music.³⁹¹

It has been suggested that He Luting, as the conservatory president, was one of these condescending critics. While He Luting's disapproval of traditional Chinese instruments was well known, his genuine interest and affection for traditional Chinese

390.Kraus, *Arts Policies of the Cultural Revolution*: 221.

391.Ibid: 221.

music could not be in question. He Luting had, after all, established the National Music Department at the conservatory in the first place. He invited traditional musicians from all over the country to come to the Conservatory and play and teach national instruments.³⁹² He also made it a habit to invite his students over to the central hall or the courtyard of the school every morning to play the *banhu* (a variant of the *erhu*, the Chinese two-stringed fiddle) and sing folk songs from the Shaanxi Province for them. It was music that he remembered from his days in Communist Yan'an.³⁹³ We know enough of He Luting's character by now to recognize that even if this had been the politically "safe" route to take, he would not have done so if he had not retained a genuine interest for this music.

Nevertheless, Yu Huiyong felt slighted by the rest of the Shanghai Conservatory, and he grew quite resentful at being perceived as a second-class member of the faculty. The leaders of the Cultural Revolution were experts at recognizing professional jealousy and exploiting it for their own purposes. The Gang of Four were certain that Yu would relish the opportunity to attack his former superior. After Yu Huiyong had attracted the attention of Jiang Qing as an activist for opera reform, Zhang Chunqiao designated him to be head of the Shanghai Conservatory's revolutionary committee. In late April, Yu Huiyong presided over the second televised criticism session of his former boss, He Luting.

Once more, He Luting was dragged into the glare of klieg lights before thousands of people shouting slogans. This time his family, including his nieces from Hunan, was

392. Kouwenhoven and Schimmelpenninck, "The Shanghai Conservatory of Music," *Chime* 6 (1993) 74.

393. *Ibid.*: 75.

seated onstage to watch his struggle session. Their mutual humiliation and grief on live television would be another powerful intimidation tactic. He Luting understood this and instantly grew angry. His anger momentarily changed to confusion when he noticed something odd – his middle daughter, He Xiaoqui, was missing. It was unlike the Maoists to overlook this detail, particularly with the amount of preparation that had gone into this struggle session. If Mr. He had for an instant allowed himself to believe the worst about her absence, he would have been correct – his daughter was dead.

There are conflicting accounts of He Xiaoqui's death: one version states that she committed suicide after watching He Luting's first televised struggle session.³⁹⁴ Another report claims that she was murdered.³⁹⁵ It may never be possible to ascertain the truth; tens of thousands of people died unnatural deaths in Shanghai during this period. It seems far more likely that He Xiaoqui, a student at the conservatory herself, was killed as the Red Guards attempted to force her to denounce He Luting. The pressure brought upon the children of the accused often took the form of extreme physical violence. Very often, the attackers accidentally "overdid it." When these torture sessions resulted in death, they would be conveniently labeled as "suicides." There were so many suicides during this period that very few families questioned this verdict. It would be several years before He Luting even learned of his daughter's death.

There was no time to ponder her absence during the struggle session. The Gang of Four had been correct in their assessment of Yu Huiyong: he was clearly eager to attack his former boss and began to do so immediately as He Luting was dragged out to the

394. Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 238.

395. Kouwenhoven and Schimmelpenninck, "The Shanghai Conservatory of Music," *Chime* 6 (1993) 79.

stage. But instead of staring stonily ahead and refusing to admit to any wrongdoing, as He Luting had done at the beginning of the last struggle session, he was so furious that he actually attempted to wrestle the microphone out of Yu Huiyong's hand. The sixty-four year old musician was unsuccessful in his attempts to grab the microphone; however, at the culmination of the struggle session he was finally allowed to speak. The main objective of the struggle session (particularly a televised session) was to force the victims to admit their guilt; in order for Yu Huiyong to succeed in the task the Gang of Four had placed before him, he would have to allow He Luting to speak. Yu demanded outright that He Luting admit his guilt.

“I am not guilty,” asserted Mr. He.

“You opposed Chairman Mao,” countered Yu Huiyong.

“I sang the praises of Chairman Mao! At Yan'an, I arranged *The East is Red* for a chorus. After liberation, I wrote songs like *Long Live the People's Leader* and *Chairman Mao Comes to Tiannamen*.”

“In Chairman Mao's 1956 meeting with music workers, how did you desperately oppose him, right to his face?” demanded Yu Huiyong.

“I already wrote this in my self-confession,” replied the exasperated He Luting. “When Chairman Mao talked about matters of tradition, I interrupted.”

“How did you have the monstrous audacity to do that?” Yu Huiyong shouted. “You counter-revolutionary!”

“Your accusations are false!” He Luting shouted in response. “Shame on you for lying!”³⁹⁶

Mr. He's behavior was so outrageous that the Red Guards onstage could no longer remain still. At this point in the session, a powerful Red Guard stepped forward and

396. The dialogue is from *Rhapsody in Red* (2004), which was drawn from Shi Zhongxin, *Hard Bones Against the Devil: A Biography of He Luting* (2000).

grabbed the microphone away before He Luting could say anything more. But before the stunned Red Guard could react, the elderly He Luting abruptly grabbed the microphone back.

“Shame on you for lying! Shame on you for lying!” he shouted over and over.

Yu Huiyong, the Red Guards, and the audience of thousands were shocked into silence. For an instant, no one moved. The live television broadcast continued. Thousands of Chinese citizens watched He Luting’s stand against his attackers.

Under normal circumstances, any behavior other than complete submission during a struggle session would warrant a near-fatal beating at the hands of the Red Guards. But whether Yu Huiyong was paralyzed by awe in the face of his former superior’s courage, or whether his common sense finally took over, he wisely realized that it would be a mistake to beat the senior citizen standing before him on live television. Instead, he ordered the Red Guards to twist He Luting’s arms into the “jet plane” position.³⁹⁷ They twisted so hard that Mr. He collapsed on the stage in pain. But when they let go, he stood back up and continued to repeat “Shame on you for lying!” Although his voice was now choked with pain, he could not be stopped from repeating his curse.³⁹⁸ The struggle session came to an end.

Chinese intellectuals remember this session with awe to this day. In 1968, cowed intellectuals in Shanghai and throughout the country who had seen or heard of He Luting’s courage took heart, inspired by the example of a man who had maintained his

397. See Chapter One.

398. Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 239.

integrity and sense of self-worth in this most nonsensical time.³⁹⁹ In *The Rest is Noise*, Alex Ross claims that no other composer ever made a braver stand against totalitarianism.⁴⁰⁰

But the immediate outcome of He Luting's courage had much more far-reaching consequences for China than as a source of inspiration. Zhang Chunqiao, watching the struggle session from the control booth, became furious. All the planning and preparation of Shanghai's top revolutionaries had once again failed to prevent the struggle session from flying out of control.⁴⁰¹ The live broadcast was abruptly cut short by his order. The struggle session was such a failure that Zhang Chunqiao then abandoned his plans for the live broadcast of future struggle sessions. He Luting's defiance and courage thus spared countless other Chinese intellectuals and their families from a similar, humiliating fate. This ultimate act of cruelty - one's torture and abasement exposed for the edification and entertainment of thousands - was never again inflicted on another citizen, all due to the courage of one musician: He Luting.

399.Ibid: 239.

400.Ross, *The Rest is Noise*: 514.

401.Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 239.

CHAPTER SIX: THE REHABILITATION OF HE LUTING

The Final Days of the Cultural Revolution

After the enemies with guns have been wiped out, there will still be enemies without guns; they are bound to struggle desperately against us, and we must never regard these enemies lightly. If we do not now raise and understand the problem in this way, we shall commit the gravest mistakes.⁴⁰²

- Chairman Mao, 1949.

The decade-long Cultural Revolution finally concluded on October 6, 1976 with the arrest of the Gang of Four, closely preceded by the September 9 death of Chairman Mao.⁴⁰³ For China, the Cultural Revolution remains a colossal catastrophe in which human rights, democracy, the rule of law, and civilization itself were unprecedentedly trampled. Not only was the president persecuted to death, tens of millions of innocent people were also attacked and maltreated. Certain individuals resorted to every conceivable means to gain personal power; some said things and acted against their will and conscience under duress; and some kind and honest people became silent. Those who courageously thought and rationally expressed their opinions were attacked and persecuted, and many were killed. In these irrational years, the whole of China tumbled into insanity.⁴⁰⁴

All aspects of art, culture, or any field in which creativity might be expressed came under the control of the artistically illiterate Gang of Four, headed by Jiang Qing. The result was cultural genocide. At the beginning of the Cultural Revolution,

402. Lin Biao, "*Quotations from Mao Tse-Tung*:" 16.

403. The most violent phase of the Cultural Revolution ended in 1969.

404. Yan and Gao, *Turbulent Decade*: 529.

establishments such as the Beijing Opera Company and the Central Philharmonic were placed under control of the army. “It was as if the Pentagon suddenly took over the Metropolitan Opera Company and all other performing arts groups in New York City, and stipulated that their subsequent work be directed personally by a close female relative of the President.”⁴⁰⁵ At the simplest level Cultural Revolution policy was to replace old culture with new, but in practice the Cultural Revolution was far better at destruction than at construction.⁴⁰⁶ The conservatories were shuttered, the professors locked up in “cow sheds,” and the entire Western classical canon banned for the better part of a decade.⁴⁰⁷

Despite her zeal for reforming opera and music, Jiang Qing had no formal musical training beyond youthful piano lessons.⁴⁰⁸ However, if she was no expert on Western instruments or music, she still had opinions which only became stronger as time went on.⁴⁰⁹ On one occasion, she told the director of the Central Philharmonic, Li Delun, that she didn’t like trombones and did not want them played anymore. Mr. Li could not envision his orchestra without trombones, so he hurriedly responded that it must have been the tuba whose sound she so disliked. His fast thinking saved the trombones, but caused the tuba to disappear from China’s orchestras for the remainder of the Cultural Revolution.⁴¹⁰ Even radical leaders admitted the shortage of art products and tried

405.Kraus, *Arts Policies of the Cultural Revolution*: 228.

406.Ibid: 220.

407.Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 292.

408.Kraus, *Arts Policies of the Cultural Revolution*: 225.

409. “She couldn’t understand anything! She couldn’t understand a fart! All she could do is pick the colors of the costumes: ‘That green isn’t right.’” – Li Delun, Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*, 254.

410.Ibid: 254.

unsuccessfully to cope with it, unwilling or unable to give up their close control for a decentralized, more spontaneous culture. The arts shortage became a bitter political issue in the last years of the Cultural Revolution and contributed significantly to the fall of Chinese radicalism.⁴¹¹

The policies began to shift from the left as early as 1971, with the demise of the megalomaniacal Lin Biao. The former general of the People's Liberation Army and Mao's most seemingly sycophantic disciple, Lin Biao had abstained from politics until he rose to prominence during the Cultural Revolution as the closest ally of Jiang Qing and the Gang of Four. He was to become Mao's successor, but he perished in a plane crash while fleeing allegations that he had tried to assassinate the Great Helmsman.

After Lin Biao's death, Mao's health deteriorated rapidly. He preferred to remain in seclusion, and he seemed to have developed a certain nostalgia for old comrades.⁴¹² His foreign minister, Chen Yi, died of cancer on January 6, 1972, and Mao disregarded the advice of his medical personnel to attend his memorial service. Chen Yi and Mao had once been so close that they critiqued each other's poetry, but when Jiang Qing and Lin Biao launched a campaign against Chen in the early years of the Cultural Revolution, Mao did nothing to stop it and even chimed in with his own wild accusations. Premier Zhou Enlai's efforts to protect Chen Yi had been in vain, and he was still in disgrace when he died.⁴¹³ However, when Mao was asked to approve the eulogy to be read at

411. Kraus, *Arts Policies of the Cultural Revolution*: 220.

412. Barnouin and Yu, *Ten Years of Turbulence*: 274.

413. Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 272.

Chen's funeral, he pointedly crossed out all mention of the general's "mistakes." On the day of the funeral, he shocked everyone by getting out of bed to attend the funeral, although he had scarcely recovered from a stroke. Wearing a heavy coat over his pajamas, he stood beside Chen's wife and held her hand, saying tearfully, "Chen Yi was a good comrade. He was a good man. He made a great contribution to the Chinese revolution and to the world revolution." Mao's physical condition was so poor that after the funeral, he had to be carried into his car.⁴¹⁴

Chen Yi had done his best throughout his life to protect artists and musicians, most notably championing He Luting. Chen was open, forthright, and unafraid to insist on truthfulness, and it would be no exaggeration to say that he and He Luting were undoubtedly kindred spirits in this regard. The outspoken Chen Yi had angered Mao on several occasions with his sarcastic remarks about the Cultural Revolution; as early as September 1966, he stated:

During the Anti-Rightist movement, some four hundred thousand people were affected, leaving behind generations on end of grief and animosity. What good came from that? Now the Cultural Revolution gets into these ways. Even eight hundred thousand will not be able to withstand them. This is serious!⁴¹⁵

His ideas ran contrary to those established by Lin Biao, editor of the revered Little Red Book: "When learning from Chairman Mao's works, one ought to learn from his ways of analyzing and solving problems. Do not recite and memorize mere words. That would depart from reality and commit the mistake of dogmatism."⁴¹⁶ His straight talking

414. Barnouin and Yu, *Ten Years of Turbulence*: 274.

415. Gao and Yan, *Turbulent Decade*: 228.

416. *Ibid*: 224.

and unusual position caused him to be targeted early by Lin Biao as a major foe and Jiang Qing as a huge impediment to her plans to distort history to gain power. Moreover, Chen Yi spoke out against many abnormal measures of the Cultural Revolution, thus lending fuel to Lin Biao and Jiang Qing's attacks against him. Zhou Enlai had done his best to protect Chen Yi, although his own situation had worsened during the early days of the Cultural Revolution. He prevented Chen Yi from being intercepted by the Red Guards, who insisted that they would haul him to the Great Hall of the People for struggle and criticism, saying: "Whoever proceeds to intercept the car of Comrade Chen Yi, I shall step forward. If you want to collar and struggle Comrade Chen Yi, I shall stand by the door of the Great Hall of the People. You will have to step over my body!"⁴¹⁷

In the eyes of some observers, Chen Yi's death – together with Lin Biao's betrayal and death – marked an important turning point in the Cultural Revolution. Although it was far from over, its force began to ebb, and soon afterwards Mao started to rehabilitate people who had been imprisoned and struggled against for years.⁴¹⁸ Mao appeared to be in the mood to make amends to some of the military leaders whom Lin Biao had earlier purged, as well as political leaders such as Deng Xiaoping, whom Mao brought back to power in early 1973. The political climate actually grew relaxed enough for a resurgence in Western classical music, largely instigated by Zhou Enlai.

Zhou Enlai turned to classical music as a tool for furthering his diplomatic goals, particularly China's relationship with the United States. When the United States security advisor Henry Kissinger visited Beijing, Zhou insisted that the Central Philharmonic

417.Ibid: 227.

418.Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 273.

perform a Beethoven symphony for him, much to the chagrin of the Gang of Four. He further angered Jiang Qing and the Gang by inviting American pianists to perform in Beijing, and he gave China's central radio station permission to play Romanian folk music to mark Romania's National Day, thus enabling the general public to hear foreign music for the first time in many years. In addition to the memorable performances by the London and Vienna Philharmonic Orchestras, Zhou Enlai's most important event in musical diplomacy was the September 1973 visit of the Philadelphia Orchestra under Eugene Ormandy.

Zhou Enlai's support of classical music extended to China's musicians as well, including Ma Sitson, the former president of the Central Conservatory who had fled the country. When Henry Kissinger made his first visit to Beijing, Zhou Enlai quietly availed himself of the opportunity to deliver a personal message to Mr. Ma who was now living in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The Premier reportedly told Kissinger that he had two big regrets in his life, and one of which was that Ma Sitson had been forced to leave China in his old age, a circumstance which made him very sad. Upon returning to the United States, Kissinger relayed the message to Mr. Ma, who was so moved by Premier Zhou Enlai's words that he retreated to his room and cried for many hours.⁴¹⁹

Zhou Enlai also initiated the movement to free He Luting, although a timely letter to Chairman Mao from He Luting's brother was also a decisive factor. By 1973, He Luting had been imprisoned for six years and had written sixty-four rebuttals of the charges leveled against him. Premier Zhou first broached the subject of his incarceration

419. Ibid: 296.

in a private meeting with Zhang Chunqiao and brought it up again at a dinner with Jiang Qing and Yao Wenyuan. As these were the persons directly responsible for He's imprisonment, it was unlikely that Zhou's inquiries were met with anything less than complete resistance. Zhou persisted, however, reminding the Gang of Four that He Luting had made many significant contributions to the revolution, and if the charges against the composer could not be resolved, they should simply be forgotten.⁴²⁰

Soon after Premier Zhou's inquiries, Mao Zedong himself apparently spoke to Zhang Chunqiao about Mr. He, reminded of the old musician by a letter from his childhood schoolmate who also happened to be Mr. He's older brother. When Zhang Chunqiao began to protest, Mao reportedly cut him off and ordered him to end the struggle against the old musician. "He wrote the *Song of the Guerillas*, "Mao is said to have added. "Isn't that still good?"⁴²¹ He Luting was released from prison in 1973.

The rehabilitation of former colleagues (albeit posthumously for many), the opening of doors to foreign musicians and ensembles, and Chairman Mao's personal intervention on behalf of the musician He Luting all showed a strong indication of a relaxed political climate, one that was turning increasingly away from the radical left. Even Chairman Mao admitted to the cultural famine, saying to Deng Xiaoping in July of 1975:

420.Ibid: 273.

421.Ibid: 273.

There are too few model plays; moreover even the slightest mistakes are dealt with by criticism. There is no more blooming of a hundred flowers. The others cannot bring up their opinions; that's no good. There is a fear of writing articles, writing plays, novels, poems and songs.⁴²²

From the reversal of cultural policies to the release of their adversary He Luting, the Gang of Four took these events as a direct and personal insult. While they could do nothing to prevent the release of He Luting, they lashed back against these reforms to the best of their abilities, enlisting the help of Yu Huiyong, He Luting's former colleague and attacker during his last memorable struggle session. Yu Huiyong was minister of culture in 1975 and 1976, at the end of the Cultural Revolution, and China's de facto chief arts administrator after 1971. Yu Huiyong was caught up in the turbulence that opened the Cultural Revolution. Before it was over, he had become a prime example of the new leaders raised up to replace those brought down by the movement, having become Jiang Qing's most important musical advisor. Yu was increasingly desperate toward the end; he sought to honor both Mao's insistence on more artworks and his own need to defend the left by encouraging new works attacking recently rehabilitated officials.⁴²³

The Gang of Four sought to retain their power by attacking Zhou Enlai, and by attempting to thwart his attempts to reestablish the arts in China. They launched a campaign against absolute music, a direct result of the programming by many of the visiting orchestras. Jiang Qing wrote that China should either receive fewer arts groups from capitalist countries, or else receive none at all, because their visits could have very

422.Kraus, *Arts Policies of the Cultural Revolution*: 237.

423.Ibid: 239.

serious results.⁴²⁴ Yao Wenyuan, He Luting's primary attacker, now turned his attention to larger prey: Premier Zhou Enlai. His writings were unsurprisingly combative, asserting that there were still people (such as Zhou Enlai) who worshipped the West and wanted to revive the old. One of his articles 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."⁴²⁵ Even the Central Philharmonic Orchestra's concert for Henry Kissinger took place despite the objections of the Gang of Four. Zhou Enlai had specifically stipulated that the orchestra play a Beethoven symphony,⁴²⁶ but Yu Huiyong decided that the initial programming of the *Fifth Symphony* was inappropriate: it was about fatalism, rendering it thus unacceptable for Communist China. Yu also objected to their next repertoire suggestion, the *Third Symphony*, proclaiming it to be about Napoleon. The orchestra was finally allowed to perform the *Sixth Symphony*, deemed politically palatable by Yu Huiyong.⁴²⁷

On January 8, 1976, Premier Zhou Enlai died. To many Chinese, Zhou had represented a comparatively sane and liberal government that believed in making the country work. Of the top Communist leaders, only Zhou had tried to mitigate the suffering of the Cultural Revolution, to stem some of the madness and to protect some of

424. Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 276.

425. Ibid: 277.

426. "Premier Zhou said to me, 'Kissinger's German. You should play Beethoven.'" (Ibid: 266.)

427. Ibid: 267.

his old comrades from Mao's wrath.⁴²⁸ He was mourned by thousands; when Ma Sitson learned of Zhou's death, he became so depressed that he stopped composing for a time. The country's mourning for Zhou Enlai and their loathing of the Cultural Revolution became inseparably interwoven. Because it was generally known that at the time of his death Zhou had been under attack from the Gang of Four, and because the Gang had ordered the mourning for him to be played down, showing grief at his death was a way for both the general public and the local authorities to show their disapproval for the Gang.⁴²⁹ Three months later, on April 5 (a traditional remembrance day), what began as spontaneous mourning for the departed premier at Tiananmen Square turned into a mammoth demonstration against the radicals entrenched in the Forbidden City.⁴³⁰ Hundreds of thousands of people flocked to the square, placing homemade wreaths in Zhou's memory and plastering handwritten poems (containing thinly veiled attacks on the Gang of Four) to the monuments. It was the first spontaneous anti-government protest in Communist Chinese history. Jiang Qing labeled these tributes "the work of class enemies." In an ominous foreshadowing of the Tiananmen Square demonstration of 1989, four thousand citizens were arrested, hundreds beaten, and about sixty people killed.⁴³¹ This further intensified the public's loathing of the Gang of Four.

Chairman Mao died on September 9, 1976. Amid the general demonstrations of hysteria and grief, the future of the Party and the Cultural Revolution was in considerable

428. Wong, *Red China Blues*: 165.

429. Chang, *Wild Swans*: 491.

430. Ningkan, *A Single Tear*: 329.

431. Wong, *Red China Blues*: 171.

turmoil, and the power struggle began immediately. Every heir apparent had come to grief. President Liu Shaoqi died naked on the cement floor of his prison cell during the Cultural Revolution. Lin Biao died in disgrace, having betrayed Mao and the Party. When Mao caught a bad cold and thought he was near death, he had impetuously crowned Zhou Enlai his successor.⁴³² “Everything depends on you now,” Mao told Zhou according to Mao’s personal physician, who was present. “You take care of everything after my death. Let’s say this is my will.”⁴³³

Mao soon changed his mind, appointing instead Wang Hongwen, another member of the Gang of Four. By playing off Zhou against the Gang, Mao ensured no faction was strong enough to challenge his authority. Deng Xiaoping, at the time vice-premier, was intended to be Zhou’s successor, then Mao’s. But the crackdown on the demonstrations in Tiananmen Square precipitated the third fall from power of Deng Xiaoping, who had been handpicked by Zhou to succeed him.⁴³⁴ Mao kept both Deng and the Gang off balance by picking a nonentity named Hua Guofeng as acting premier, and his successor. “With you in charge, I’m at ease,” Mao scribbled shakily to Hua in a note that wasn’t made public until later.⁴³⁵ But in the final phase of his life, he was more obsessed than ever with a coup. It was to avert such a possibility that he intimated to Deng Xiaoping

432.Ibid: 165.

433.Li, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao*: 551.

434.Ningkan, *A Single Tear*: 329.

435.Wong, *Red China Blues*: 167.

and his allies in 1975 that they were welcome to crush Madame Mao and her Gang after his death.⁴³⁶

On the night of October 6, 1976, Hua Guofeng called an eight o'clock meeting for the politburo members most closely associated with the publication of Mao's works – Zhang Chunqiao, Yao Wenyuan, Wang Hongwen, and Jiang Qing.⁴³⁷ Zhang Chunqiao was the first Gang member to arrive; after Hua announced his arrest, Zhang did not resist. Wang Hongwen arrived next and attempted to fight off the guards, but he was quickly subdued. Yao Wenyuan was either arrested at Zhongnanhai or at his home. Jiang Qing sensibly stayed away, and was eventually arrested in her residence, the Spring Lotus Chamber in Zhongnanhai. The Gang of Four had no support from anyone – not the army, not the police, not even their own guards. They had only Mao. The Gang of Four had held power only because it was really a Gang of Five.⁴³⁸

With Mao dead and the Gang of Four jailed, the Chinese government grappled with the task of explaining why the Cultural Revolution happened and assigning responsibility for the many crimes that had taken place. Rather than acknowledge the ultimate accountability of the Communist Party, the leadership chose to lay blame primarily on individuals who were safely jailed or dead. Jiang Qing was labeled “an out-and-out executioner of proletarian literature and art, a trumpeter of feudal, bourgeois and revisionist wares, a witch trying to resurrect zombies both Chinese and foreign.”⁴³⁹ With

436.Chang and Halliday, *Mao: The Unknown Story*: 629.

437.Li, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao*: 634.

438.Chang, *Wild Swans*: 496.

439.Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 284.

no apparent irony, she and her Gang of Four colleagues were accused of using the arts as a means to promote a counter-revolutionary line and restore capitalism, the same specious accusations that they had used to bring down so many others:

Their line in literature and art was an important component of their extreme Rightist political line aimed at seizing power in the Party and government, overthrowing socialism and restoring capitalism. The gang's first step in this direction was gaining control over literature and art....Step by step they established a fascist dictatorship in literary and art circles, ignoring instructions from the Party Central Committee and Chairman Mao....The gang of four learned all the despotic measures used by Chiang Kai-shek, Hitler and the Inquisitors of medieval Europe.⁴⁴⁰

A spectacular televised trial was held for the Gang of Four. Zhang Chunqiao was defiant, even feigning sleep at one point, but with his manacled legs and spectacles askew, he looked pathetic and desperate. Wang Hongwen, the youngest of the Gang, protested that he was "too young to be sentenced to death."⁴⁴¹ Yao Wenyuan sweated and stuttered as questions were put to him, and appeared terrified throughout the televised trial. The evidence produced against him included a diary entry, in which he asked, "Why can't we shoot a few counterrevolutionary elements? After all, dictatorship is not like embroidering flowers."⁴⁴² Yao admitted the facts but repeatedly tried to separate himself from his crimes, saying the writings did not represent his views.

440.Ibid: 284.

441.Ibid: 284.

442.Barboza, David. "Yao Wenyuan, 74, Member of Gang of Four, Is Dead." *New York Times*, January 7, 2006.

It was the classic defense of having acted only under orders.⁴⁴³ Jiang Qing argued with the court, interrupted witnesses and shouted that “making revolution is no crime.”⁴⁴⁴ The former actress called the judges fascists and was so disruptive that she was thrown out of the courtroom more than once. She dismissed her lawyers, speaking in her own defense. She refused to acknowledge any guilt or regret at her trial, defiantly insisting that she had only been implementing her husband’s wishes.

The arrest of the Gang of Four was cause for celebration nation-wide, as the group of tyrants who had ravaged nine hundred million people was finally removed from power. Jiang Qing, Zhang Chunqiao, Wang Hongwen, and Yao Wenyuan were the earliest as well as the last supporters of the Cultural Revolution. Mao had left to them the legacy of the Cultural Revolution, but not the power of Party and state. With their downfall, the Cultural Revolution came to an end.⁴⁴⁵

Retribution and Redemption

In a story that is essentially one of knowledge versus ignorance, courage versus cowardice, and even freedom versus tyranny, there will always be a strong desire to see the evildoers punished and the heroes vindicated. The wicked oppressors in this story do indeed meet with a satisfyingly disgraceful end. But for the unjustly accused heroes, their triumph in the face of excruciating losses was bittersweet at best.

443.Eimer, David. "Yao Wenyuan: Last of the Gang of Four." *Independent*, January 9, 2006.

444.Ibid.

445.Barnouin and Yu, *Ten Years of Turbulence*: 297.

Jiang Qing and Zhang Chunqiao were both sentenced to death, but their sentences were commuted to life imprisonment. Zhang Chunqiao was eventually released from prison for medical reasons, dying of throat cancer at the age of eighty-eight in 2005. After fifteen years of solitary confinement, Jiang Qing was also diagnosed with throat cancer and released to the custody of a hospital. She committed suicide in 1991 at the age of seventy-seven by hanging herself in the hospital bathroom.

Wang Hongwen was sentenced to life imprisonment, and died of liver cancer in 1992 at the age of fifty-seven. Yao Wenyuan, called by one account “the most evil man of the twentieth century in China,”⁴⁴⁶ was sentenced to twenty years in prison. He was released for medical reasons from the Qincheng jail in 1986, where he was said to have served as a librarian. He died of diabetes in 2006 at the age of seventy-four. It was a condition of his release that the man dubbed “the killer with a poison pen” by the press was not allowed to write about or discuss his career in any way.

Yu Huiyong did not survive the fall of his patrons in the autumn of 1976. There was a brief and intense campaign against Yu Huiyong, but it paled in comparison to the blows dealt his patrons. Yu was accused of plagiarism, even to the point of stealing the tunes of a blind musician, and the verdict in 1977 was that he was in fact a secret rightist and counter-revolutionary.

Yu was arrested and classified as a “first-category Gang of Four element.” He provided testimony that was used against Jiang Qing, Zhang Chunqiao, and Yao

446.Eimer, “Yao Wenyuan – Last of the Gang of Four,” *Independent*: 2006

Wenyuan, although it was not particularly damaging. The last public mention of Yu was made on March 1, 1977. Sometime after this date he killed himself by drinking DDT.⁴⁴⁷

Shanghai Conservatory critics made token efforts to lay blame for the school's violence during the Cultural Revolution on Yu's shoulders, but the effort was half-hearted. Indeed, the campaign against the followers of the Gang of Four petered out within months. The main reason was that Mao was not repudiated, nor was the Cultural Revolution as such. Anyone who had done evil simply claimed that they had acted out of loyalty to Mao, as Jiang Qing's famous quote during her trial attested: "I was Chairman Mao's dog. Whomever he told me to bite, I bit."⁴⁴⁸ There were no clear criteria to judge criminality either, except in the case of the most blatant murderers and torturers. Many had been involved in house raids, in destroying historical sites, antiques, and books, and in the factional fighting. The greatest horror of the Cultural Revolution – the crushing repression that had driven hundreds of thousands of people to mental breakdown, suicide, and death – was carried out by the population collectively. Almost everyone, including young children, had participated in brutal denunciation meetings, many lending a hand in beating the victims.⁴⁴⁹ No one was immune to the ravages of the Cultural Revolution, even those who had somehow managed to escape from China.

Fu Cong had settled in Europe, became a renowned concert pianist, and eventually lost all contact with his homeland. In 1977, he wrote directly to Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping, telling him that he wished to return to China to visit his brother and to do

447. Kraus, *Arts Policies of the Cultural Revolution*: 240.

448. Meisner, *Mao's China and After*: 443.

449. Chang, *Wild Swans*: 498.

something for his country. When his parents were posthumously rehabilitated, he returned for their memorial service and seven months later went back to give lectures at the Central and Shanghai conservatories. He also discussed his original decision not to return to China, telling a journalist:

If I returned to China, I knew my situation would be impossible. Both my father and I would have had to expose each other. That was unthinkable. We would never do that. So I was forced to leave. About my leaving I always felt full of regret and anguish. After all, I'm one of millions of intellectuals in China. They all suffered terribly in the Cultural Revolution, but I escaped this. It seemed so unfair. I felt uneasy, as if I owed something to all my friends.⁴⁵⁰

Fu Cong had defected as a young man while already overseas and had remained quiet about his reasons for leaving and his opinions about the situation in China. As he later told a reporter, "All these years I've followed this principle: Never allow anyone to use me to harm my country and never do anything dishonorable for personal gains."⁴⁵¹ For these reasons, because of the compassion many felt for him due to his parents' joint suicide, it was relatively easy to rehabilitate him.

The rehabilitation of Ma Sitson was considerably more difficult. He had been tried for treason *in absentia* and declared guilty, not only for fleeing but for publicly making critical statements about China. While the vast majority of intellectuals who were persecuted in the Cultural Revolution were rehabilitated at the end of 1978, he was not. Officials from the Central Conservatory continued to work on his behalf, and he was

450. Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 294.

451. Ibid: 295.

finally rehabilitated in 1985. Ma Sitson and his wife made plans to return to China, but he was hospitalized with heart disease and died before he was able to return.⁴⁵²

The Shanghai Philharmonic held a public ceremony in 1979 rehabilitating the memory of Gu Shengying, the professional pianist who gassed herself together with her mother and brother. Her aged father was allowed to return from his exile in Qinghai and was given housing in Shanghai, as well as recordings, press clippings, and photographs to replace those he looted by the Red Guards after his daughter's suicide. But there was no way to replace the family he had lost.⁴⁵³

China's education system was especially hard hit by the Cultural Revolution. For ten years there had been no open entrance exams, no formal graduations, no teaching of a standard, non-political curriculum. Red Guards had destroyed school records, burnt textbooks, and beaten, abused and murdered teachers at schools throughout the country.⁴⁵⁴ The return to normal functioning thus took longer at institutions of music education than it did at other musical organizations, such as orchestras. Regular enrollment at the Central and Shanghai conservatories did not begin until 1978. In the first year of the restored system, seventeen thousand students applied for one hundred places in the Central Conservatory.⁴⁵⁵

The rebuilding process was even harder at the Shanghai Conservatory than elsewhere because so many of its professors had died – and because the humiliation and

452. Ibid: 296.

453. Kraus, *Pianos & Politics in China*: 179.

454. Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 292.

455. Kraus, *Pianos & Politics in China*: 176.

torture that had driven them to their deaths had come from within the Conservatory.⁴⁵⁶ People had suffered pain and deep humiliation at the hands of others who had been their former students, colleagues, and even friends.⁴⁵⁷ In the early 1970's, many people returned to Shanghai with diseases picked up by their exile in the countryside. Many more experienced mental shock which they would never be able to overcome completely. Two rehabilitation meetings were held in 1976 in honor of ten teachers who had died, with hundreds of memorial wreaths and telegrams streaming in from all over the country. Nearly two hundred people who had been persecuted at the Conservatory had their cases "re-examined." People had their property returned, in as far as possible. One teacher recalls having lost a precious collection including music by Bartok, Stravinsky and other modern composers. What he received in return were some hundred different records of music by Mozart and Beethoven.⁴⁵⁸

For many people confronted with the violence of the Cultural Revolution, it had been a shock to experience Chinese maltreating Chinese. In fact, the aspect of national "fratricide" may go some way in explaining the ghastly proportions that the violence assumed: the very recognition that the people "on the other side" were actually colleagues and friends led to violent counter-reactions in a number of cases. In the early 1980's, former victims and torturers in the Shanghai Conservatory could be seen living in the same building as neighbors or working in the same department. A man might drink tea at a table together with a colleague responsible for the murder of his closest

456. Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 297.

457. "They were my best students – the second person who came to criticize me, I'd known him since childhood." – Tan Shuzen. *Ibid*: 298.

458. Kouwenhoven and Schimmelpenninck, "The Shanghai Conservatory of Music," *Chime*: 80.

relative.⁴⁵⁹ Having them all work together in the same units again was as difficult in the music world as it was in other parts of Chinese society.⁴⁶⁰ Thus, in addition to finding replacements for professors lost to suicide, it was also necessary to allay the bitterness and anger that weighed on many who survived. The 1979 decision to reinstate He Luting as president did much to help with this process.⁴⁶¹

He Luting had been determined to get his old job back ever since his release from prison in 1973. In the intervening years, the conservatory's revolutionary leaders gave him a small desk in the music research room and made it clear that he was not wanted, but he went to work anyway.⁴⁶² He was grief-stricken when he learned of the 1968 death of his daughter, but he also continued to struggle with his tremendous sorrow and even guilt over the suicides of so many conservatory professors. He Luting felt responsible because it was he who had convinced many of these professors to return to China from their successful careers abroad when he first became president of the conservatory.⁴⁶³ It was their international success (particularly in competitions) and studies overseas that rendered these professors obvious targets during the Cultural Revolution.

Mr. He apparently felt the worst about the pianist Li Cuizhen, because he had worried about her from the start, knowing that her love of beauty and enjoyment of pretty clothes could get her in trouble. When he heard how she had died – dressed in her best

459. Ibid: 80.

460. Kraus, *Pianos & Politics*: 179.

461. Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 297.

462. Ibid: 297.

463. "He felt so much guilt. He felt terrible when he came out of jail and learned of all who had died."
– Zhu Jianer. Ibid: 297.

clothes and carefully made up – he cursed himself for not having tried to help her remain strong in the face of the Red Guards.⁴⁶⁴ There was nothing that He Luting could have done for these professors, as he himself was either imprisoned or under brutal attack. However, as he was the catalyst for their return to China, his guilt remained with him throughout the remainder of his life.

When the Cultural Revolution ended, He Luting went to Beijing without permission to demand that the officials at the Ministry of Culture give him his job back. His ultimate reinstatement as Shanghai Conservatory president was a cause for celebration in intellectual circles nationwide. A special concert of his own music was held to honor him in Shanghai when he reassumed his post, and a similar concert was held in Beijing in 1983 to celebrate his eightieth birthday.⁴⁶⁵

He Luting's first act upon returning to the leadership of the conservatory was to preside over a memorial service for the many professors who had committed suicide or died in captivity. Mr. He then began once again to gather the most talented people available to administrate and teach at the conservatory, starting with Ding Shande, Zhou Xiaoyan and Tan Shuzhen, who were all reappointed to their former positions as vice-presidents. He Luting used his position for promoting his views on music and music education. Together with a group of other prominent musicians, he prepared "A Proposal for Strengthening School Music Instruction," in which he complained that national leaders did not sufficiently stress music, schools did not emphasize music classes, standards for music teachers were too low, and the ideology of music education was

464.Ibid: 297.

465.Ibid: 297.

backward. They also stressed the need for the reform of teaching methods. Without changes in music education, the classics would never be popularized, and training would be restricted to a few outstanding specialists.⁴⁶⁶ He Luting continued to fight for the rights of musicians everywhere; for example, when a regulation was passed stating that only the Central and Shanghai conservatories could use foreign textbooks, it caused consternation in music circles nationwide. Although it did not affect the Shanghai Conservatory, Mr. He nonetheless led the battle to get the regulation rescinded.⁴⁶⁷

He Luting also repeatedly emphasized the importance of preserving Chinese tradition even as imported techniques and theories were adopted to make Chinese music better.⁴⁶⁸ He said that “new Chinese music will easily be successful, because it has a very deep traditional base.”⁴⁶⁹ He also stated that “Melody is important: if there are national characteristics, then our music will be liked internationally. Atonal music, on the other hand, is unintelligible, it has no national characteristics. The beauty of China’s nature cannot be expressed in this monotonous atonal music.”⁴⁷⁰ His attitude toward Chinese music was preservative and patriotic at heart.

He Luting’s abuse during the Cultural Revolution had absolutely no effect whatsoever on his ability to retain strong opinions, or his habitual outspokenness. During one concert of new music in 1984, He Luting nearly walked out in a rage because the

466. Kraus, *Pianos & Politics*: 185.

467. Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 336.

468. “During my interview with He, he constantly emphasized the beauties and superiority of Chinese melody.” – Barbara Mittler. Mittler, *Dangerous Tunes*: 42.

469. Ibid: 301.

470. Ibid: 283.

music offended him, but he was held back by his wife. He came backstage personally to scold the composer for his lack of melody, which was seen to be essential to Chinese music.⁴⁷¹

He Luting and several of his colleagues retired from the Shanghai Conservatory in 1986. Sang Tong, the composer whose maltreatment at the hands of the Red Guards had left him partially deaf, was appointed the new chief director.⁴⁷² Mr. He travelled around the country to meet with music teachers in elementary, middle, and high schools and wrote music education proposals for local governments. He also started to compose again, including the score for a movie about Marshall He Long, a charismatic fellow Hunanese who had died during the Cultural Revolution – allegedly after Jiang Qing ordered doctors to give him glucose injections instead of the insulin he needed to control his diabetes.⁴⁷³

He Luting's wife, Jiang Ruizhi, died in 1997. Mr. He himself passed away on April 27, 1999 at the age of ninety-six. The death of the musician known throughout the country for his stubborn adherence to principle was major news. More than a thousand people attended his funeral and floral wreathes were sent by the nation's top leaders, including then-president Jiang Zemin and then-premier Zhu Rongji. On the first anniversary of Mr. He's death, the Shanghai Music Publishing House released a collection of essays in his memory written by a variety of friends, students, colleagues

471. Ibid: 181.

472. Kouwenhoven and Schimmelpenninck, "The Shanghai Conservatory of Music," *Chime*: 81.

473. Cai and Melvin, *Rhapsody in Red*: 336.

and relatives. They are a testament to Mr. He's force as a composer, an educator, an inspiration, and a friend.⁴⁷⁴

“A great person respected by everyone has gone forever. But he will always be the conscience of the music world. He will always be watching over us.”⁴⁷⁵

474. Ibid: 336.

475. Li Delun, Ibid: 336.

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