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Reconsidering Cultural Politics in the Analysis of Contemporary Chinese Music: The Case of *Ghost Opera*

Samson Young

Chinese music has received considerable attention in recent scholarship due to the success of the 'New Wave' generation of composers. Despite this apparent bloom in interest, some writers feel that the discourse suffers from a lack of close reading, in favor of identity politics and meta-cultural issues. Using Tan Dun's Ghost Opera as a case study, this article suggests that the issue is less about 'appropriate balance', and has more to do with the type of question technical analysis has traditionally been employed to answer in the scholarship of contemporary Chinese music. Instead of focusing on the degree to which a signifier is 'Chinese' or 'contemporary', analysts should ask why ethnicity is performed when it is not always necessary, and potentially even distracts from the music itself.

Keywords: Tan Dun (b.1957); Ghost Opera; Musical Quotation; Cultural Politics; Contemporary Chinese Music

In the preface to Cartier-Bresson's *D'une Chine à l'autre* (Cartier-Bresson, 1954), a book of photographs of China, Jean-Paul Sartre describes an episode of the staging of the picturesque:¹

[The photographers] seek out a Chinese who looks more Chinese than the others; in the end they find one. They make him adopt a typically Chinese pose and surround him with *chinoiseries*. What have they captured on film? *One Chinaman?* No... the Idea of what is Chinese. (Sartre, 2001, p. 18)

The idea of posing is an interesting one. Imagine that the Chinaman in Sartre's snapshot of Oriental theatre is aware of the implication of his actions: under what circumstances, then, could one be *made* to pose? Can we imagine an *invitation* to pose, or even a *desire* to pose?

The economic and political successes of China mean that this once exoticized nation's presence is no longer confined to explorers' accounts. Today, we may have difficulty imagining a token Chinaman content to be passively mystified and culturally assembled. From the stock market to the Olympics to the musical avant-garde, China now actively participates in the production of her own international image. Similarly, contemporary Chinese music has received considerable attention in recent scholarship due to the success of the 'New Wave' generation of composers (Wang, 1986).² Writings on the nature of musical inter-culturation in contemporary Chinese music have at various times emphasized different facets of the practice, including but not limited to the broader cultural context for musical Orientalism in the Western experimental tradition (Corbett, 2000); the historical development and political implications of contemporary music from within China (Mittler, 1997); politics of representation, ideological issues and patterns of reception (Chan & Law, 2003; Everett & Lau, 2004).

To Analyze or not to Analyze?

Despite this apparent bloom in interest, some feel that the discourse of contemporary Chinese music suffers from a lack of close reading in favor of identity politics and meta-cultural issues. In the words of Frank Kouwenhoven (1992, p. 76; emphasis in original):

Western students of Sinology or Musicology occasionally visit me to discuss contemporary Chinese music. They always appear interested in one and the same theme: the impact of *politics*... it is unfortunate that so very little attention has been paid to the music itself. The works of young composers... are hardly ever viewed in an international musical context.

In 'Against National Style: Individualism and Internationalism in New Chinese Music', Barbara Mittler (2003) similarly argues that new Chinese music should be taken seriously as the expression of individualism, rather than always being defined by its relationship to China. A more recent endorsement of the technical-analytical approach comes from Christian Utz (2003, pp. 7–8):

Research on encounters between traditional non-Western music and contemporary compositional practice tends to neglect detailed musical analysis, in favor of extensive socio-cultural or political theoretical frameworks... Until now detailed structural analyses of musical works, for instance, have rarely been found in this field, in contrast to interpretations of their (cross-) cultural signification or their multi-textural impact.

In many ways, this question of meta-narrative as opposed to close reading replicates the competing categories of the new musicology debate. Chinese or not, when it comes to determining the appropriate tipping point of cultural symbolisms versus technical accounts, the jury is still out.³ In the case of contemporary Chinese

music, however, the issue of appropriate balance is complicated by a number of factors. Scholars of the field, including some of its pioneers, have traditionally emerged from such diverse disciplines as cultural studies, Sinology, post-colonial studies and literary studies. While musicology has come to embrace cultural-historical frameworks from a place where technical musical analysis is the norm, contemporary Chinese music scholarship approaches close reading from a different direction. This has implications for the way musical analysis functions in the reading of contemporary Chinese music.

How do technical analysis and cultural politics fit into a discussion of this body of work? One of the most important contributions by Kouwenhoven, Mittler, Utz and others is their questioning of Chinese-ness as an essentialized concept, which was inspired by similar development in post-colonial studies.⁴ This has led scholars to reconsider more technical analytical approaches. In more specific terms, Christian Utz (2003) suggests a re-examination of the relationship between 'traditional' and 'contemporary' idioms, towards a model that moves beyond this dualism in favor of a continuum of signifiers. This is where one encounters an interesting paradox. If we embrace the view that ethnic identities are constructs, then to what extent are we interested in *how* cultural signifiers function to reinforce these imaginary categories? To re-appropriate Sartre's picturesque paradigm: if one were to capture the Orient on the busy streets of urban China today, our Chinaman would be an internationalized individual. This means that he may now choose to pose or not to pose in front of the camera, and in either case, he is fully aware of the implication of his own action. Therefore, it is perhaps less meaningful to ask *how Chinese* our Chinaman's performative masquerade is because it inevitably leads to the drawing of an arbitrary line on the continuum of signifiers. Instead of focusing on the degrees to which a signifier is 'traditional' or 'contemporary', could one not ask *why* ethnicity is performed when it is not always necessary, and potentially even distracts attention from the music itself? In the case of contemporary Chinese music, if sound can indeed be heard free of cultural contexts as these writers suggest, then why do composers and analysts continue to invoke culture?

In the following, I will present a reading of Tan Dun's *Ghost Opera* to demonstrate that contemporary Chinese music scholarship's allergic reaction to analysis stems not entirely from an obsession with socio-cultural frameworks. The reason for choosing *Ghost Opera* is not only due to the important place it occupies in the repertoire and in Tan Dun's musical career; more importantly, the extensive use of musical quotations and theatrical elements, both of which are rich in explicit cultural meanings, makes *Ghost Opera* a particularly fruitful work to analyze.

Theatricality and Explicit Cultural Meanings in *Ghost Opera*

Tan Dun takes full advantage of the theatrical potential of the concert hall in *Ghost Opera*. Each member of the five-piece ensemble is required to vocalize, move between stage positions, and play an assortment of percussion instruments at various times.

Like many of Tan Dun's compositions from the 1990s, the use of theatrical elements in *Ghost Opera* serves to symbolically ritualize the performance space. The title of the composition points to two possible conceptual points of departure, both of which are related to folk rituals. The first is the shamanistic practice of *nuo* (傩). *Nuo* originates from exorcism ceremonies, the earliest surviving records of which date back as early as the Shang Dynasty (1700–1027 BC). In *nuo*, it is believed that spirits communicate with the ritual's mediator, as well as having conversations amongst themselves. The formal aspects of *nuo* theatre—the theatrical manifestation of *nuo* tradition—are not standardized, though it typically involves a masked performer who can be taken to represent deities, characters from folk legends or historical figures, depending on the function of the occasion.

A second possible source of inspiration is a form of theater known as '*guixi*' (鬼戲), literally meaning 'ghost opera' or 'ghost drama'.⁵ *Guixi* consists of a vast repertoire dating back to the Yuan (1271–1368 AD) and Ming (1368–1644 AD) dynasties. *Guixi* typically deals with the subject matter of death, and involves at least one dead character. In *guixi*, death finds its dramatic expression often in a narrative set in the underworld from where deities and spirits are summoned, or with characters whose spirits roam freely between the realms of the living and the dead.

Aside from the traditions of *nuo* and *guixi*, the title of *Ghost Opera* also implicitly points to the musical genre of opera as understood in the Western concert hall tradition.⁶ To be exact, only the theatricality inherent in an opera, rather than the genre as most narrowly defined, is being referenced by the title. *Ghost Opera* is complete with a cast, a synopsis and a libretto. The 'cast' is defined as various agents in the musical-dramatic narrative. The 'synopsis' is a graphical representation of *Ghost Opera*'s worldview. The 'libretto' presents the flow of the composition as a conversation between sonic and theatrical events. It contains the opening bars of J. S. Bach's 'Prelude No. 4 in C-sharp Minor' from the first book of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, the first stanza of the celebrated Chinese folk tune *Xiaobaicai* (小白菜),⁷ two excerpts from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, and monkish vocalizations.

Ghost Opera's eclecticism, according to the work's program description, is 'cross-temporal, cross-cultural and cross-media', and it 'touches on the past, present, future and the eternal; employs elements from Chinese, Tibetan, English and American cultures; and combines performance traditions of the European classical concert, Chinese shadow puppet theater, visual art installations, folk music, dramatic theater and shamanistic ritual' (Monastra, 2006). Tan Dun has also spoken publicly about his aspiration to create a musical-spiritual universe, where signs and sounds no longer function as traces of culture or history. Likening the process to a shamanistic ritual, Tan Dun asserts that in his music 'there is no East or West, all is human' (Lipsyle & Morris, 2005). It is precisely on these grounds that Tan Dun and some other members of the 'New Wave' have rejected readings of their works limited to Chinese-identity-related issues. Given composers' discomfort with cultural identification, and with technical-analytical method's deposition to the 'how Chinese' type of questions,

it is perhaps no surprise that scholars of contemporary Chinese music tend to avoid nuts and bolts close reading.

Yet despite the composer's best intentions, *nuo*, *guixi*, *The Tempest* and *Xiaobaicai* all carry with them explicit cultural associations. Therefore, the 'summoning' of these elements in itself can also be read as an identity-marking gesture. On the one hand, we acknowledge the composer's rejection of one's being Chinese by descent; but, on the other hand, in *Ghost Opera*, we are confronted with Tan Dun's active summoning of identity markers by consent. Under these circumstances, how does one avoid being entangled in cultural politics? In the words of Allen Chun (1996, p. 137):

[Decolonization] does not mean...that one is free to invent culture as one pleases...only by demystifying the authority of interests that have deemed it necessary to define culture in particular way and to make people identify with prevailing communities would one then be free to choose, making the idea of multiple identities a meaningful reality.

Instead of regressing to purely technical analysis under the auspices of an all-is-human platform, analysts should reconsider the function of analysis when dealing with acts of musical inter-culturation. In the spirit of Allen Chun's quotation above, I would suggest that we ask why identity markers are summoned even when they are not necessary, and scrutinize the strategic nature of the act of identification. In *Ghost Opera*, this act of identity-marking is achieved largely through the use of musical quotations. Like theatrical elements, the cultural association of these quotations is explicit. This is precisely what makes *Ghost Opera* such a fruitful work to analyze since we can by-pass the question of 'how Chinese' or 'how Western' these quotations are and proceed directly to ask *why* they are used.

Comprehensive analyses of *Ghost Opera* have already been attempted in several publications (Gooi, 2001; Utz, 2002). In the following, I will focus my attention on musical quotations, paying special attention to the context and strategic nature of their use. Matters such as harmony, pitch organization and instrumentation will be considered only insofar as they are pertinent to the use of musical quotations.

Auditory Quotation Marks

According to Nelson Goodman, there are two defining conditions for quotations. First, a quotation must present replica-hood of the quoted. In the case of a musical quotation, replica-hood is loosely defined as exhibiting 'closely similar auditory properties' (Goodman, 1978, p. 41) to the quoted, rather than always requiring a strict syntactic replica of the original as more often is the case in literary quotations. The second necessary criterion, the prerequisite that a genuine quotation must also refer to or denote its origin, is more problematic for music. Bicknell (2001), Goodman (1978), Howard (1974) and others have all noted the difficulty in pinning down the act of referencing in musical quotations. One can imagine instances where a musical quotation escapes the notice of even the keenest of listeners, particularly

when a composer makes deliberate effort to mask over the identity of the quoted material by weaving it underneath the musical fabric.

It is true that the recognition of musical quotation pre-supposes cultural and historical literacy, but even in the absence of extra-musical footnotes, quoted musical materials can be highlighted by being subject to the processes of de-contextualization. That is to say, a quoted passage can be distinguished by pitting the original context as familiar against the musical quotation as foreign, and also as elements of stability and volatility. The distance between the quoting and the quoted is set up by conjuring up musical buffers. These buffers can be thought of as auditory quotation marks. Once these buffers are in place, they might dissolve again to obscure the identity of the musical quotation. In *Ghost Opera*, it is precisely the instability of these auditory quotation marks that gives rise to a multiplicity of readings of musical quotations as identity-making gestures, and provides a glimpse into their strategic nature.

The two quotations that appear most frequently in *Ghost Opera* are the first eight bars of J. S. Bach's 'Prelude No. 4 in C-sharp minor' from the first book of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* and the Chinese folk song *Xiaobaicai*. The Bach quotation makes its initial appearance in the first movement emerging out of the sounds of water. This quotation is not a literal replica of the original. Chord tone doublings and non-essential tones are omitted. Occasionally, rhythmic values are either halved or doubled (mm. 1, 6–8). Additional arpeggiations and octave transposition are also spotted in several places (mm. 6–8). The harmonic progression and the counterpoint, however, are strictly preserved (Figures 1 and 2).

The Bach quotation is abruptly cut short by the sound of a bowed gong and the 1st violin player's vocalization. After another episode of water sounds and vocalizations, the Chinese folk tune *Xiaobaicai* is heard. This time the quotation is literal, sung by the *pipa* player over a low C pedal in the viola (Figure 3). When heard in the context of the Bach quotation, *Xiaobaicai* sounds strangely alienated. Its dissonant minor second relationship to the Bach quotation's C-sharp is certainly partly responsible. *Xiaobaicai*'s strong sense of the tonality of C is further reinforced by the low C viola pedal that precedes its entry. The orchestration and physical arrangement of players also serve to heighten this sense of alienation. The Bach quotation is initially played by the 1st violin, viola and cello in the centre of the stage directly in front of the audience. In comparison, *Xiaobaicai* emerges in a single voice behind a shadow play screen, where the *pipa* player is positioned. It is sparse, far-removed and foreign. Tan Dun allows the Bach quotation to mount the blank sonic canvas with a first statement in three-part counterpoint, thus establishing itself as the context. A monophonic folk tune that is limited to a pentatonic pitch collection is then heard at a distance. The contrast here could not have been greater.

The second appearance of the Bach quotation is heard at the beginning of the second act *Earth Dance*. This time (rehearsal letter A), fragments of the dance-proper in D (m. 4) pre-empt the Bach quotation in C-sharp. The dissonance between these two sound worlds is augmented as the rising fifth dyad (d-a') in the first violin increases in dynamics, pitch range and frequency. The dissonance resolves when the



Figure 1 J. S. Bach, Prelude No. 4 in C-sharp Minor, Book I, *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, mm. 1–8. Available at: <http://www.8notes.com/scores/9598.asp>

tonality of D finally gets established by phasing out of the Bach quotation. This is further reinforced by the repeated sounding of a fifth (d and a) in the cello (Figure 4), and the dominant pedal in the first violin (rehearsal letter B, m. 2). The rising fifth dyad violin figure soon reappears (rehearsal letter C, m. 1), but this time it is in the *pipa* and is colored by a C-sharp that resolves upward to D.

In no time at all, the 6/4 meter at the beginning of Act Two bursts into a dance in 2/4. With perfect fifth, perfect fourth and major second as the primary intervals, the dance proper is firmly grounded in D and harmonically static. In fact, little harmonic drama can be found in the rest of the second act. The focus here is on rhythm. The stomping rhythmic figure (rehearsal letter A, m. 1) and new folk-like materials (rehearsal letter B, m. 11) are subjected to canonic treatments in various places (rehearsal letter B, mm. 16–18; letter E, mm. 6–8; letter M). In letter K, monkish vocalization returns, bringing the ecstatic dance into a climax of earthy and primal chaos, eventually converging into a variation of *Xiaobaicai*, this time in D (Figure 5). As it turns out, the two instances of the *Xiaobaicai* are set a minor second away on either side of the Bach quotation's C-sharp tonality.

Tan Dun's handling of the two quotations up until this point produces remarkably rich cultural gestures. The treatments that these two quotations receive are significantly dissimilar. When *Xiaobaicai* is summoned, it focuses on signifying the sparse and introspective, the nostalgic, the distanced, the rhythmic and the primal. In contrast, whenever the Bach quotation is used, an image of Bach as the master of contrapuntal writing is called upon. In each case, the folk tune quotation appears to

(in position 1)
(waterdrops) ca. 15''

♩ = 60

Con solo (in position 7)
Con solo (in position 6)
Con solo (in position 3)

①
②
③
④

p *mp* *p*

Figure 2 Tan Dun, *Ghost Opera*: Bach quotation first appearance. Copyright © 1995 by G. Schirmer, Inc. (ASCAP). International copyright secured. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission.

①
②
③
④

Ya Ya Ya Ya Ya Ya
Ya O Ya O
Shao Bai Tai Ya
Ya O Ya O Ya O Ya O

(in position 5)
(singing/gong and low ready in hands)

f *ppp*

Di Li Huang Ya San Liang Sui Ya Mei Die Niang Ya Ya O Ya O

Figure 3 Tan Dun, *Ghost Opera*: Xiaobaicai quotation first appearance. Copyright © 1995 by G. Schirmer, Inc. (ASCAP). International copyright secured. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission.

Figure 4 shows a musical score for a Bach quotation. It consists of three staves. The top staff is marked with a tempo of $J=50$ and a 'pant.' marking. The middle and bottom staves are marked with a tempo of $J=140$. Dynamics include mp , mf , and f . A circled 'A' is above the top staff. Crescendo markings are present in the bottom two staves.

Figure 4 Tan Dun, *Ghost Opera*: Bach quotation second appearance. Copyright © 1995 by G. Schirmer, Inc. (ASCAP). International copyright secured. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission.

Figure 5 shows a musical score for a Xiaobaicai quotation. It consists of two staves. The top staff is marked with a tempo of $J=140$ and a 'pant.' marking. The bottom staff is marked with a tempo of $J=140$. Dynamics include mp , mf , and f . A circled 'T' is above the top staff. Crescendo markings are present in the bottom staff.

Figure 5 Tan Dun, *Ghost Opera*: Xiaobaicai quotation second appearance. Copyright © 1995 by G. Schirmer, Inc. (ASCAP). International copyright secured. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission.

be deprived the very quality that the Bach quotation exemplifies. *Ghost Opera* promises a world in which Bach, Chinese, Shakespeare and Monks are not East or West, but simply human. Yet as we listen to how the folk materials are being consistently singled out as out of context by dissonant key relationships, while with subsequent reappearance the Bach quotation remains largely intact and firmly in C-sharp, we are confronted with a different picture. Bach, his legacy and the importance of harmony and counterpoint are firmly centralized. By contrast, *Xiaobaicai*'s syntax is shaped to operate within the frames of the quoting agent so that it may never threaten the buffers between the two sound worlds and destabilize the

centre. It would be redundant to play the old tune and restate the point of colonial relative upper-hand. More importantly, *Ghost Opera* seems to yield to the code of model minority⁸ and to the policy of cultural assimilation. Under these circumstances, one is customarily white, but *palatably* ethnic when called upon—in expositions, in food fairs and on dining tables. In other words, full expression of the quoted is only possible when the quoting agent deems it appropriate.

This metaphor of model minority plays out even more forcefully when the buffers between the two sound worlds dissolve. In the third act, *Dialogue with 'Little Cabbage'*, Bach and the Chinese folk tune are finally heard together. A short *pipa* cadenza is followed by the third appearance of *Xiaobaicai*, this time featuring the pentatonic pitch collection centered around B. Played by the first violin, this is the only instance so far in the composition where the folk tune is heard unobstructed by the shadow play screen. Lasting only two bars, however, the folk tune is soon overwhelmed by the return of the Bach quotation.

With the buffers gone, we should be on the brink of realizing the composer's 'no East or West, all is human' vision, but the awkwardness of *Xiaobaicai* in its new context keeps us grounded in reality. One of the most striking characteristics of *Xiaobaicai* is the melody's metrical structure: four bars of song proper are set in a slightly unusual 5/4 time, followed by two bars of coda in 4/4 time. In letter A of Act Three, the folk tune is broken up into pieces in several places, leaving the tune sometimes exposed, other times fractured in the middle of a phrase. This allows the folk tune to accommodate to the 6/4 meter of the Bach quotation, which remains unchanged throughout the section. It also ensures that the folk tune lines up with the underlying harmonic framework of the Bach quotation. Consequently, *Xiaobaicai*'s characteristic sense of periodicity takes a back seat (Figure 6). Such an awkward mingling soon turns into full-fledged deconstructing. In letter C, the *Xiaobaicai* quotation re-appears in the cello line, this time set in A and squarely in 6/4, while in the upper strings the same pentatonic pitch collection is now mapped onto the rhythm of the first bar of the Bach quotation (Figure 7). Here, *Xiaobaicai* yields to harmony and counterpoint at the expense of its defining 5/4 meter and usual phrase structure. The Bach quotation and what it represents are clearly privileged.

Reconsidering Cultural Politics

On more than one occasion, Tan Dun has spoken publicly about how he perceives his place in the world of Western classical music. Bach, Beethoven, Bartók, Schoenberg and Stravinsky are among some of the names to whom he most frequently relates himself (Utz, 1998; Van Putten, 1996). Tan Dun, like many of the 'New Wave' generation, launched his international career over three decades ago, when composers of color were still fighting an uphill battle. In a world where ethnicity is also a commodity, identity-performing is one way to distinguish oneself in a crowded marketplace. Now that scholars of contemporary Chinese music have finally succeeded in debunking ethnic identity as an essentialized concept, composers find

Figure 6 shows a musical score for four staves, labeled (A) and (B). The tempo is marked as $\text{♩} = 60$. The score includes various musical notations such as dynamics (*p*, *mp*, *mf*, *pp*) and performance instructions like *con sord.* (con sordano). The notation includes notes, rests, and articulation marks.

Figure 6 Tan Dun, *Ghost Opera: Xiaobaicai* and Bach quotation third appearance. Copyright © 1995 by G. Schirmer, Inc. (ASCAP). International copyright secured. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission.

Figure 7 shows a musical score for four staves, labeled rehearsal letter C. The score includes various musical notations such as dynamics (*mf*, *f*) and performance instructions like *con sord.* (con sordano) and *espr.* (espressivo). The notation includes notes, rests, and articulation marks.

Figure 7 Tan Dun, *Ghost Opera*, Act III, rehearsal letter C. Copyright © 1995 by G. Schirmer, Inc. (ASCAP). International copyright secured. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission.

themselves still being viewed through their Chinese-ness instead of in an international context. It is easy to put on a performative masquerade of the picturesque when the world is watching, but it is not always up to you to take it off when the audience becomes fixated.

It is not my intention to pass judgment on the ideological premise of Tan Dun's 'all is human' vision, or the extent to which he has succeeded.⁹ What is interesting in eclectic cultural collages such as *Ghost Opera* is why some frames of reference deem certain signifying strategies as more relevant. The strategic nature of musical quotations in *Ghost Opera* suggests that in the context of musical inter-culturation certain identity positions are more desirable than others. If our goal as analysts is to reaffirm Chinese composers' position as individuals in the concert world, then instead of turning away from cultural politics, we should take a fresh look at the operation of socio-cultural discourse in the reading of contemporary Chinese compositions. In particular, we must confront our discipline's general reluctance to deal with Chinese composers' agency and their newfound power in the age of the post-picturesque. This reluctance stems from the fear that such a project might further hinder the empowerment of ethnic compositional voices. I would argue that when scholars begin to discuss this body of work in reference to Chinese composers' newfound agency, it will become obvious that there are still colonial machineries deep at work, imposing unfair demands on Chinese composers to put on and take off their identity hats. We must be mindful of the tension between these contesting paradigms, and to confront their implications. Rather than evade cultural politics pessimistically, there is still much left to be said and done in the socio-cultural discourse of contemporary Chinese composition. That being said, we must also be cautious not to invoke identity markers in analysis simply to enlarge musical discoveries that might otherwise be less significant, and then exorcize them when one runs into tricky political debates that resort to a rejection of cultural-political narratives. Analysts cannot have their cake and eat it too.

Notes

- [1] The 'picturesque' (literally meaning 'in the manner of a picture') is an aesthetic category that first came to prominence in England through the treatises of such writers as William Gilpin, Uvedale Price and Richard Payne Knight. Picturesque is obsessed with the dispossessed, the destitute and the aged over the young and the heroic. The picturesque is also fascinated with the exotic other, gazing upon images of a mystified Orient through reports of travellers, missionaries, traders and soldiers.
- [2] 'New Wave' (*xinchao*) refers to a group of young composers who grew up during the Cultural Revolution and emerged out of China in the politically volatile early 1980s. Collectively, they reflected the social, economic and political changes at the time, and the impact of such changes on music.
- [3] The new musicology debate first came to prominence in the 1980s, though the philosophical grounding of the discourse has been around for much longer. According to Ellen Rosand (1995, p. 10), new musicology is informed by 'semiotics, response and reception theory, narratology, gender theory, cultural criticism'. Often inherent in the discussion is a suspicion of analytical methods and marginalization of formalist positions.
- [4] The imaginary nature of Chinese-ness as a fluid construct has been dealt with extensively in recent literature, most notably in a collection of essays *In The Living Tree: The Changing Meaning of Being Chinese Today* edited by Tu Wei-Ming (1994).

- [5] The Chinese character *xi* can be used interchangeably to signify drama, play or theatre, such as in *xi ju*; or games, such as in *you xi*; or used to represent regional opera when a stylistic or sub-genre prefix is attached, such as in *jingxi*, Beijing opera. At the time of writing, no consented-to English translation exists for the term 'guixi'.
- [6] An adequate definition of the genre of opera will no doubt require a book of its own; I am by no means suggesting that there even exists a normative understanding of opera, even within the confines of the concert hall tradition. It is a fluid concept that is open to repeated contestation and redefinition—Tan Dun's very own effort here included.
- [7] *Xiaobaicai* is sometimes also referred to as '*Xiaobaisai*'. More than seven versions of this folk tune are currently documented in different dialects. The version that exists in *Ghost Opera*, also the most widely circulated version of the tune, comes from the Hebei province, home to more than 50 minority ethnic groups.
- [8] Model minorities are defined by their economic exceptionalism, upward class mobility, educational excellence and minimal contribution to their host nation-state's social problems. Asian Americans in particular are often portrayed by popular press as an exemplarity ethnic group. Model minorities are also more readily absorbed into the culture that is dominant or perceived as more desirable in the expense of denying their ethnic identity, ultimately aspiring to become 'more white than white' (Puar & Rai, 2004; Wong et al., 1998).
- [9] In my opinion, this is an important question that is best dealt with in reference to cultural expectation and audience reception.

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