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EXOTIC TOYS, MUSICAL CENTRALITIES AND POWER REVERSALS

THE EARLY RECEPTION OF EUROPEAN KEYBOARD MUSIC AND INSTRUMENTS IN EAST ASIA

Investigation of the reception of European keyboard music in East Asia necessarily includes consideration of the intensive processes by which an originally *alien* type of instrument came to be enculturated within the region and even to acquire the status of a 'natural' medium of musical expression. These processes, encapsulated by Emily Dolan's notion of 'keyboardization',[1] began in the mid-sixteenth century, when harpsichords, clavichords and organs made their way first into Japan and then into China, brought by Jesuit missionaries as tools of their evangelising;[2] by the late nineteenth century, they had achieved a widespread impact in these countries, reflecting a Western cultural and political ascendancy connected with the increasingly forceful realisation of colonialist policies.[3] The following discussion, however, will prefer the concept of enculturation over that of the more unidirectional acculturation in order to underscore the rivalistic cross-appropriations and power dynamics that mark the history of this transcultural encounter. The principal theses I shall develop include the following: the exoticised response of Asians to keyboard instruments as intricate toys, illustrative of an attitude towards the West as a source of useful technology, without its own inherent value; differences of musical centrality in the sense formulated by Bruno Nettl, that is, the selective emphasis of musical parameters that define musical creation, listening and thought (e.g. polyphony, timbre);[4] a reversal of colonial power, whereby the adoption of a 'dominant' culture might serve to buttress not a view of the success of a colonising endeavour, but rather one in which native subjecthood or agency gains in enrichment, above all through the subversion of binaristic discourses of coloniser versus colonised. These arguments do not aim to downplay the reality of symbolic or actual physical violence involved in Europe's approaches towards Asian others, but rather to contribute to a nuanced historical account which avoids a reductive generalising of 'aggressor' and 'victim', with its concomitant hard division into active and passive participants.

In her comprehensive history of Japanese music, Eta Harich-Schneider vividly relates the misunderstandings that occurred during encounters with the music of others: 'the Jesuits simply reject Japanese song-dance; the Japanese, having been treated to the music of Palestrina, Morales and Gabrieli, are passionately

1
Emily Dolan, 'Toward a Musicology of Interfaces', *Keyboard Perspectives*, 5 (2012), 1–13.

2
Ian Woodfield, 'The Keyboard Recital in Oriental Diplomacy, 1520–1620', *Journal of the Royal Music Association*, 115/1 (1990), 35–36, 57–60. According to Woodfield (34), an organ may have reached China as early as the thirteenth century.

3
See e.g. Richard Curt Kraus, *Pianos and Politics in China: Middle-Class Ambitions and the Struggle Over Western Music* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

4
Bruno Nettl, *The Western Impact on World Music* (New York: Schirmer, 1985), 20–21.

interested – in a toy'.[5] Polyphony held little appeal for the Japanese, to whom a multi-voiced texture sounded like 'caximaxi' or confused chattering;[6] equally uncomprehending was the reaction of the Jesuits to Noh theatre, described by Fr. Alessandro Valignano (1539–1606) as 'confusa conclamatio' or 'muddled general shouting'.[7] These illustrations of the difficulty of cross-cultural musical sympathy underscore the importance for a global history of music of exploring diverse modes of *listening*, and of foregrounding the subjectivity of human agents in preference to a treatment of music as an autonomous object. On the other hand, the Japanese fascination with Western keyboard instruments as exotic toys counts more as a topic of material and technological history, since it was concerned primarily with the mechanisms for producing sounds and less with the sounds per se or with music in an aesthetic sense.

The Jesuits in China also found the same exoticist preoccupation with toys among the locals there. For example, Ian Woodfield notes that, 'according to [Matteo Ricci's] own account, many Chinese were attracted by the prospect of viewing European novelties such as clocks, pictures, statues, maps and musical instruments'.[8] In planning to visit the imperial court in Beijing, Ricci knew 'that a keyboard instrument would therefore have the desired element of novelty', so that '[his] intention was to use the curiosity value of the harpsichord as part of his long-term strategy of winning converts at the highest levels of Chinese society'.[9] Expressed through the voice of a native, rather than mediated by Western commentators, the emphasis of the unusual and the mechanistically intricate also emerges clearly, as in the following lines from a poem, 'Listening to a Western Barbarian Woman Playing the Yangqin' (聽西洋夷女操洋琴, *Ting xiyang yinü cao yangqin*), written in 1827 by Cai Xianyuan (蔡顯緣), an imperial civil servant who visited Macau in 1827 and enjoyed the opportunity to examine the organ in that city's Church of St Paul. Cai's description reveals an evident wonderment at the complexity of the alien object, expressed through a language of imagistic metaphor which can only be approximated in translation:

諦視銅鉉百千縷，密於梳櫛光於銀。
晶屏金鏡影交射，如揩秋水融粼粼。
驅環見骨昔未信，百鍊今迺觀其眞。
冶工操煉作冰雪，梓人裁用同繩綸。
綰紐無端會臍腹，齟齬成列排牙齦。
竊疑呼吸伏橐籥，抑或振觸乘機輪。
其名曰琴但髣髴，豈有雁柱銜嶙峋。

Look carefully at the multitude of copper rods, denser than a comb, brighter than silver.
Crystal screens and golden mirrors exchange reflections, like clear autumn waters flowing wide and deep.

5
Eta Harich-Schneider, *A History of Japanese Music* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 470.

6
Ibid., 478, citing the Jesuit missionary Luis Frois's 'Treatise containing a succinct and brief comparison of certain contradictions and differences between the customs in Europe and in the province of Japan', a document now preserved in the library of the Real Academia de la Historia, Madrid.

7
Ibid., 470, citing *De Missione Legatorum Iaponensium ad Romanam Curiam*... (Macau: In Societatis JESU cum facultate Ordinarij, & Superiorium, 1590), an account of the journey to Europe of four young Japanese converts who were accompanied by Valignano, Visitor to the Jesuit missionary province of Japan, allegedly written by these converts but probably heavily edited by Valignano or by Fr. Duarte de Sande (1547–1599), rector of the College of St Paul in Macau.

8
Woodfield, 'The Keyboard Recital in Oriental Diplomacy', 57.

9
Ibid., 58, 60.

Removing the cover, one could not believe the sight of the bones [i.e. keys], hundreds in a chain whose reality one still sees now.
The metalworker when smelting produces ice and snow, the woodworker cuts out strands from the same rope.
Twisted buttons in disarray form into a navel, misalignment becomes an even row of teeth and gums.
I would suspect the respiration occurs within a concealed furnace, or through the rotation of the mechanism.
It is called a *qin* [zither] but only resembles one, how do the *yanzhu*[10] hold the bony collection together?[11]

These East Asian responses to Western keyboard instruments point to a crucial aspect of the intercultural encounters discussed in the present article, namely the objectification of others and their use as tools of self-enrichment. With regard to the apparent openness towards Western music at the court of the Chinese Emperor Kangxi (r. 1661–1722), Joyce Lindorff has observed that the monarch 'supported the international exchange of ideas and knowledge – *though partly to enhance his empire on his own terms*'[12] (my emphasis). This kind of attitude persisted as late as the twentieth century, during the May Fourth Movement which began in 1919, a modernisation drive that regarded traditional Chinese culture (including its music) as outdated and in urgent need of reform in accordance with Western scientific and technological standards. A central principle adopted by the movement, however, was 中學為體，西學為用 (*zhongxue wei ti, xixue wei yong*), or 'Chinese learning is the essence, Western learning is the tool'. Hence, China would gain a new strength and power through the assimilation of foreign knowledge, but would still remain fundamentally itself, a sovereign subject improved by a merely useful object.

The challenges of comprehension across the boundaries of stark cultural difference present no surprise, of course. Wholly unaccustomed to musical instruments which required the use of ten fingers, Chinese natives could not but exoticise their experience of this aberrance. Regarding exoticism, Hayden White has argued that '[it] do[es] not so much refer to a specific thing, place, or condition as dictate a particular attitude governing a relationship between a lived reality and a problematical area of existence that cannot be accommodated easily to conventional conceptions of the normal or the familiar'.[13] A vivid instance of an inability to accommodate observed phenomena within the normal or the familiar survives thanks to the account recorded by a European priest, Matteo Ripa, of Kangxi's playing of a harpsichord. The monarch's use of a single finger on this occasion excited the scorn of Ripa, who remarked that 'When the sovereign occasionally touched a key with only one finger, it was enough to fill the courtiers with admiration according to the extravagant flattery of the court'.[14] However, this presumption of imperial musical deficiency only reveals its own

10
The moveable bridges of traditional zithers such as the Chinese *guzheng*.

11
Reprinted in the *Ming-Qing shiqi Aomen wenti dangan wenxian huibian* (明清時期澳門問題檔案文獻彙編, Collection of Records and Documents on the Macau Problem of the Ming and Qing Eras) (Macau: *Renmin Chubanshe* (人民出版社), 6v., 1999), 6:830–31. This compilation was prepared by Chinese scholars in the period immediately preceding the end of Portuguese rule in Macau. The translation of the lines from Cai's poem is my own.

12
Joyce Lindorff, 'Missionaries, Keyboards and Musical Exchange in the Ming and Qing Courts', *Early Music*, 32/3 (2004), 407.

13
Hayden White, 'The Forms of Wildness: The Archaeology of an Idea', in *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1992), 151.

14
Translation from Wai Yee Lulu Chiu, 'The Function of Western Music in the Eighteenth-Century Chinese Court', PhD dissertation, Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2007, 104.

unawareness of the subjectivity of a 'many-fingered' standard. The problematical area of existence, in this case, consisted of the playing style of traditional Chinese *qin* instruments, involving the subtle, highly economical use of just a few fingers. That Kangxi understandably had recourse to what was normative for him, in attempting to learn a new instrument, confronted Ripa with a necessary re-centring of his own normality, namely, his equation of digital multiplicity with musical sophistication, which he did not possess the wherewithal to carry out.

A useful concept for theorising the gaps in understanding discussed here is Bruno Nettl's centrality, according to which the musical practice and thought of a given culture centres upon a few specific parameters or perhaps even only a single one, and does not treat all parameters as equally significant. Hence, for example, harmony and polyphony have arguably represented greater focal points than timbre in European music, whereas the reverse situation holds for Chinese music. Even acknowledging the generalised and oversimplified nature of such a contention (for instance, its neglect of historical change, as if any musical tradition remained static over the course of the centuries), one may still accept its grain of truth when endeavouring to account meaningfully for the situations related above. Habituated to different parameters, Chinese and European musicians variously experienced cognitive alienation as a result of their cross-cultural encounters. Yet this shock of the foreign sometimes catalysed a reconfiguration of centralities. We may perhaps detect the onset of such a process in the attempt to employ native terminology to explain the strange keyboard instruments newly arrived in China.

Lindorff has enumerated a series of Chinese terms invented to denote the clavichord, following the initial encounter with a specimen brought to Beijing by Matteo Ricci as part of a first, failed attempt to settle in the imperial capital:[15] *xiqin* (西琴), *daxiyangqin* (大西洋琴), *yaqin* (雅琴), *fanqin* (蕃琴), *tianqin* (天琴), *tiesiqin* (鐵絲琴), *qishierqin* (七十二琴), *shouqin* (手琴), *yangqin* (洋琴) and *dajianqin* (大鍵琴). Common to all of these is the ending *qin* or 'zither'. The Sinicising idea of Western keyboard instruments as a kind of zither remains in force still today, even if *qin* no longer strongly evokes the image of traditional plucked zithers such as the Chinese *guqin* or the Japanese *koto*, but serves more broadly as a referent for a large number of diverse chordophones, reflecting an effect of Westernisation. Thus, the piano is a *gangqin* (鋼琴, 'steel zither'), the harpsichord a *dajianqin* (大鍵琴, 'large keyed zither' or 'large keyboard zither'), and the organ a *fengqin* (風琴, 'wind zither'). Of the earlier terms, *xiqin* and *yangqin*, both meaning 'Western zither', as well as *daxiyangqin* or 'Atlantic zither', seem relatively straightforward in their geographical designations,[16] while *qishierqin* or '72(-string) zither', *dajianqin* and *shouqin* or 'hand zither' indicate technical aspects of instrument construction and

15
Lindorff, 'Missionaries, Keyboards and Musical Exchange', 405.

16
Yang originally meant 'ocean' but later signified 'foreign', with a tendency to refer specifically to 'Western'. *Daxiyang* can likewise indicate a meaning of 'Western', because of Europe's position adjacent to the Atlantic Ocean.

performance, perhaps with an undertone of 'keyboardisation' in the suggestions of 'abnormal' size and number of strings and fingers. More culturally loaded, as it were, are the following: *fanqin*, which can mean 'foreigners' zither' or 'barbarians' zither', thus manifesting a Sinocentric stance towards the clavichord; *yaqin*, possibly an assimilation of the 'barbarian' instrument within the refined Chinese concept of *yayue* or courtly music; *tianqin* or 'heavenly zither', which establishes a link with a political-cosmological concept of deep significance in the Chinese historical context, as in the valorisation of China as the Heavenly Kingdom; and *tiesiqin* or 'zither of metal and silk', referring to two of the eight materials, or *bayin* (八音, literally 'eight tones'), which form the traditional Chinese system of instrument classification, the other six being bamboo, wood, stone, clay, gourd and animal skin.

The last-named of these terms, 'zither of metal and silk', may also transmit a hint of 'keyboardisation' in encompassing more than one category of the classificatory scheme. A report by Zhang Qu (張渠, 1686–1740), governor of Huizhou Prefecture, Guangdong Province, more directly conveys a sense of timbral surfeit, specifically as a reaction to hearing the organ of St Paul's Church in Macau, approximately one century before Cai Xianyuan:

> 有風樂，藏革櫃中不可見，內排牙管百餘，外按以囊，噓吸微風入之，有聲自櫃出，若八音併奏，亦名風琴。
>
> There is wind music (i.e. an organ), hidden within a leather cabinet, inside are arrayed numerous pipes, outside is a sack which one compresses, which lightly draws in air, soud is emitted from the cabinet, if the eight instruments [*bayin*] are played together, they are called an organ.[17]

The phrase 'as if the eight instruments are played together' perhaps hints at a decidedly unfamiliar auditory experience, a simultaneous listening to a plethora of sound colours normally differentiated from one another, or generally to an unwonted sonic density. We may recall here the Japanese characterisation of polyphony as 'caximaxi', and further note a similar response on the part of Emperor Kangxi, who, presented with a performance featuring an ensemble made up of harpsichord, flute, bass viol, violin and bassoon, reacted thus: 'Enough, enough … the truth is, I am not accustomed to out-of-tune concerts'.[18] Later in the eighteenth century, Fr. Jean Joseph Marie Amiot (1718–1793) reported his attempt to convince Chinese musicians of the virtues of French music. His interlocutors remarked with an admirable awareness of cultural difference, 'Your music was not made for our ears, nor our music for your ears'.[19]

But how did East Asian listeners later come to naturalise the hearing of musical traits that they had long found distasteful?

17
From Zhang Qu, *Yue-dong wenjianlu* (粵東聞見錄, Chronicle of Eastern Guangdong), first scroll, 'Macau'. Reprinted in *Ming-Qing shiqi Aomen wenti*, 6:682.

18
Lindorff, 'Missionaries, Keyboards and Musical Exchange', 408.

19
Ibid., 411.

In other words, by what process did a shift of centrality occur? Though I shall leave a detailed consideration of this question to the other authors of the present volume, I may at least propose here the relevance of the idea of keyboardisation formulated by Emily Dolan, who argues for a renewed musicological emphasis on the physical linkage among sounds, the materials from which they arise and the methods of their production. In highlighting the neglect of these interconnections in favour of an abstract and disembodied conception of music as sound (whereas art historians rarely pursue an understanding of paintings as light, for example), Dolan comments: 'it would make just as much sense to talk about the media of music as consisting of the wood, metal, wires, reeds, pipes, valves, speakers, magnetic tape, vinyl and circuits that we use to produce and record sounds. After all, sound is the effect produced by the battery of physical media'.[20] When a critical mass of East Asian musicians (rather than only the relatively few native converts to Christianity before the nineteenth century) eventually took up a Western 'ten-fingered' mode of sound production by playing keyboard instruments more in the fashion of a European church organist than a member of the Chinese imperial court, the impact of the development undoubtedly extended to the very conceptualisation and cognition of music, with the transformed use of the hands enforcing a keyboardised reconfiguration of the musical mind.

The occurrence of this musico-cultural sea change can likely be explained only by consideration of the evolving power dynamics that gradually resulted in European military and economic ascendancy in East Asia, rather than by aesthetic factors. Though it lies beyond the scope of a brief essay to adduce comprehensive evidence in support of such a thesis, the example of a neighbouring society that absorbed a full-scale Western impact at a much earlier time, the Philippines, presents a noteworthy case study. Subjected to a forced intercultural encounter that established an unambiguous colonial context during the late sixteenth century, the Filipino people rapidly assimilated European cultural norms and practices (as mediated through Spanish forms) in diverse spheres including music, as David Irving has detailed.[21] And yet this apparently wholesale acculturation perhaps demonstrates a less unidirectional relation of dominance than it initially suggests, as Irving notes: 'the vast majority of church musicians in the Philippines were in fact Filipinos who were able to control the soundworld of ecclesiastical institutions. The very visible and audible threats that were posed to Spanish authorities by the subaltern's wielding of musical power resulted in the formulation of rigid legislation for the whole archipelago'.[22] This soundworld was not Filipino in an essentialist sense, that is, it did not consist to any significant degree of 'traditional' musical elements, but would in all likelihood have struck an outside listener as entirely Western. A Tagalog musician

20
Dolan, 'Toward a Musicology of Interfaces', 3.

21
David R. M. Irving, *Colonial Counterpoint: Music in Early Modern Manila* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

22
Ibid., 11.

discussed by Irving, named Marcelo de San Agustín (d. 1697) and characterised as 'the most dextrous organist known among the Filipinos, who are very skillful in playing instruments', illustrates the circumstance of a native individual who seems to have fully mastered a 'foreign' idiom.[23] I would like to argue that Marcelo does not represent an instance of submission to colonisers, any more than Asians who speak a European language as their mother tongue because of the conditions of their birth or upbringing feel that they communicate via a medium that is somehow not theirs, or suffer any hindrances in employing the full resources of the language to shape a compelling, developed individuality. Rather, the opportunity exists here to undercut the binaristic discourses of 'we' vs 'they' that undergird colonialist ideology, rather than to perpetuate them inadvertently. Thus, I prefer the concept of enculturation to that of acculturation for its greater hint of parity, even in cases where one 'interlocutor' possesses overwhelming technological, economic and other advantages.

When Asians nowadays enthusiastically pursue the study, practice and enjoyment of music by composers such as Bach, Mozart and Chopin, do they reveal their colonisation by the West, or have they to some extent colonised the West themselves? To conclude the present essay, and also to offer some indication of directions for future exploration, I would like to relate the discussions that took place as part of a round table organised by four Filipino musicologists for the first conference of the International Musicological Society's study group on the global history of music, titled 'Music in the Pacific World: Change and Exchange Through Sound and Memory'.[24] The round table, on the theme of decolonising Filipino music historiography, featured presentations by Maria Alexandra Iñigo Chua (University of Santo Tomás), Arwin Quiñones Tan (University of the Philippines), Isidora Miranda (Vanderbilt University, USA) and José Semblante Buenconsejo (University of the Philippines), and it covered topics ranging from hybridity through social class to zarzuela. During the question-and-answer session following the presentations, one of the audience members asked, 'Why did you focus so much on Western music? What about your traditional music?' The subtext of these queries might well have been, 'Why do you passively accept your colonisation?' Undercutting the essentialist assumptions of the questioner, Professor Chua responded incisively, 'Our traditional music *is* Western music', and further asserted that 'We have colonised Western music'. Professor Miranda also added that 'We seek to question the boundary between Western and traditional music'.

In this forceful stance towards the possible charge of a meek complicity with an unjust cultural dominance, one can discern a challenge to another colonialist discourse, that of mimicry, defined by Homi Bhabha as the colonised subject's position of

23
Ibid., 172–173.

24
'Music in the Pacific World: Change and Exchange Through Sound and Memory', First Conference of the IMS Study Group on the Global History of Music, Taipei, Taiwan and online, 14–17 October 2021.

forever being almost but not quite a full member of the coloniser's culture, simultaneously absorbed within it and alienated from it: in other words, a permanent second-class citizen.[25] In refusing a characterisation of themselves as pursuing something which is not quite theirs, subaltern participants of an ostensibly foreign tradition might perhaps diffuse the power structures that would cast suspicion on their full, coherent and human selfhood.

25
Homi Bhabha, 'Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse', in *The Location of Culture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004), 121–131.

ABSTRACT
Western music first achieved a sustained presence in East Asia during the sixteenth century, brought to this 'distant' region by European traders and missionaries. However, its dissemination remained limited for some three centuries to specific locales such as the area of southern Japan around Nagasaki and the Chinese imperial court in Beijing. Even so, investigation of the early phases of this cross-cultural encounter helps to illuminate the process by which Asian listeners gradually assimilated the alien quality of Europe's musical sounds as transmitted especially by its keyboard instruments, to such a degree that these came to function as a native language of sorts. The present article will discuss the following aspects: the exotic fascination with the technological complexity of the foreigners' musical devices, taking precedence over any aesthetic engagement with the music; the initial clash and then shift in musical centralities in the sense formulated by Bruno Nettl, that is, the selective emphasis of parameters (e.g. polyphony, timbre) that define musical creation, listening and thought; the applicability to the history of Sino-Western exchange of Emily Dolan's notion of 'keyboardisation', an idiosyncratic reconceptualisation of musical content that would eventually acquire normative force; questions of colonisation and reverse colonisation in understanding the complex power dynamics that shaped this global musical encounter.

KEYWORDS
exoticism, musical centrality, keyboardisation, colonialism

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