
WAI LING CHEONG

IMAGES OF CHOPIN
IN THE PEOPLE'S
REPUBLIC OF CHINA

On 6 February 2022 the Polish President Andrzej Duda, the only elected EU head of state to attend the opening ceremony of the Beijing Winter Olympics, met with his Chinese counterpart to strengthen diplomatic relations, with an emphasis on economic cooperation. Back in 2016, the signing of a declaration on strategic partnership had brought Xi Jinping to meet with Duda in Warsaw, on which occasion the two countries also signed a protocol on Polish–Chinese cultural cooperation, which included a Beijing International Fryderyk Chopin Piano Competition for Young Pianists. Since then, the Central Conservatory of Music, Beijing (CCOM) has hosted the Competition twice, spotlighting Chopin’s music on a grand scale and on a regular basis in the People’s Republic of China (PRC). The promotion of Chopin and his music, often handled as an issue of foreign affairs and no mere musical matter, has perpetually been entrusted to party-line organisations based in Beijing, notably the Central Conservatory, the Chinese Musicians Association (CMA) and the People’s Music Publishing House.¹ Needless to say, state-run mass media also have an important role to play in this, as exemplified by the following two cases that involve China Central Television (CCTV) and the *People’s Daily Online*.

Chopin and the Warsaw-based Sino-US ambassadorial talks (1958–1970)

On 21 June 2016, two days after Xi arrived in Warsaw for his state visit to Poland, a clip titled ‘Park Łazienkowski marks China–Poland friendship’ was uploaded to YouTube, in which CCTV’s narrator, who was not ethnically Chinese and spoke in English, reflected on Stanisław August Poniatowski’s ‘passion for Chinese architecture’.²

The man who ruled Poland in the eighteenth century also had a passion for Chinese architecture. And the evidence of this is inside a world-famous park in Poland, the Park Łazienkowski or the Royal Baths Park, which many Chinese people know as the ‘Park of Chopin’, because of the statue of the great composer that’s in it. But what is less known about the park in Warsaw is its ancient connection to China.

1 The CCOM’s hosting of the Beijing International Fryderyk Chopin Piano Competition for Young Pianists offers us one immediate example.

2 Youtube.com. The acronym CNTV, shown on the screen, stands for China Network Television Broadcasting Company.

A 'China Avenue' was built in the eighteenth century as a symbol of the bilateral ties between the two countries back then.³

This kind of image crafting – the same park invoking China for the Poles and Poland-cum-Chopin for the Chinese – was made even more explicit in a Polish journalist's Chinese text published in the *People's Daily Online* two years earlier, in 2014. Peter Kazinovsky writes:⁴

Since the beginning of the new century, growing Chinese investment has injected a new impetus into the development of Poland's economy and society, and also showed the attraction of the Chinese dream for Poles.

In the centre of Warsaw, the capital of Poland, there is a famous royal garden – Łazienki Park [Royal Baths Park]. Interestingly, the Chinese are accustomed to calling it 'Chopin Park' because there is an iconic Chopin statue in the park. Many Warsaw citizens like to call it 'China Park', as there is an ancient 'China Avenue' in the park. This legendary park has witnessed the history of friendly exchanges between the peoples of Poland and China over the past 200 years.⁵

Kazinovsky ventured much further back than the CCTV clip to Benedict of Poland's missionary trip to China in the thirteenth century, before invoking such historical figures as Michał Boym and Witold Urbanowicz, but the message remains essentially the same.

According to historical records, as far back as 1246, before the Italian Marco Polo arrived in China, the Polish [Franciscan] friar Benedykt (Polak) was sent on a mission to China. Four hundred years later, another Pole by the name of Boym, the envoy of Emperor Yongli of the Ming Dynasty, was sent to European countries that maintained good relations with China. During World War II, the Polish hero General Witold Urbanowicz also went to China and fought side by side with Chinese pilots against the Japanese invaders.

What stands out above all in Kazinovsky's text is his account of a 'hazy, uncharted past' that lay concealed in the 'Chopin Park':

In addition, Myślewicki Palace in Warsaw's Chopin Park records a hazy, uncharted past: in the 1950s and 1960s, Chinese and American diplomats held many secret talks here for twelve years, which eventually led to US President Nixon's historic visit to China in [February] 1972.

First kick-started following the Geneva Conference of 1954, the Sino-US ambassadorial talks were held in Geneva from 1955 to 1957 between Wang Bingnan, the PRC ambassador to the Polish People's Republic (PPR),⁶ and U. Alexis Johnson, the US ambassador to what was then Czechoslovakia. When Jacob D. Beam, the US ambassador

3
Ibid.

4
Published on 7 August 2014, the title of this Chinese text is 'Poland welcomes Chinese (International Forum)'. Peter Kazinovsky is editor-in-chief of the *Poland Tribune*. See <https://daydaynews.cc/en/sports/city-of-double-olympics-from-peak-to-peak.html>, accessed 27 July 2022.

5
My translation.

6
Wang Bingnan was the PRC ambassador to Poland from 1955 until April 1964.

to Poland, replaced Johnson to work with Wang Bingnan at the negotiating table in September 1958,⁷ the ambassadorial talks also changed location from Geneva to Warsaw's Royal Baths Park, which, as already noted, houses both a Chopin statue and a China Avenue.

The engagement of the PRC and US ambassadors to Poland and the hosting of the talks at Myślewicki Palace suggest that Poland had actively facilitated the talks. The negotiations held in the 'Chopin Park', which lasted until 1970,⁸ led eventually to the 'ping-pong diplomacy' of 1971 and the passing of United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2758 in October of that year to recognise the PRC as 'the only legitimate representative of China to the United Nations'.

In July of 1971, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger makes a secret trip to China. Shortly thereafter, the United Nations recognizes the People's Republic of China, ending it with the permanent Security Council seat that had been held by Chiang Kai-shek's Republic of China on Taiwan since 1945.⁹

In February 1972 Nixon became the first American president to meet with Mao in the PRC, paving the way for the establishment of formal diplomatic relations between the PRC and the US on 1 January 1979. Might all this have happened without the decade-long hard work of the 'secret talks' held in the 'Chopin Park'?



Figure 1. A plaque in the 'Chopin Park'¹⁰

Today, visitors to Myślewicki Palace in Warsaw can read about this 'hazy, uncharted past' in three languages (Polish, English and Chinese), from a plaque that hangs there:

From 1958 to 1970, Myślewicki Palace in the Royal Łazienki Park was the site of several dozen rounds of talks between the People's Republic of China and the United States of America. The talks were

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In 1964 Wang Guoquan succeeded Wang Bingnan as PRC ambassador to Poland (1964–1970), but Wang Bingnan remained the chief PRC representative in the Sino-US ambassadorial talks.

8

The Sino-US ambassadorial talks ended in 1970 as more direct channels for negotiations between the two countries opened up.

9

The resolution was passed on 25 October 1971, which marks the fatal expulsion of the Republic of China (today better known as Taiwan) from the United Nations. See <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-relations-china>, accessed 27 July 2022.

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A plaque in the 'Chopin Park', Wikipedia, accessed 14 June 2022.

the principal form of dialogue between the two countries during that period and contributed to the building of mutual trust and preserving of peace.¹¹

The text inscribed on the plaque stresses that Myślewicki Palace was the site where the historical talks between the PRC and the US were held, leading eventually to, so it is claimed, ‘the building of mutual trust and preserving of peace’. This certainly goes some way towards explaining why the ‘Chopin Park’ holds symbolic importance for the PRC.

The Chopin monument in Shanghai

That bilateral relations between the PRC and Poland continue to capitalise on the visual images of a park and a statue (or monument) in the twenty-first century can be grasped from a reading of ‘52 Years of the Existence of the Polish–Chinese Friendship Association’, published by Zdzisław Góralczyk, a former Polish ambassador to China.¹² The location, however, has extended beyond Warsaw to embrace Shanghai and Beijing. As in the past, the anniversary celebration of Chopin’s birthday is put to good use, but now it is celebrated more frequently. Both the 197th and 198th anniversaries were turned into grand celebrations through the unveiling of monuments.

The official ceremony of unveiling the [Chopin] monument took place on March 3, 2007, in Sun Yat Sen Park in Shanghai as part of the celebration of the 197th birthday of Fryderyk Chopin. [...] On the initiative of the TPPCh (Polish–Chinese Friendship Association) and the Social Committee for the Construction of the Monument of Fryderyk Chopin, on March 29, 2008, in relation with the 198th anniversary of Fryderyk Chopin’s birthday, a two-meter artistic model of the Shanghai monument of Fryderyk Chopin was unveiled in the Chaoyang District Cultural Centre in Beijing.¹³

Góralczyk, who proudly proclaimed himself ‘an Honorary Citizen of Beijing’ and Chair of both the Polish–Chinese Friendship Association (2000–2015) and the Social Committee for the Construction of the Monument,¹⁴ comments on the lofty importance of ‘the monument of Fryderyk Chopin’ by remarking that it ‘is the first monument of a foreigner erected in the People’s Republic of China by decision of its government’.¹⁵ Góralczyk’s remark is not strictly correct, since a statue of Marx and Engels was erected in 1985 in Shanghai’s Fuxing Park, though the ideologies embodied in the Marx and Engels statue and the Chopin monument may not differ so very much.

11
Ibid.

12
Góralczyk held this post between 1994 and 1999.

13
Zdzisław Góralczyk, ‘52 Years of the Existence of the Polish–Chinese Friendship Association’, *Polish Political Science*, 11 (2011), 349–362. This article documents the history of the TPPCh and that of the Chopin Monument in Shanghai. The Social Committee comprised companies and institutions from Poland and China (including the Embassy of the People’s Republic of China.)

14
Ibid., 357–358.

15
Ibid., 358–359.

PART I

Just as Poland capitalises on the worldwide popularity of Chopin's music to export the composer as a cultural commodity, so the PRC embraces Chopin as patriotism and nationalism personified, a high-profile 'cultural worker' in exile who agonised over the crushing of the November Uprising in Poland in 1831. It was likely Fou Ts'ong (1934–2020) winning third prize (and the mazurka prize) at the Fifth International Chopin Piano Competition in 1955 that triggered the PRC's strategic promotion of Chopin, though this remains a hypothesis awaiting scholarly scrutiny. Unlike Fou, who had benefited from the tutelage of Zbigniew Drzewiecki (1890–1971) at Warsaw's State College of Music (the present-day Fryderyk Chopin University of Music), Li Yundi, the first Chinese pianist to be awarded first prize at the International Chopin Piano Competition, in 2000, was trained by Dan Zhaoyi at the Sichuan Conservatory of Music and subsequently the Shenzhen Art School.¹⁶ Understandably, this success story (an internationally renowned interpreter of Chopin trained on Chinese soil) could not fail to boost the PRC's claim on Chopin.

The special case of Chopin in the PRC is even more striking when we shift our focus from charismatic performance platforms to Chopin's treatment within academic circles. To the best of my knowledge, only two full-length scholarly monographs on Chopin authored by eminent PRC scholars have been published since 1949, and the number of doctoral theses on Chopin is just as meagre.¹⁷ *Chopin's Ballades* (1986) by Qian Renkang (1914–2013) was followed more than two decades later by *Interpretation of Tragic Content in Chopin's Music*¹⁸ (2008) by Yu Runyang (1932–2015), and it is noteworthy that both Qian (Shanghai Conservatory) and Yu (Central Conservatory) were and still are considered musicologists of the highest calibre in the PRC. Aside from monographs and doctoral theses, nowadays there are many journal-length publications on Chopin, the majority of which are devoted to more 'neutral' analytical studies of his music, often referencing European scholars such as Jim Samson and John Rink. There is obviously no lack of interest in Chopin, but at the same time a certain reluctance to venture into territory that extends beyond supposedly ideology-free analysis. This prompts the question of whether (and if so, how) ideologically-determined paradigms may have been lurking behind the very particular development of Chopin scholarship in the PRC, a question that cannot be adequately answered without delving into the lasting impacts in the PRC of Qian, Yu and Zofia Lissa (1908–1980), Yu's mentor at the University of Warsaw in the late 1950s.

16
Chen Sa, who won fourth prize in the same competition, was, like Li, a piano student of Dan Zhaoyi at the Sichuan Conservatory of Music and the Shenzhen Art School.

17
There are several short books and Chinese translations of mainly Soviet monographs on Chopin.

18
This is the monograph's original English title.

Why the decision to send Yu to Warsaw University?

That Yu Runyang had studied musicology under the supervision of Zofia Lissa and Józef Chomiński in Poland seems pivotal to his being groomed into the foremost Chopin scholar in the PRC. According to Wang Cizhao, the government initially funded Yu Runyang to study conducting at Moscow Conservatory, but then a sudden change of plan led to him being sent in 1956 to Warsaw University to study musicology instead.

Mr. Yu Runyang is among the New China's first generation of musicologists. Upon graduation from the Central Conservatory's composition department, Yu was sent on government scholarship to study conducting at the Moscow Conservatory. Due to *the country's need at the time* [my emphasis], however, a change was made to send him to study musicology (a discipline that had yet to be set up in the PRC) with Zofia Lissa and Józef Chomiński in Poland instead.¹⁹ In the early 1960s Yu Runyang returned to teach at the Central Conservatory. He taught mainly Western music history and pioneered the offering of music aesthetics courses in the PRC.²⁰

According to Wang, there was a need to train talents to set up the discipline of musicology in China, but no doubt Yu Runyang could still have been sent to Moscow, if it had just been a matter of abandoning conducting in favour of musicology. Might the change of plan to send Yu to Warsaw rather than Moscow in the autumn of 1956 be in any way related to the evolving bilateral relationships between Poland and China? Yu arrived in Warsaw around the mid-way point between Fou Ts'ong's success at the Chopin Competition in February 1955 and the commencement of the Sino-US ambassadorial talks in the 'Chopin Park' in September 1958, the year when both the China-Poland Friendship Association and the Polish-Chinese Friendship Association were founded.²¹

On May 17, 1958, the founding national convention of the Polish-Chinese Friendship Association (The TPPCh – *Towarzystwo Przyjaźni Polsko-Chińskiej*) was held in Warsaw. The decision to establish the TPPCh on the national level was undoubtedly of a political nature.²²

We may infer from all this that diplomatic activity had been rather hectic on different levels and through multiple channels during these four critical years in the development of Sino-Polish bilateral relations, and that the stationing of Yu in Warsaw to study with Lissa might have been a small part of this. That Lissa was more closely affiliated to the Polish communist authorities than Chomiński also correlates well with the fact that Lissa was promoted in the PRC as a leading musicologist, whereas Chomiński remains much less well known. Even before Yu enrolled at Warsaw

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Although Chomiński's publications on Chopin outweigh Lissa's, Yu mentions Lissa much more often than Chomiński. Yu published an obituary – 'In Memory of the Outstanding Polish Musicologist Zofia Lissa' – in *People's Music* (1982 no. 4), two years after Lissa had passed away. There is, however, no sign of any obituary of Chomiński published in the PRC.

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Wang Cizhao, 'On the publication of Yu Runyang's manuscripts for [his] Western Music History', *People's Music* (2021, no. 4), 90.

21

The China-Poland Friendship Association was established on 30 September 1958. As in the case of the China Friendship Foundation for Peace and Development, the China-Poland Friendship Association operates under the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC), which was founded back in 1954 and has the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as its parent organisation. See Góralczyk 2011, 352–355.

22

Ibid., 350.

University in 1956, Lissa's essay 'Young composers of the Polish People's Republic' had already been translated into Chinese and published in *People's Music* in 1954.²³ Subsequently, many more of her writings were translated into Chinese and published.²⁴ Lissa was also held up as an authority on music aesthetics and Western music more generally until, finally, Carl Dahlhaus's scholarship came to be disseminated in 2006 through Yang Yandi's groundbreaking translation of Dahlhaus's *Musikästhetik* (1967; English translation 1982) and *Grundlagen der Musikgeschichte* (1977; English translation 1983).²⁵

PART II

Here I aim to reveal how and to what extent Chopin was claimed and promoted above other Western classical composers in the PRC, arguably to serve, perhaps first and foremost, ideological ends. I delimit the timeframe to the period from the founding of the PRC in 1949 to c.1979, when the PRC established formal diplomatic relationships with the United States. In what follows, I examine selected papers about Chopin published by *People's Music* and *Music Research*, the state's leading music journals, as well as the People's Music Publishing House, the most prestigious music press in the PRC. Before proceeding any further, some background information about the two journals and the People's Music Publishing House is in order.

Launched in 1950, *People's Music* is the Chinese Musicians Association's flagship journal and the PRC's first and by far the most enduring music journal. In 1958 *Music Research* was launched by the People's Music Publishing House as one its 'four influential periodicals', and since then it has joined *People's Music* as the state's foremost mouthpiece where music is concerned. While *Music Research* is more academically oriented, most of its papers published in the 1950s and 1960s are, like *People's Music*, heavily freighted with political messages. As for the Chinese Musicians Association (modelled on the USSR's Union of Soviet Composers), its cultural and political missions are plainly stated on the official website:

Founded in 1949, China Musicians Association (CMA) is a non-governmental organization of professional musicians from all ethnic groups all over China under the guidance of the CPC [Communist Party of China]. Serving as the bridge and bond between CPC and government as well as music circles, CMA is considered to be a key element in prospering Socialist literary and artistic causes and building up a Socialist cultural power.²⁶

At this point, I need to take a detour to mention Lü Ji (1909–2002) and Zhao Feng (1916–2001), since they were de facto the most

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The translator Shi Dazheng also translated Viacheslav Paskhalov's monograph into Chinese by way of Lissa's Polish translation. He also published a Chinese translation of Zbigniew Drzewiecki's essay in *Yinyue Yiwu*'s special issue on Chopin (1960/1).

24

According to Yu's obituary, Lissa edited an anthology of Chinese folksongs and mass songs and thought highly of Xian Xinghai's *Yellow River Cantata*.

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In 2004, in the *Journal of the Wuhan Conservatory of Music*, Jin Jingyan published a Chinese translation of Dahlhaus's contribution to the entry on 'Melody' in *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (MGG).

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See <http://e.cflac.org.cn/Associations/Music/> and also <http://www.chnmusic.org/>. CMA operates under the auspices of the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles (CFLAC); see <http://e.cflac.org.cn/>.

powerful and influential figures in musical circles, as broadly defined, and this factor needs to be registered in order to make good sense of their contribution (one paper each in *People's Music*) to the PRC's Chopin literature. Lü had presided over the CMA for some five decades, having chaired the CMA from its inception until 1985, and he stayed on as an honorary chair until 2002. Meanwhile, Lü's close associate Zhao Feng was appointed as party secretary to the CCOM in 1958 and remained at the helm of the conservatory for more than 25 years.²⁷ They were both considered formidable musicologists in the PRC.²⁸

Table 1. Lü's and Zhao's only publications on Chopin

Zhao Feng (<i>People's Music</i> , 1960/2)	'Xiaobang – Bolan renmin weida de geshou: Jinian xiaobang dansheng yibaiwushi zhounian' [Chopin – a great bard of the Polish people: commemorating the 150 th anniversary of the birth of Chopin], 5–8, 33
Lü Ji's speech published by Zhang Xian (<i>People's Music</i> , 1980/3)	'Xiaobang danchen yibaiqishi zhounian jinianhui zaijing juxing' [A commemoration of the 170 th anniversary of the birth of Chopin held in Beijing], 35

Lü, though not a Western music scholar, was prominently featured in a paper on Chopin published by Zhang Xian in *People's Music* (1980/3). The main content of Zhang's paper – 'A Commemoration of the 170th Anniversary of the Birth of Chopin Held in Beijing' – is a speech Lü delivered at the celebratory event in February 1980.²⁹ Central to Lü's speech was a biographical account of Chopin, albeit with much emphasis on Chopin's patriotism towards his ill-fated motherland. Lü ended his speech by extending a wish for the strengthening of bilateral relations between the PPR and the PRC. In attendance were personnel from the Polish Embassy and Wang Bingnan, chair of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, and the former Chinese ambassador to Poland (1955–1964), who had played a key role in the Sino-US ambassadorial talks held in the 'Chopin Park'.

Compared with Lü, Zhao was more of a Western music scholar. As shown in Table 2 below, prior to Zhao's publication of a paper to commemorate the 150th anniversary of Chopin's birth, he had already published on Glinka, Rimsky-Korsakov and Handel on the anniversaries of their birth or death. Zhao was seemingly charged with this particular mission.

27
While chairing the CMA, Lü Ji served concurrently as the party secretary to the CCOM when it was newly founded.

28
This position has yet to be challenged.

29
This event was organised by the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, the Chinese Musicians Association and the Polish-Chinese Friendship Association.

Table 2. Zhao Feng's papers on individual Western composers published in *People's Music* from 1954 to 1960

1954/3	'Jinian weida de eluosi zuoqujia gelinka dansheng yibaiwushi zhounian' [Commemorating the 150 th anniversary of the birth of the great Russian composer Glinka], 1-2
1958/7	'Jinian limusiji kesakefu shishi wushi zhounian' [Commemorating the 50 th anniversary of Rimsky-Korsakov's death], 22-23, 38
1959/4	'Jinian deguo weida de zuoqujia qiao fu hengde'er shishi erbai zhounian' [Commemorating the 200 th anniversary of the great German composer George Frideric Handel's death], 1-3
1960/2	'Xiaobang – Bolan renmin weida de geshou: Jinian xiaobang dansheng yibaiwushi zhounian' [Chopin – a great bard of the Polish people: commemorating the 150 th Anniversary of the birth of Chopin], 5-8, 33

Curiously, the timing of Lü's and Zhao's *People's Music* articles on Chopin (1960 and 1980 respectively) overlaps neatly with another pair of papers published in *Music Research*, and they are the only two papers on a Western composer – which happens to be Chopin – published by *Music Research* within the defined timeframe. As shown in Table 3 below, in the early issues of *Music Research* (1958–1960), there is only one paper (1960/2) about a Western composer. Chopin is also the only Western composer spotlighted in the first issue of *Music Research* published after a two-decade suspension.³⁰

Table 3. Articles on Western composers published in *Music Research* from 1958 to 1980

1960/2	Ding Shande, 'Zhongguo renmin weishenme neng jieshou he lijie xiaobang yinyue' [Why Chinese people can accept and understand Chopin's music], 25-29
<i>Music Research</i> suspended for two decades ³¹	
1980/1	Yu Runyang, 'Xiaobang yinyue de minzu neirong: Jinian bolan jiechu yinyuejia xiaobang dansheng yibaiqishi zhounian' [Nationalism in Chopin's Music: commemorating the 170 th anniversary of the birth of the outstanding Polish composer Chopin], 93-120
1980/2	Mao Yukuan, 'Simeitana jiqi buxiu juzuo "wo de zuguo"' [Smetana and his great masterpiece <i>Ma Vlast</i>], 85-99

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Chopin was followed by Smetana in the second issue of *Music Research*, published in 1980. With the exceptions of 1987 and 1996, *Music Research* then published at least a paper or two on Western composers every year.

31
From 1961 to 1979, *Music Research* was suspended along with all other music journals.

Ding Shande's 'Why Chinese People Can Accept and Understand Chopin's Music' and Yu Runyang's 28-page-long 'Nationalism in Chopin's Music – Commemorating the 170th Anniversary of the Birth of the Outstanding Composer Chopin' were evidently meant to carry some weight. While Ding and Yu could not possibly measure up to the elevated political stature of Lü and Zhao, they were key musical figures in their own right. Ding was then vice-president of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music (SCM), and he was invited to serve on the jury of the Sixth International Chopin Piano Competition.³² Yu, a protégé of Lissa, was considered an authority on Chopin's music, and he was promoted to be president of the CCOM by the end of the 1980s.

In his article (*Music Research*, 1960/2), Ding attempted to account for the special liking of Chopin's music in the PRC by drawing analogies between Chopin's music and the Chinese classical poetry and ink painting of, respectively, Li Bai and Qi Baishi, who are of course among the most revered masters of Chinese literature and art. Yu's 28-page article (*Music Research*, 1980/1), which covers Chopin's life and work, is more conventional in approach, though it shares with Ding the same unusually strong emphasis on Chopin's patriotism and nationalistic use of folk elements in his music.³³ Yu's paper also differs from Ding by offering advice on how contemporary PRC composers might benefit from Chopin's music:

The foregoing gives a brief account of the nationalistic content in Chopin's music. What then does Chopin's music reveal to Chinese music workers, who are working on building up our socialist musical culture?³⁴

For Yu's contemporary PRC composers, who were mandated to follow Mao's dictum to negotiate with past traditions and Western modernism in the making of new Chinese music, Yu affirmed the worth of Chopin's music. In Yu's view, Chopin's patriotism and his amalgamation of Polish folk elements and what was then mainstream Western art music are highly relevant.

32

Three SCM pianists were chosen to participate in the competition: the legendary Gu Shengying, who committed suicide during the Cultural Revolution, Li Minqian and Lin Ling. None of them enjoyed the privilege of studying with Drzewiecki in Warsaw prior to the competition.

33

Genre-based discussion of Chopin's music is also characteristic of Solovtsov's monograph on Chopin, which was translated collectively at the CCOM and published in 1960 to celebrate the Chopin Year. Yu's coverage of Chopin in his article of 1980 is expanded in his monograph of 2008, published by the Shanghai Conservatory of Music Press (<http://www.shcmpress.com/>).

34

Yu 1980, 118.



Figure 2. *Music Research* (1960/1) and *People's Music* (1960/2)

In contrast to *Music Research*, which emphasised Chinese traditional music and folk music of different ethnicities in the PRC, *People's Music* published more papers on Western composers of art music.³⁵ *People's Music* first published a paper on Chopin in February 1955, a critical year which saw a decisive change in Chopin reception in the PRC (Appendix 1). The paper is a Chinese translation of Drzewiecki's views on performance issues that pertain to Chopin's music. The next few issues of *People's Music* then published papers that report and reflect on Fou Ts'ong's success at the Fifth International Chopin Piano Competition. These include Ma Sicong's paper (1955/5). Ma, then in the early stages of his presidency of the CCOM, mentioned Drzewiecki's training of Fou in Warsaw prior to the International Chopin Piano Competition, adding that Drzewiecki was in charge of the competition that year. As a side note, Drzewiecki is very well known in the PRC, since Fou Lei 'corresponded with both Fou Ts'ong and his son's teacher Drzewiecki over the years, and the letters were published as a book – *Home Letters by Fou Lei* – that is widely read in the PRC. All in all, the sudden surge of papers on Chopin, or rather Fou Ts'ong, ends with foreign reviews of Fou's piano performances published in the November issue of *People's Music* in 1956.

It was not until 1960 that papers on Chopin reappeared in *People's Music*. In the interim years, anniversary commemorations of other Western composers filled its pages: Glinka (with Beethoven in the margins) in 1957; Debussy, Rimsky-Korsakov, Janáček and Puccini in 1958; Handel and Musorgsky in 1959. Anniversary commemorations seem to have served well as a pretext to publish on Western composers. The earliest examples in *People's Music* are J. S. Bach in 1953 and Glinka and Dvořák in 1954. Meanwhile, Fou – made a national hero after his success at the 1955 Chopin Competition – had defected to London in December 1958, the year Mao launched the Great Leap Forward (1958–1960) after completing the Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1957. Understandably, Fou's defection was not reported in the PRC, and the strategic promotion of Chopin was advanced as planned in 1960 on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of his birth.

Poland had made 1960 the 'Year of Chopin', and *People's Music* published four papers on or related to the composer, including Hong Shiji's review of the Polish pianist Jan Berezynski's Chopin recital held in Beijing (1960/4). Chopin's 'arrival' in China was, according to Hong, accompanied by an 'artillery carriage of the imperialistic cultural invasion', and this had caused the spirit of Chopin to be misunderstood as feeble, mournful and sentimental. Hong then praised Berezynski and his fellow Communist bloc pianists for having helped to rectify the bourgeois-distorted understanding of Chopin and his music.

Zhao Feng's paper (1960/2), which preceded Hong's by two months, is a more substantial piece of writing on Chopin.³⁶ It is significant that Zhao was the first PRC musicologist to publish

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The inaugural issue of *People's Music*, published in 1950, contains an interview with Ferenc Szabó, 'Hungary's revolutionary composer'. This is followed by an obituary on the record-breaking Stalin Prize winner Nikolai Myaskovskiy (1950/2), and a paper on 'Shostakovich's Speech on World Peace' (1950/3).

36

Zhao Feng's paper adds up to five pages, which would have been considered long by the journal's standard at the time. *People's Music* also published an announcement of Li Minqian's fourth prize at the Sixth International Chopin Piano Competition and of the activities the CCOM planned to celebrate the Chopin Year of 1960. In the same year *Music Research* published for the first time a paper on a Western composer, i.e., Ding Shande's paper on the reception of Chopin's music in the PRC.

a scholarly Chinese text on Chopin in a leading journal. There is evidence that he had laid the groundwork and influenced the future course of the Chopin narrative in the PRC. Chopin's patriotism and democracy (inherited from earlier Soviet sources) are notions that loom large in Zhao's paper:

Chopin's patriotism against foreign oppression and his anti-feudal democratic ideas may be understood as a red thread that runs through his thoughts and music throughout his life.³⁷

As in Ding's article published that same year in *Music Research*, Zhao also addressed the question of 'Why Chinese People Can Accept and Understand Chopin's Music' with some rigour. Yet Li Bai and Qi Baishi find no place in Zhao's answer to this question. Rather, he ascribed the Polish people's and the Chinese people's enthusiasm for Chopin's music to their shared experience of 'patriotism against foreign oppression' and their 'anti-feudal democratic ideas':

Some of Chopin's outstanding works are praised by a vast number of music lovers in our country. The fundamental reason is that China had, in the past, similar experiences to Poland in the nineteenth century, and our people naturally felt a strong affinity for the patriotism against foreign oppression and the anti-feudal democratic ideas expressed in Polish literature and art.³⁸

Zhao also linked Lu Xun, the PRC's foremost Communist literary figure, via the Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz, to Chopin. Significantly, Mickiewicz recurs, without exception, in all party-line publications on Chopin. These include Yu's article (*Music Research*, 1980), Liao Naicong's booklet on Chopin (People's Music Publishing House, 1981), Qian Renkang's monograph *Chopin's Ballades* (1986), and Yu's only monograph on Chopin published in the new millennium (Shanghai Conservatory of Music Press, 2008).

The closing remarks of Zhao's paper give us a good sense of the language he used, as he was perhaps at his most rhetorical here:

We commemorate Chopin not just because we see in him a great 'national bard' of Poland, but also because we see in Chopin's hand the heroic weapon entrusted to him by the Polish people. May the heroic weapon be an everlasting symbol of the brotherhood between the Chinese and the Polish people, who fight to defend peace.³⁹

³⁷
Zhao 1960, 6.

³⁸
Ibid., 8.

³⁹
Ibid., 33; end of article.

Zhao conjures up the image of a towering Chopin, and we can almost hear him chanting aloud while fixing his gaze on the 'great "national bard" of Poland' and 'the heroic weapon entrusted to him by the Polish people'. In 1960, just two years after the Sino-US ambassadorial talks switched to the 'Chopin Park' (1958–1970), the prospects for the talks were still far from optimistic. With

the benefit of hindsight, however, there is no denying that ‘the brotherhood between the Chinese and the Polish people’ had empowered the PRC to win not just some prizes at the Chopin Competition, but ultimately a seat on the Security Council at the United Nations in 1971.

Translations of books on Chopin published by the People’s Music Publishing Press

As mentioned already, *People’s Music* had published its *first* article on Chopin (a Chinese translation of Drzewiecki’s Polish paper) in February 1955. The timing, just one month before Fou won prizes at the Fifth International Chopin Piano Competition that March, seems intriguing. By November of the same year, the People’s Music Publishing Press followed suit and published its first monograph on Chopin, a translation of the authoritative Soviet musicologist Yuli Kremlev’s book *Friderik Shopen: ocherk zhizni i tvorchestva*.⁴⁰ The significance of this pairing of *first* article and monograph becomes more apparent when we take into account the fact that *People’s Music* is the Chinese Musicians Association’s flagship journal, and that the People’s Music Publishing Press is ‘the only national-level music publishing house in China’.⁴¹ In the next five years or so, the People’s Music Publishing House, perhaps trying to ride on the popularity of Chopin’s music brought about by Fou’s success at the 1955 Chopin Competition, published more books on Chopin. They included a translation of Anatoli Solovtsov’s *Shopen: Zhizn’ i tvorchestvo* in February 1960⁴² (roughly a month before Li Minqian won fourth prize at the Sixth International Chopin Piano Competition) and translations of Iwazskiewicz’s *Chopin* in 1961 and Liszt’s *Chopin* in 1965.⁴³

Judging from the sheer number of books the People’s Music Publishing House issued on the life and oeuvre (not just selected works) of a Western composer in the 1950s and 1960s, Chopin was indeed prioritised above all other composers.⁴⁴ Some policy or at least strategic planning might have been lurking behind the scenes, and the Soviet tactic of promoting Chopin as both a genius and a patriot, with a view to cultivating nationalistic sentiments, might have been a factor. Both Kremlev’s and Solovtsov’s books on Chopin were originally published in 1949, when the USSR launched a grand commemoration of the centenary of Chopin’s death. A comparison of the abstracts that appear at the beginning of the Chinese translation of these two Soviet books is revealing. Kremlev’s monograph has an abstract that states explicitly the Marxist orientation of the book:

This is a large-scale and conclusive research work on Chopin from the perspective of Marxism. It rectifies the distorted bourgeois understanding of Chopin and unveils the true face of Chopin’s patriotism and democracy.

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Yuli Kremlev, *Friderik Shopen: ocherk zhizni i tvorchestva* (Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe Muzykal’noe Izdatel’stvo, 1949). The other two books are translated texts on Tchaikovsky and Musorgsky.

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See <https://www.pml.org.uk/members/peoples-music-publishing-house/>, accessed on 27 July 2022.

42
Anatoli Solovtsov, *Shopen: Zhizn’ i tvorchestvo* (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1949). An abridged version was published in 1956.

43
The latter was the last book on Chopin published by the People’s Music Publishing House before the ‘ten years of turmoil’ following Mao’s launching of the Cultural Revolution in 1966.

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There are three monographs with this kind of coverage for Chopin (Kremlev, Solovtsov and Iwazskiewicz), two each for Tchaikovsky and Rimsky-Korsakov, and only one for other canonical composers such as Handel, Beethoven and Mozart.

The abstract in the Chinese translation of Solovtsov's book is relatively subtle. The only trace that hints at a Marxist ideology is a remark on how Solovtsov reveals to us the profoundly patriotic and democratic thinking in Chopin's music. These are of course the key notions in the abstract of Kremlev's book and also in Zhao's influential Chinese text published in 1960 in *People's Music*.

Chinese books on Chopin published by the People's Music Publishing Press

Although it is evident that the lofty importance attached to Chopin in the PRC warranted the publication of monographs by esteemed Chinese musicologists, it was seriously delayed.⁴⁵ The People's Music Publishing House did not publish any Chinese book on Chopin until 1981, more than two decades after the translation of Kremlev's and Solovtsov's Chopin monographs had appeared. The first to be published was Liao Naixiong's⁴⁶ *Cannons Buried in Flowers: A Brief Introduction to the Music of Chopin, Poland's Patriotic Composer*, a very short book (only 41 pages) that can hardly be compared to the two weighty Soviet volumes. Both Liao's use of number notation (instead of staff notation) and the vast number of copies printed (30,430 copies) suggest that the book targeted general music lovers rather than music specialists.

In 1986, half a decade after Liao's *Cannons Buried in Flowers*, a full-length monograph on Chopin written in Chinese – Qian Renkang's *Chopin's Ballades* – was finally published by the People's Music Publishing House. According to the preface by Li Minqian (a prize winner at the Chopin Competition of 1960), Qian had completed the monograph in 1964, but the Cultural Revolution, a term Li avoided by referring to 'ten years of turmoil', disrupted the publication plans.

This book was originally written [by Qian] in 1964. During the ten years of turmoil, it is unfortunate that Mr Qian lost most of his manuscripts. Yet this book was spared and preserved, and now, having been revised by Mr Qian, is finally made available to us. Evidently, in the wake of the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee, our country's music industry is being led by the Party's correct line to blossom.⁴⁷

Qian is among the most eminent musicologists of his time, and he is certainly versatile, having published extensively on Chinese traditional music and Western classical music. Although he did not claim to be a Chopin scholar, and is not regarded as such, his *Chopin's Ballades* (1986) turned out to be not just the first, but also, until now, the only full-length Chinese monograph on Chopin published by the People's Music Publishing House.⁴⁸ On the face

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In order to discuss Chinese books (untranslated) on Chopin's life and oeuvre published by the People's Music Publishing Press, I need to go beyond the defined timeframe of 1950–1980, since even the earliest of them postdates 1980.

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Liao Naixiong is the son of the famed PRC aesthetician Qing Zhu. See Wai Ling Cheong, Ding Hong and Yi Ching Tam, 'From Berlin to Wuhan: Twelve-tone Composition and the Pedagogical Legacies of Kohoutek, Křenek, and Smith Brindle in China', *Acta Musicologica*, 94/1 (2022), 48–67.

47

Li Minqian's foreword to Qian's monograph is dated 29 February 1984.

48

Qian was likewise not a Tchaikovsky scholar, but the People's Music Publishing House published his Tchaikovsky monograph all the same.

of it, the publisher has issued two further Chinese monographs on Chopin: Liao's *Chopin: Poet of the Piano* in 1998 and Qian's *Chopin's Ballades Decoded* in 2006. Upon examination, however, Liao 1998 is exactly the same as Liao 1981 except for a change of book title from *Cannons Buried in Flowers* to *Chopin: Poet of the Piano*. Similarly, Qian 2006 is the same as Qian 1986 (the change of title is not mentioned in either case). It seems that the People's Music Publishing House was under some pressure to publish more Chinese monographs on Chopin, perhaps because the grand celebrations of the bicentenary of the composer's birth in 2010 were fast approaching. In any case, the official unveiling of the Chopin monuments in Shanghai and Beijing had already taken place in 2007 and 2008, respectively.

Yu's 2008 monograph – Chopin and the Opium War

The same context might have been a factor in Yu's finally completing a monograph on Chopin in 2008, close to three decades after he published an article in *Music Research* to commemorate the 170th anniversary of Chopin's birth. While Yu was in a better position than Qian to contribute to Chopin scholarship, having studied with Lissa and Chomiński in Poland in the 1950s, he seems to have shown little interest in writing up a book. His 2008 monograph resulted from the compilation of lecture notes, after he was invited to deliver a series of lectures on Chopin at Shanghai Conservatory's 'Qian Renkang Academic Forum'.⁴⁹ Yu's use of some original Polish sources, though, compares favourably with Qian's reliance on predominantly English sources (see Appendix 2).⁵⁰

Yet they both adhered to the Soviet narrative on Chopin as delineated in Kremlev's and Solovtsov's monographs on Chopin, and we can trace the critical position established by Yu in his monograph of 2008 all the way back to the first Chinese article on Chopin published in the PRC, which was by Zhao, the then party secretary to the CCOM. The prime importance of patriotism and democracy in Chopin's thinking and music is affirmed, and they both read into Chopin's compositional use of folk elements a manifestation of his nationalism in musical terms. What Zhao delineated in his 1960 article is also restated at the end of Yu's monograph. The Chinese, like the Poles, had repeatedly endured oppression from foreign forces. That the Chinese people applaud and understand well the music of Chopin might have owed something to the fact that the people of these two countries share the experience of suffering military aggression and geo-political atrocities. By the time Yu's monograph appeared in 2008, this motto-like argument had already been used multiple times. Perhaps this explains why Yu added something new by pinpointing the Opium War as exemplifying foreign oppression, noting that it was also in the 1840s that Chopin was composing his late music.⁵¹

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The Forum was organised by two leading SCM scholars, Yang Yandi and Han Zhongyin, and a former student of Yu at the CCOM.

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Rather unexpectedly, of the three sources cited in Appendix 2, Qian cited Perry 1902 most extensively.

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Yu probably had in mind the first Opium War, which was fought between China and Great Britain from 1839 to 1842. The second Opium War did not break out until 1856. Yu invoked the Opium War again in a keynote speech he delivered in 2009 at a conference organised in honour of his 2008 monograph. It was Han Zhongyin, professor of music aesthetics at Shanghai Conservatory and a former student of Yu at the CCOM, who initiated and organised this conference, an occasion for graduate students from the CCOM and the SCM to interact through the presentation of their Chopin research. Most of the papers were published in the journals of the CCOM and the SCM in 2010 to mark the bicentenary of Chopin's birth. Han also compiled the papers into a book published in 2013.

Toward the end of his career, Yu planned to publish a second monograph on Chopin, but it was eventually left unfinished.⁵² The idea of contributing to a rich corpus of Chopin scholarship might have posed too much of a challenge for Yu, having been established as the Chopin scholar par excellence in the PRC. In contrast, the training of pianists to excel at the International Chopin Piano Competition, being relatively free from ideological burdens, has proven to be of higher propaganda value and, importantly, a more achievable goal.

Appendix 1. Articles on Chopin published in *People's Music* from 1950 to 1980

1955/2	Zbigniew Drzewiecki, 'Lun xiaobang zuopin de yanzou' [On the performance of Chopin's works], 16-17
1955/4	Anonymous, 'Diwujie guoji xiaobang gangqin bisaihui jiegou jiexiao' [The results of the 5th International Chopin Piano Competition announced], 29 Qiu Zhen, 'Cong fucong huojiang tanqi' [On Fou Ts'ong's prize-winning at the Chopin Competition and beyond], 29
1955/5	Ma Sicong, 'Guanyu fucong dejiang' [On Fou Ts'ong's prize-winning], 19
1956/11	Anonymous, 'Guowai baokan dui fucong yanzou de pingshu' [Reviews of Fou Ts'ong's performances in the foreign press], 30 D. Pulafushe, 'Yige liaobuqi de gangqinjia' [An amazing pianist], 30
1960/1	Yu Renjia, 'Woguo yinyuejia canjia bolan xiaobangnian huodong' [Our country's musicians united for Chopin Year activities], 26
1960/2	Zhao Feng, 'Xiaobang – Bolan renmin weida de geshou: Jinian xiaobang dansheng yibaiwushi zhounian' [Chopin – a great bard of the Polish people: commemorating the 150 th anniversary of the birth of Chopin], 5-8, 33
1960/3	Anonymous, 'Guoji xiaobang gangqin bisai jieshu: Woguo gangqinjia Li Mingqiang huo disiming' [The International Chopin Piano Competition: our pianist Li Mingqiang won fourth prize], 38-39 ⁵³
1960/4	Hong Shiji, 'Ping bolan gangqinjia yang beilairensiji de xiaobang zuopin duzouhui' [A review of the Polish pianist Jan Berezynski's Chopin recital in Beijing], 19
<i>People's Music</i> suspended (1967-1975)	
1980/3	Zhang Xian, 'Xiaobang danchen yibaiqishi zhounian jinianhui zaijing juxing' (A Commemoration of the 170 th Anniversary of the Birth of Chopin Held in Beijing), 35

52
Some of Yu's manuscripts for the unfinished project were published posthumously by his former student Wang Cizhao.

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The China-Poland Friendship Association (a propaganda machine) is touched on in this paper. This Association was already active by then. It arranged for the three pianists participating in the Chopin Competition that year (Li Mingqiang, Gu Shenyang and Lin Ling) to perform in different cities for two weeks. Ding Shande was also invited to different places.

Appendix 2. The most cited sources (all in English) in *Chopin's Ballades* by Qian (1986)

Karasowski, Moritz. *Frederic Chopin: His Life, Letters, and Works*, tr. Emily Hill (London: W. Reeves, 1879).

Niecks, Frederick. *Frederick Chopin, as a Man and Musician* (London: Novello, Ewer & Co., 1888).

Perry, Edward Baxter. *Descriptive Analyses of Piano Works, for the Use of Teachers, Players, and Music Clubs* (Philadelphia: T. Presser, 1902).

ABSTRACT

Just as Poland capitalises on the worldwide popularity of Chopin's music to export him as a cultural commodity, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has embraced Chopin as patriotism personified, a high-profile 'cultural worker' in exile who agonised over the crushing of the November Uprising in Poland in 1831. It was likely Fou Ts'ong winning third prize at the Fifth International Chopin Piano Competition in 1955 that triggered the PRC's strategic promotion of Chopin. Unlike Fou, who had benefitted from the tutelage of Zbigniew Drzewiecki at Warsaw's State College of Music (the present-day Fryderyk Chopin University of Music), Li Yundi, the first Chinese pianist to be awarded first prize at the International Chopin Piano Competition, in 2000, was trained at Shenzhen Art School. Understandably, this success story could not fail to boost the PRC's claim on Chopin. The special case of Chopin in the PRC is even more striking when we shift our focus from charismatic performance platforms to Chopin's treatment within academic circles. Through a critique of selected papers about Chopin published by *People's Music* and *Music Research*, the PRC's leading music journals, this study reveals how and to what extent Chopin was claimed and promoted above other Western classical composers, arguably to serve, first and foremost, ideological ends. With the onset of the decade-long Sino-US ambassadorial talks in 1958, held in Warsaw's 'Chopin Park', as one main focus, the timeframe of this study is delimited to cover the period from the founding of the PRC in 1949 to c.1979, when the PRC established formal diplomatic relationships with the United States.

KEYWORDS

Reception, patriotism, Sino-US ambassadorial talks

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