Beethoven’s Shifting Reception in China, 1910s–1970s

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March 2016

This project was submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Graduate Liberal Studies Program in the Graduate School of Duke University.
Abstract

Since the late 1970s, Beethoven has remained the best-known Western composer in China. His music has been written into China’s music textbooks and is frequently played by orchestras all around the country. However, this popularity among the Chinese was not always the case. This project explores how and why Beethoven’s music experienced ups and downs in popularity in China from the 1910s to the 1970s. Specifically, I examine how the Chinese people’s attitudes toward and interpretations of Beethoven’s music underwent several dramatic shifts between the 1910s, when his music was first introduced to China, and the late 1970s, when the Chinese ultimately came to admire his music in a way similar to Western audiences. The Chinese people’s shifting attitudes toward Beethoven throughout the twentieth century serve as a cultural index in two respects: by indicating China’s relationship to the West, especially to Western art; and by indicating the cultural effects of China’s own political exigencies.

This paper draws on both primary and secondary sources to examine the causes of the shifting perception. The primary sources, which will be used to reconstruct the stages of Beethoven’s reception in China and the distinct historical context of each period, include Chinese newspapers and magazine articles, Chinese government documents, and the biographies and essays of Chinese authors. Secondary sources, which will be used to frame the analysis of the primary materials, will include scholarly works from the fields of ethnomusicology, cultural history, China Studies, aesthetics, and Beethoven studies.
One possible explanation for the dramatic fluctuations in the reception of Beethoven’s music in China may be that the Chinese people mainly treated music as a tool, valuing it only for its usefulness at any given time. The Chinese people’s overvaluation of music’s utility—of its capacity to meet the nation’s core needs at any given time—may explain why, from the 1910s to the 1970s, the popularity of Beethoven’s music in China experienced such ups and downs.
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Introduction

As the saying goes, “In one thousand readers’ minds, there are one thousand hamlets.”

As with reading books, so too with listening to the music of Beethoven. In various historical periods and regions of the world, different audiences have held distinct interpretations of Beethoven’s music. These differences of perception can be attributed to people’s varying experiences, needs, and social and cultural backgrounds. Listeners’ aesthetic knowledge and ideas originate from their own social experience, and their social experience is limited to and formed by their education, social status, and historical context. Since the earliest performances of Beethoven's music in the late eighteenth century, people around the world have interpreted his music from many different angles, listening through the filter of their own feelings and experiences. Still, to an extent, both Easterners and Westerners across historical periods have shared similar experiences of Beethoven's music. Unlike the harmonious music of Mozart, the overall style of Beethoven’s music is perceived to be stirring and not depressing, impulsive and not contained, and bold and vigorous rather than gentle and calm.

In many Chinese hearts today, Beethoven’s music represents strength and persistence. The Chinese believe that his personality, which is well reflected in his works and the stories of his life, deserves the respect of all. Beethoven is viewed as the “God of Music” in China, a noble representative of human civilization and progress. Schools at all levels and in every region use textbooks that cite his music as representing one of the crowning achievements of classical music. Of all the performances by foreign orchestras in China, Beethoven’s music is played the
most. The Chinese admire his respectful attitude toward the idea of the Napoleonic hero, expressed in his *Eroica Symphony*; his spirit of fighting against hardship, expressed in his Fifth Symphony; his affirmation of freedom and equality, expressed in the *Ode to Joy* finale of the Ninth Symphony; his resilience in the face of unpredictable obstacles, expressed in his *Emperor* Piano Concerto; and his power to create a grand-scale narrative, as evidenced in his *Appassionato* Piano Sonata.

Chinese audiences have long acknowledged these features of Beethoven’s music, and yet, throughout the twentieth century, the music has experienced ups and downs in popularity among the Chinese. Beethoven’s music was first introduced to the Chinese, and first enjoyed their appreciation, in the New Cultural Movement of the mid-1910s and the 1920s. Then, the music experienced a period of neglect during the wartime of the 1930s and 1940s. Next, it regained a short-lived appreciation during the 1950s, before being subject to disapproval during the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s. The cause of these dramatic fluctuations in the reception of Beethoven’s music may be that the Chinese people have long subordinated the aesthetic functions of music to the utilitarian, treating music as a tool that is valuable only for its usefulness at any given time.

Of music’s two major functions, the aesthetic and the utilitarian, the aesthetic is generally considered the more essential and irreplaceable of the two. If one follows this logic in appreciating music, the audience’s aesthetic needs should be privileged above their practical needs. Yet in China, beginning in ancient times, social norms dictated that practical needs should be emphasized over aesthetic ones. For centuries, this fact profoundly affected music

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appreciation in China. As China’s core needs changed from one historical period to another, so too did the demands that China made of its music change. The Chinese people’s overvaluation of music’s utility may explain why, from the 1910s to the 1970s, the popularity of Beethoven’s music in China experienced such fluctuations.
Chapter One: Beethoven’s Reception During the New Culture Movement

In the mid and late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, China experienced a series of failures: it lost the First and Second Opium Wars in 1842 and 1860 respectively, then lost the First Sino-Japanese War in 1895, and finally suffered the collapse of the Chinese Republic that had been founded in 1912. These failures reduced China from its self-described status as the “most civilized nation under heaven” to one that was racked by external and internal crises. These crises stimulated the Chinese desire for revitalization, and the people began to pursue political independence as well as economic and cultural prosperity. The core need of the Chinese during this period was to rid themselves of the vestiges of their semi-colonial and semi-feudal past, to be restored to the great nation they knew themselves to be.

Learning Advanced Western Culture through Beethoven

During the New Culture Movement in the 1910s to the 1920s, Darwin’s The Origin of Species (1859) and Rousseau’s Social Contract (1762) were introduced to China. The Chinese believed that the two books together represented “the symbol of modern Western science.” Darwin’s and Rousseau’s theories had enormous impact on Chinese intellectuals at that time, and gradually became mainstream beliefs. The concept of natural selection in Theory of Evolution laid the theoretical foundation for the work of Chinese intellectuals who wanted to rescue China from backwardness and to foster its evolution into an advanced Westernized culture. The "theory of natural rights" articulated by Rousseau in his Social Contract fulfilled China’s need to oppose feudal aristocracy and establish a more equal society.

Some top intellectuals at the time believed that the most effective method to revitalize the country was to disrupt the blind worship of traditional Chinese culture and to learn instead from advanced Western thought. Although the scholars who advocated this view had themselves classical Chinese educations, they launched a revolt against Confucianism and what they perceived to be outdated aspects of Chinese culture, and called instead for the creation of a new Chinese culture based on Western values, cultures, technologies, and political and economic systems. Drawing upon their own imagined visions of the West, these Chinese intellectuals set out to save poor, weak China from itself and ultimately to realize China’s renaissance. It was in this context that, in the 1910s and 1920s, China’s New Culture Movement was launched by top intellectuals, such as Yan Fu and Kang You-Wei. Most of the intellectuals at the center of the New Culture Movement had studied or worked overseas, where they learned Western cultures and technologies. Europe was their first choice for such educational travels, although many of them went to Japan. The latter country had already been Westernized to a large extent, so the Chinese intellectuals were able to learn advanced Western culture and technologies there without taking on the expense of European travel. Moreover, after China’s loss in the First Sino-Japanese War, Chinese intellectuals realized the extent of Japan’s great military, economic, and political power, and grew eager to know how Japan had evolved within only a couples of decades from being a nation that Westerners bullied (as China still was), to being a nation with such advanced culture and technologies that it could bully China.

During the New Culture Movement, the Chinese people’s need for revitalization led them to prefer grand, powerful music. According to Cai Zhong-De, the Chinese had traditionally
valued gentle, peaceful musical styles. But now, according to Zhang Jing-Wei, top intellectuals wanted to use forceful, passionate music to arouse the Chinese from their demoralization, inject new blood into the backward Chinese culture, and stimulate the Chinese people’s desire to fight for their nation and for a new life. As the Chinese continued to privilege music’s utility in this period of intense social reform, the Chinese tended to overvalue the utility of music to an even larger extent, particularly its power to unify and energize them as citizens. By the same token, the Chinese also undervalued music’s aesthetic qualities, its power to inspire and delight. For example, in the preface of Little Music Magazine (1906), Li Shu-Tong states that the preeminent function of music is its usefulness. In one article of the magazine, “The Biography of Beethoven: God of Music,” Li praises Beethoven’s music, and lauds the man himself for his diligence and the spirit in which he pursued truth. Li Shu-Tong argues that the Chinese should emulate these traits.

*Introducing Beethoven Through Publications*

At that time, in the New Culture period of the early twentieth century, many Chinese regarded learning about Western culture and arts as a sort of sacred mission that would save China. It is thus not surprising that, during this time, the assertive and very Western music of Beethoven captured the Chinese imagination. The Chinese were first introduced to Beethoven’s music in the early twentieth century through the work of the famous artist and educator Li Shu-

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6 Ibid, 16.
Tong (1880–1942). Li, one of the leading figures in the New Culture Movement, began his study at the Tokyo School of Music in 1905 (now Tokyo University of the Arts), where he learned oil painting and Western music. In 1906, he founded a magazine called *Little Music Magazine*, which was printed in Japan and distributed in Shanghai. It was in this magazine that he first introduced Beethoven’s music to the Chinese. In Li’s translated book *The Biography of Beethoven: God of Music* (1906), he not only introduced Beethoven’s life story and works to the Chinese for the first time, but also presented Beethoven as a unique personality and distinctive genius.

In addition to Li Shu-Tong, another top intellectual during the movement was Lu Xun. Both put into practice the idea of “utilizing culture to save China.” In 1907, Lu Xun (1881–1936), China’s literary mogul, was studying in Japan. He published an article titled “The History of Science” in *He-Nan* magazine. The purpose of the article was to propagate the idea of "saving the country through science." At the end of the article, he argued that scientific development ought to bring about advances in the technology, literature, and art of a nation. He believed that the Chinese needed to know not only great Western scientists, but also great Western master of literature, art, and music, such as “Shakespeare, Raphael, Carlyle and Beethoven.”

Lu, like Li, also got to know Beethoven in Japan, where he studied Western medicine. Lu described Beethoven as “one of the most influential figures in Western culture, the equal of...
Kant and Shakespeare,” and argued that Beethoven should have a prominent role to play in China’s New Culture Movement.\footnote{Ibid.}

Another famous figure in the New Culture Movement was Feng Zi-Kai (1989–1975), a famous Chinese music educator, painter, writer and translator, who described Beethoven in terms that likened him to the Chinese people themselves. According to Feng, “Deafness is a great sadness in Beethoven’s career. His music is a reflection of his life. He could find the light in the darkness. His music could help him to express his sadness and escape out of his sadness.”\footnote{Feng, Zi-Kai. "The Stories of Ten Western Musicians in Modern World." In The Collection of Zikai Feng’s Works, by Chenbao Feng. Hangzhou: Zhe Jiang Cultural and Educational Press, 1990, 89.} Feng’s comment implies that the Chinese should set up Beethoven as an exemplar of courage and persistence. Just as Beethoven had kept up hope despite his disability, so too could the Chinese, living in a disabled semi-colonial and semi-feudal nation, seek the light and struggle to escape their cultural sadness.

In 1927, Bei-Xin Publishing house published a Chinese version of The Biography of Beethoven, which was translated from Romain Rolland’s Life of Beethoven (Vie de Beethoven) by Yang Hui. In 1931, Camel Press published another Chinese-language translation of Rolland’s Life of Beethoven by Fu Lei (1908–1966), one of China’s most famous translators, literary critics, and art connoisseurs. He had studied during his youth in France, where he systemically learned Western music theory. After Fu finished reading Romain Rolland’s original version on March 3, 1934, he wrote in a letter to Rolland, "I read your Life of Beethoven by accident, but I couldn't help crying after reading it. I felt lit up by a divine candle, received new force of life, and
cheered up miraculously. This is a real spiritual life event." By bringing such an emotional response into his translation of Rolland’s work, Fu’s translation triggered a furor over Beethoven in China.

Fu Lei’s writings on Beethoven spoke to these Chinese in the midst of their unyielding fight against hardship and suffering; his words offered a new psychic power for them and enthralled them with a sense of heroism. Among all the translated versions, Fu Lei’s version used the most resplendent poetic Chinese words and was remarkable for its focus on depicting Beethoven’s heroic character rather than historical details. In the proceeding years, even as other Beethoven biographies were translated and published in China, and more and more Chinese became aware of the great musician Beethoven, Fu Lei’s version remained the most influential. It was widely published and republished, and has become the version translated across decades.

In his “Preface” to the book, Fu Lei offers a striking illustration of Beethoven’s spirit that would inspire and motivate many young Chinese intellectuals:

Only by fighting through real hardship can we overcome our imagined romantic hardship; only by seeing the heroic trauma when conquering the hardship can we undertake our cruel fate; only by embracing the spirit of ‘If I am not entering hell, who will?’ can we save our selfish and dispirited nation. ... The person who can heal our youth’s social disease in this century is Beethoven; the person who can inspire my fighting spirit is Beethoven; the person who is the most influential on my mental growth is Beethoven, the person who supports and comforts my suffering heart is Beethoven—not to mention that he introduces me into the world of music. Passing his gift to the younger generation by writing this book is the best method to express my appreciation to Beethoven.

Another sentence in the “Preface” became widely popular from the moment of its appearance:

“Open the window! Let the fresh air get inside!” A saying by Fu Lei caught on among the intellectuals: “The nation that does not know Beethoven is a sad nation.” In his book, Lei describes China as a selfish, dispirited nation, and expresses unreserved admiration for Beethoven’s strong personality. Fu’s depiction of Beethoven as restive and rebellious resonated among the intellectuals of that period. His writing reflected the Chinese intellectuals’ anxiety to reform China and raise it from poverty to prosperity. Beethoven was the model in their hearts, the one who encouraged them to fight for their goals.

Besides Romain Rolland’s *Life of Beethoven*, many other academic books on Beethoven were published in the West. For example, *Thayer’s Life of Beethoven*, which was begun in 1866 and took more than a half-century to finish, was published in 1917. It was revised and expanded by H. Deiters and Hugo Riemann into the first monumental book that analyzed Beethoven’s life based on reliable historical information. In 1840, Anton Felix Schindler, an associate, secretary, and early biographer of Beethoven, published *Biographie von Ludwig van Beethoven*. In 1925, P. Bekker published *Beethoven*, and in 1937, W. Engelsmann published *Beethoven and the Creative Law in Symphonic Art*. However, because none of these works was translated into Chinese, they did not effectively influence Chinese research into the field of Western music history and were not shared with the general public, and subsequently did not have an impact on the Chinese reception of Beethoven in the twentieth century. Starting in the 1930s, the Chinese began focusing on anti-Japanese music, and "the theme of survival" overshadowed the theme of “enlightenment.”

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16 Ibid.
For the top intellectuals in China who advocated Beethoven’s music, the fundamental function of music was to meet the core need of China at that time: to awaken the people’s hopes and stir them to save their nation. That the moment of Beethoven’s introduction to China overlapped with the New Culture Movement should not be viewed as a coincidence. Rather, the reemergence of Beethoven was an all but inevitable choice of the Chinese based on their longstanding proclivities and on the nation’s condition at the time.

*Practicing and Performing Beethoven’s Music*

During the New Culture Movement, Beethoven and his music received appreciative reception in China, particularly in metropolises, such as Beijing and Shanghai. In these large cities, musical institutions and associations were established to teach and practice Beethoven’s music. Many intellectuals encouraged such practice and believed it could inspire the Chinese to develop a progressive morale and fight for their nation. During the New Culture Movement, China’s education system underwent a broad transformation, becoming more accessible and breaking down the previous social distinctions between upper and lower classes. Many intellectuals propagated the idea that "only by providing equal educational opportunity can the nation’s citizens become more civilized and make good efforts to develop our country." The change in their concept of education in the 1920s and 1930s brought short-lived prosperity to China’s education system, including piano education. Many professional music centers and institutions were established, and as a result, many instructors of piano were trained.

In 1917, the President of Beijing University, Cai Yuan-Pei, encouraged college students to explore extracurricular musical activities, and he personally served as the President of the

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students’ "Music Research Institute of Beijing University." Cai was an aficionado of Beethoven’s music, and in 1929, Cai even expressed his praise of Beethoven’s music in a poem. In the poem, he criticized feudal state scholars, and expressed the intention to make Beethoven’s music popular in China. In the poem, he said he loved Beethoven’s music, which contains deep and inspiring ideas, and asserted that this music could boost China’s morale to build a strong nation. Cai’s poem reflects how Beethoven’s music responded to China’s need for enlightenment.

On November 11, 1919, Cai gave a speech in which he noted, "Our country still hasn’t established any music department for students to learn a musical instrument professionally."\(^{19}\) After the speech, he met with the music educator Xiao You-Mei and discussed the establishment of an official "Music Learning Institute of Peking University." Shortly after the meeting, the Institute was founded under the Xiao’s initiative, and a 15-member orchestral team was established. Founded in 1919, the Institute is China’s earliest influential music institution.\(^{20}\) Although the musical instruments were incomplete at the beginning, under the Xiao’s instructions, in less than two years, the orchestra performed more than 40 concerts, including Beethoven’s Sixth Symphony.\(^{21}\)

Immediately after the founding of the "Music Learning Institute of Beijing University" in 1920, Wu Meng-Fei founded Shanghai Normal College. In 1922, he changed the name to Shanghai Normal Art Institute. According to Music World, some students in the Institute could play piano sonatas of Mozart and Beethoven at an intermediate or even advanced level.\(^{22}\)

Another institute founded in Shanghai in the 1920s was St. Mary’s Hall, a girl’s school, where

\(^{19}\) Ibid, 103.
\(^{20}\) Ibid, 74.
\(^{21}\) Ibid, 75.
\(^{22}\) Ibid.
the leadership encouraged communication and exchanges between Chinese and Western cultures and the cultivation of talents. The school established various skill-oriented music clubs, including a piano club. The piano club was divided into several associations, including the "Rubinstein association," "Chopin association," "Schuman association," and "Beethoven association," among others. The most popular association was Beethoven’s. It held monthly performances, where every member of the association would perform on stage. The establishment of various music center and clubs shows that the top intellectuals’ efforts in advocating Beethoven’s music were not in vain. During the New Culture Movement, some Chinese put the idea of learning Western Culture into practice, and as a result, Beethoven’s music became familiar to the Chinese in urban areas.

23 Ibid.
Chapter Two: Beethoven’s Reception During Wartime

During the New Culture Movement of the 1910s and 1920s, Beethoven’s music became well established in China as one of the Chinese people’s most passionately admired exemplars of Western culture. However, the New Culture Movement was followed by two wars, the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945) and the Liberation War (1945–1949), during which the Chinese relegated Beethoven's music to the periphery of their culture. The Japanese invaded China in 1931, and anti-Japanese sentiment in China grew more intense during the early 1930s. The Second Sino-Japanese War, erupting in 1937, was fought in self-defense after Japan’s six-year invasion, while the Liberation War was fought between the Chinese Communists and the Chinese Nationalists, each of whom wanted to be the nation’s ruling party. According to Fu Lei, during these wars, which lasted over a decade, the number and variety of publications that were produced about Beethoven shrank dramatically. Only a few biographical works, such as Romain Rolland’s Life of Beethoven, remained relatively popular.24 The frequency with which Beethoven's works were performed in Beijing and Shanghai during wartime was also significantly reduced, with performances being put on mostly in the remote southwest of China, a region controlled by the Nationalist government. As the frequency of the productions decreased, their nature changed as well. During the New Culture Movement, Beethoven’s music had been mainly spread by musicians, professional music associations, and music educational organizations, for the purpose of saving the nation by advocating Western culture

and promoting enlightenment. However, during the war, the Nationalist government was the only party that promoted Beethoven’s music, and they did so merely to improve the quality of civilian education.

**Beethoven’s Loss of Popularity in China**

During the wars of the 1930s and 1940s in China, Beethoven’s music was received quite differently than it had been among Beethoven’s own contemporaries. His larger works, in particular, were inspired by the French Revolution and conveyed a powerful spirit of passion and enthusiasm. The music has a spirit that is capable of stimulating the morale and self-confidence of even the most oppressed. For this reason his music became the favorite of the French people in the late eighteenth century as they struggled and suffered under oppressions and hardship. One might expect that the Chinese, struggling with their own wars in the 1930s and 1940s, would draw on Beethoven’s music for strong psychological support as they fought against the Japanese for their national independence. Yet Beethoven’s music actually lost popularity in China at that time, compared to the widespread appreciation his music had enjoyed during the New Culture Movement of the 1910s and 1920s. One might explain the loss in popularity by pointing out that it was hard to perform large musical works during wartime, but this was not the fundamental reason for the loss in popularity. Nor was Beethoven’s loss in popularity due to differences in taste between Easterners and Westerners, because if that were the case, Beethoven’s music would never have achieved the popularity that it did during China’s New Culture Movement. Rather, the fundamental cause of Beethoven’s loss in popularity during wartime was a change in the Chinese people’s core needs.

During wartime, as the Chinese faced an existential crisis, their primary need was to
achieve the victory that would liberate the nation. According to Xiao You-Mei, all members of Chinese society, including those involved in culture and the arts, were motivated by this need to serve the cause of war unreservedly. The spirit of enlightenment and individual emancipation that had prevailed in the New Culture Movement gave way to concern over the nation’s very survival. According to Feng Zi-Kai, during the war, the Chinese people’s musical needs transformed, so that instead of needing rich expressions of inner emotion, they now needed music that could stimulate anti-Japanese sentiments that could inspire the broadest spectrum of Chinese citizens. In short, what the Chinese needed at this time was music to serve their new political goals. As in previous eras, the Chinese subordinated the aesthetic appreciation of music to a utilitarian concern with what music could do to promote the nation’s political cause. What changed was not the emphasis on utility, but the needs that defined that utility.

A major reason for Beethoven’s loss in popularity at this time was a dramatic inversion in the class hierarchy. The reigning class during the New Culture period had been a group of intellectuals who valued Beethoven’s music for conveying the advanced, modern, cultural spirit of the West, which they saw as meeting the Chinese need for enlightenment. These intellectuals used their influence and social resources to introduce Beethoven’s music to China and popularize it among celebrities, intellectuals, and students in urban areas. However, there remained a considerable political, economic, and cultural gap between China’s urban and rural

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areas and between different social classes. Peasants, workers, and rural residents had never appreciated Beethoven’s music during the New Culture Movement; indeed, those members of the lower classes had long seen their aesthetic needs and abilities neglected and even despised. The outbreak of the war, which rapidly shifted the nation’s attention to winning the war and national independence, reduced intellectuals’ social status. Instead of being pioneers, they were now seen as rather useless. Meanwhile, workers and peasants who had long been neglected became soldiers, the very people who could achieve victory in the war. Once these workers and peasants were in power, they promptly dismissed Beethoven’s music.

Another obstacle to the appreciation of Beethoven in this period was a strong nationalistic sentiment among the Chinese. According to Zhou Hai-Hong, there was a growing tendency to resist cultural elements that were associated with the West and with Japan. This fact points to another fundamental difference between wartime China and the China of the New Culture Movement: during wartime, Beethoven’s music was suppressed and neglected, and the aesthetic distance between his music and the people was reinforced. In short, the war interrupted the appreciative reception of Beethoven's music in China.

During wartime, Beethoven’s music was mainly performed by China’s Symphony Orchestra, which was established by China’s national government in Chongqing on June 6, 1940. The Japanese had started invading the previous capital, Nanjing, in 1937, so due to safety concerns, the national government moved from Nanjing to Chongqing. Upon the outbreak of the anti-Japanese war, the national government’s international status rose rapidly.

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During World War II, many anti-fascist national leaders became aware of China’s positive contribution, visited China, and expressed interest in cooperating with the Chinese. Vice President Kong Xiang-Xi thought that neglecting to train a national symphony orchestra would be a diplomatic mistake, so he arranged a meeting to discuss the establishment of such an orchestra. After extensive discussion, all the representatives reached the consensus that founding a national orchestra was a diplomatic necessity. It is clear that their motivation was political rather than cultural. The orchestra often performed Beethoven’s works in front of national leaders and diplomats from various countries. Of all Beethoven’s works, the pieces played the most during the war were the Violin Concerto in D major, and the Fifth and Ninth Symphonies. Although the orchestra did play Beethoven’s music frequently, the audience members were all politicians and celebrities, so the music had little impact on the general public. Even when the orchestra occasionally played Beethoven’s music for ordinary citizens, the setting was a political event, or the motive was political in some way. For example, on August 8, 1940, the orchestra performed Beethoven’s Eroica Symphony for the staff of Nationalist Party who were departing Chongqing for the war fronts. Overall, because the national orchestra was not targeted at general audiences, it did not boost the popularity of Beethoven’s music.

During China’s eight-year war against the Japanese, access to Beethoven’s music was limited. Anti-Japanese, revolutionary, and Soviet songs all dominated the front lines, and behind enemy lines, some musicians worked in very humble material conditions, mainly used Beethoven’s music as resource for teaching Western music. In 1943, the students cooperated

29 Ibid.
with China’s Symphony Orchestra to perform Beethoven’s *Ode to Joy*.\(^{30}\) At that time, the general public could only access Beethoven’s music through rare old records.

**Prevalence of Anti-Japanese Songs in China**

At first glance, Beethoven’s works might have appeared suitable to the Chinese cause during this period. Indeed, certain characteristics of Beethoven’s works did appeal to the needs of the Chinese: the music was passionate and enthusiastic, making it theoretically capable of inspiring national confidence and morale, and thus helping the Chinese to win their wars. However, the masses could not easily understand the music’s deeply sophisticated connotations and abstract, complex melodic structures, and they tended to denigrate musical skill. For these reasons, the nation’s needs were better filled by the many straightforward anti-Japanese songs that were written by Chinese composers at the time. This local music served the useful function of uniting the people around the cause of liberating the nation. The Communist Party, represented by Mao, was aware of the lower classes’ crucial new role in society and the importance of catering to their tastes in art, including music. Mao’s “Speech on Literature and Art Forum in Yan An” reflects the party’s strategy of adapting to the lower classes’ needs. In the speech, Mao states, “We should provide books and newspapers to all cadres, military soldiers, factory workers, countryside farmers, who can read, and for those illiterate, we also should provide them plays, paintings, and music. They are recipients of our arts.”\(^{31}\) Amidst the increasing influence of China’s Communist Party, the artworks that enjoyed popularity were those that appealed to the masses.


The Chinese people’s sense of nationalism was highly aroused during wartime. As a result, their taste in music was mainly shaped by nationalist ideas and was entwined with the national liberation movement. Famous musician Xian Xing-Hai described the nature of anti-Japanese music as follows: “It must connect to the masses, awaken workers and peasants, reflect our people’s power, and also be simple and lively.” As early as 1936, in his article “Songs Are a Mirror of Our Society,” Mu Hua pointed out, "Our new music in wartime should serve the war, and our musicians should be inspired by our masses’ real lives to compose the music vividly reflecting their lives.”

In February 1935, famous musician Nie Er composed “March of the Volunteers” for the movie *Sons and Daughters in a Time of Storm*. In May of the same year, the score was published in the popular magazine *Dian Tong Pictorial Magazine* under the title “Let's Restore Our Lost Land.” The eye-catching background design featured an image of the Great Wall. Upon the movie’s public release, the passionate melody created a strong impact on the Chinese. This song became better known than the movie among the Chinese and was one of the most famous anti-Japanese songs. In 1949, “March of the Volunteers” was officially selected as China’s national anthem.

During the war, performances of anti-Japanese songs were organized by many, newly emerging singing groups. In February 1935, China’s first anti-Japanese chorus, “People’s Singing Group,” was established in Shanghai. In May of the same year, Beijing University held a large concert called "The United Music Concert of Beijing" on the square in front of the Imperial Palace’s Supreme Harmony Hall. The chorus, composed of 540 students, sang many anti-

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Japanese songs such as "Singing for China," “Protecting Our Nation,”” and “Killing Our Enemy.”

More than three thousand audience members attended the concert. One journalist wrote, "The concert was like an outbreak of a volcano, with bloody flames flowing out of the crater.” 33 The anti-Japanese songs published during the war were countless. Written by anti-Japanese hero Kan Pei Tong, “China’s Anti-Japanese Songs Collection” was published in Hong Kong in 2005. It collected 3,621 anti-Japanese songs by more than 1,800 composers. The extreme popularity of the anti-Japanese songs, contrasted against the virtual disappearance of Beethoven’s music, reflects the Chinese people’s neglect of Beethoven’s music during the war.

33 Ibid, 119.
Chapter Three: Beethoven's Reception Between the Establishment of the People’s Republic of China and its Cultural Revolution

After the wars of the 1930s and 1940s, the Chinese Communist Party, led by Chairman Mao, emerged victorious. In 1949, Mao assumed power over the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Establishing this independent nation gave the Chinese people great pride, yet they were also uneasy. The turbulence within the country’s borders and in its foreign relations led the Chinese to believe that only by rapidly solidifying their new national government could they prove the superiority of socialism to the outside world, and also establish a sense of national self-confidence and self-esteem within their own borders. So it was that, during the 1950s, China’s core needs changed again: whereas during the war, the people had needed inspiration to fight their enemies, now that the war had been won by China’s Communist Party, they needed to justify the socialist and communist ideologies that undergirded the new government. Every aspect of Chinese society had to be aligned toward this need, which naturally had a profound influence on how Beethoven was received in Mao-era China.

Although Beethoven’s music was not widely appreciated during the war, and it was even suppressed to some degree, it regained a short-lived appreciation between the time of the PRC’s establishment (1949) and China’s Cultural Revolution (1966). In fact, the mainstream public opinion of Beethoven and his music was relatively positive between the establishment of the PRC and the outbreak of China’s Great Leap Forward (1958). Beethoven’s identity as a Western, bourgeois composer did not become an obvious obstacle to his receiving public praise. Instead, according to Qiang Ren-Kang, the composer was treated as “a progressive
democrat and activist of the bourgeois revolution in France,” and his works were considered as “breaking the confines of bourgeois art.” In 1950s China, the nation’s core need was the construction of socialism. Faced with this task, the ardent Chinese found the passionate and enthusiastic characteristics of Beethoven’s music appealing. However, the concept of class struggle gradually gained traction after 1958, and Beethoven's identity as a representative of the Western bourgeoisie began to receive large-scale public criticism. Additionally, as Sino-Soviet relations worsened in the early 1960s, China’s analysis of Western music was isolated from others, and they began to hold extremely negative views of all Western music, including Beethoven’s. Thus, after the brief resurgence of the late 1950s, Beethoven’s works ebbed again.

Perception of Beethoven’s Music from 1949–1958

In the early 1950s, few Chinese were engaged in foreign music research. During that time, the Cold War had already started, and China was on the socialist side led by the Soviet Union in resisting the capitalists. As the Soviet Union’s and other socialist countries’ music experts came to China’s universities to lecture on foreign music, and as China sent many music-major students to Eastern European socialist countries, a group of young Chinese foreign music researchers formed. In 1956, the music department of the Central Conservatory of Music in China was established, and from that point on, China had an official institution for the study of foreign music. However, even though Chinese research on foreign music had by now reached a breadth and depth that was unprecedented in China’s history of music research; at the time, the research was heavily influenced by the extreme political left and by the isolation of China

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from the international stage.

The renewed appreciation of Beethoven’s music in the 1950s was mainly sparked by the publicly circulated remarks of well-respected proletarian revolutionists. The most frequently quoted of these comments about Beethoven was a letter from Friedrich Engels to his sister Maria Engels in 1841. Engels passionately praised Beethoven’s *Fifth Symphony*: "How excellent was the symphony last night! If you haven't heard this magnificent work, then you have heard nothing in your life yet." Another example of high praise is found in the book *Recalling Lenin*. In it, Gorky mentions that one night at the beginning of the Soviet Union’s October Revolution, Lenin came to Gorky’s home to hear a pianist play Beethoven’s *Appassionata*. Lenin responded rapturously, “I don't even know any melody in the world that is better than this piece, and I would like to listen it every day. This is marvelous and couldn’t exist in the human world! When I was listening to it, I naively thought, what a miracle that human beings could create it!” In such a context, the research on Beethoven’s music was limited to a shallow, politically oriented perspective, and any other study on the music was criticized and rejected.

Western music was not banned in China in the 1950s, but the international political structure and China’s foreign policy determined the focal point of foreign music research. For this reason that research was limited to the music of Eastern European socialist countries, particularly the Soviet Union, rather than encompassing the music of capitalist Western European countries. Several monographs on foreign music were published during this period.


Among those works, the first important academic work on foreign music, *The Analysis of Tchaikovsky’s Main Works*, was published in 1954 by Qian Ren-kang, China’s eminent musicologist. The book, which analyzes Tchaikovsky from a historical materialist perspective, including his personal beliefs and the creative features of his music, has become China’s most important reference work on Tchaikovsky.\(^{37}\)

Another important book, edited by Chen Zong-Qun, Wang Yu-He, and Yu Run-Yang, is *The History of European Music*. Although it has been criticized for making simplistic critiques of historical musicians, it offers a comprehensive and overall positive evaluation of important European composers in musical history since the 19th century. The book still remains China’s only large-scale work on European music history to date. The book used a relatively positive attitude to evaluate many important composers and their works in European music history. For example, the book points out that the humanitarian spirit reflected in Bach’s music carries a progressive significance at that time, that compared to other musicians at that time, Mozart has a more thoroughgoing spirit of enlightenment, and that Beethoven’s music is revolutionary, full of heroic spirit, and a landmark of that period.\(^{38}\) Although the book oversimplifies its negative analyses of Western composers, it along with *The Analysis of Tchaikovsky’s Main Works* achieved a synthesis of Marxist, Leninist, and Maoist approaches in analyzing Western music. The work was finished in April 1964, but not printed and released until after the Cultural Revolution.

Although Beethoven’s music experienced a brief resurgence during this period, the


\(^{38}\) Ibid.
research and study of foreign music was determined by the political left, which dictated which countries and composers could be researched and which kinds of music were to be advocated or criticized. Music from socialist countries, particularly the Soviet Union, was to be introduced to the public, and classical European music was generally viewed positively to some extent. However, American music and modernist Western music was arbitrarily disparaged.

For example, in 1951, the music department of Nanjing Literary Association published an article, “Several Problems of Introducing Western Music,” to criticize a music program of Nanjing People’s radio. The article argues that learning from Western music was in direct opposition to the basic principle of literary and art works set by Chairman Mao. It states,

    We could not advocate Western music to our Chinese people, because the Soviet Union introduced the music to its people. This is dogmatism . . . Were people’s lives in 19\textsuperscript{th}-century Europe really peaceful and happy? Only the landlords there had the really peaceful and happy lives.\textsuperscript{39}

The article takes a far-left perspective in criticizing Western music, which it interprets as entirely bourgeois, dismissing the music produced in a bourgeois society as merely the mistakes of capitalists.

\textit{Perception of Beethoven’s Music after Class Struggle Escalated in 1958}

From the late 1950s onward, the class struggle in China escalated rapidly, and the Chinese held increasingly negative views of Beethoven’s works. In 1958, in the Eighth Delegate Conference of the Chinese Communist Party, the party determined that the major conflict defining Chinese culture was between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, or put in ideological terms, the major conflict was between socialism and capitalism. To address this conflict, in

1962, ten members of the Eighth Plenum of the Communist Party of China Central Committee decided upon the long-term strategy of class struggle: that is, the Party would systematically eliminate the bourgeoisie, rich peasants, and landlords, and establish the proletariat as the leading class in their place. Further, in 1963, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China established the preeminence of the class struggle, a decision that indicated that class struggle would be the Party’s main strategy for achieving the nation’s core needs. Less than a year after class struggle was set up as the Party’s primary strategy, the sole criterion for evaluating artwork became its class association. At that time, the interpretation of Beethoven shifted from his being a warrior to being bourgeois. The perception of his music was transformed: where once it had seemed to be art on behalf of the people, now it seemed to be on behalf of the bourgeoisie. His music was seen as evil because of his original sin of being associated with the bourgeois class.

From the winter of 1963 to the summer of 1964, each and every speech that Chairman Mao gave at a Central Working Conference expressed the same concerns about culture: “Our country will die if we always learn from Westerners.” After the mid-1960s, China’s culture was increasingly directed by leftist ideologies. Beethoven’s work could not represent the Chinese people’s achievements, so it was largely suppressed. Mao’s speeches denounced the act of learning from foreign culture and explicitly characterized Beethoven as a dangerous influence. In 1964 came an important turning point: a group of revolutionaries in the Communist Party began to stir up the Cultural Revolution, the goal of which was to preserve “true” Communist ideology in the country by purging the capitalist and traditional remnants from Chinese society,

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and by re-imposing Maoist thought as the dominant ideology of the Party. In order to rapidly advocate socialism and proletarian ideology and achieve this goal, some revolutionists went to extremes to downgrade or even belittle Western arts, values, and lifestyles. For revolutionists who wanted to foment proletarian revolution and class struggle, Beethoven, as one of Westerners’ most famous representatives, was not immune from attack.

The extreme political left that advocated the Cultural Revolution was not yet fully formed in 1964, but the left-leaning trend had begun. In articles published around that time, Beethoven was frequently and naturally linked to phrases such as "bourgeois class attribute," which expressed class-oriented views of Beethoven’s music and life experience. Beethoven was viewed as the insurmountable idol of the people who worshipped Western bourgeois musicians. Such articles also made politically motivated statements such as the following,

“The 18th and 19th centuries were a time of well-developed Western bourgeois culture, and under the direct impact of the bourgeoisie, a group of musicians like Beethoven emerged. However, Beethoven’s achievement is caused by historical conditions, and the worship [of him] is artificial superstition. The more successful he is, the more criticism he must receive.”

China’s Cultural Revolution was a frantic period of violence and superstition. Although the Revolution officially broke out in 1966, it was incubating as early as 1964, when China’s central authority began propagating the Revolutionary ideology that became the fuel of the Revolution. Around the time when Chairman Mao announced his well-known *The Two Important Instructions on the Problems of Literary and Art Works*, the Defense Minister Lin Biao published his *Instruction to the Literary and Art Works for Troops*, declaring that "literary and art works with the features of imperialism, capitalism and revisionism are reactionary,

decadent, and pornographic, and they paralyze and deceive the people.”\textsuperscript{42} The official attitude towards “capitalist arts” was set up as a guideline.

In 1964, the magazine \textit{People’s Music} consecutively published three articles stating that the blind worship of Beethoven should be criticized, and that the composer’s bourgeois attributes should be acknowledged. According to the magazine, “Beethoven is a bourgeois musician, and his progressive and revolutionary features are limited by his class attributes. It is extremely harmful to unconditionally take all his works as progressive and revolutionary, and to learn from them.”\textsuperscript{43} This negative interpretation of Beethoven’s music was very different from the common view before the mid-1960s. In the early 1960s and before, according to Guo Nai-An, Beethoven's music was interpreted as a form of inspiration for people fighting against dark forces: “The intense struggle between brave, heroic people and dark forces is presented by the whole symphony from the beginning to the end.”\textsuperscript{44} Yet after the mid-1960s, according to Hong Chen, Beethoven’s work was believed to “reflect the rising bourgeoisie fighting sprits and élan,”\textsuperscript{45} with his late-period works in particular being considered “dark,” “pessimistic,” and “disappointing,” instead of passionate, enthusiastic, and positive. During the ten-year Cultural Revolution, Beethoven’s work gradually came to be viewed as bourgeois and reactionary, and thus contrary to the proletariat revolution.

Jiang Qing, Chairman Mao’s wife and secretary, was labeled “the flag-bearer of chairman Mao,” leading the charge for revolutionary literature and art. She too made

\textsuperscript{42} Lin, Biao. \textit{The Recourse on China’s Cultural Revolution}. Hong Kong’: Chinese University in Hong Kong’s Research Center for China’s Study, 2002, 56.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid, 46.
disparaging comments about Western music and art. For example, in 1964, she gave a speech about musical works, in which she said,

The bourgeoisie and the revisionists were decadent, reactionary. We must break the foreign principles—a symphony is actually a representation of formalism, and there is no internal connection between its movements. . . . Madame Butterfly is all about American imperialism and insulting Japanese girls. It is very dirty and evil. La Dame Aux Camelias is about a prostitute. Alexandre Dumas and his son, Alexandre Dumas the Younger, are not progressive for their time.⁴⁶

In 1965, Jiang Qing pointed out in another conversation, "Admiring Western music is absolutely a slave’s behavior. We should create our own music."⁴⁷

On the eve of the Cultural Revolution, in February 1966, Lin Biao and Jiang Qing held a symposium called "The Forum," where they announced The Summary about Literary and Art Works for Troops (1966). The summary criticized “the dark route of anti-party, anti-socialist literary and art works," meaning foreign literary and art works. In the second section of the summary, they wrote, "It is imperative to break the worship of Chinese or foreign classical literary and art works. Stalin was a great Marxist and Leninist, and his criticism of modernist bourgeois literary and art works was very sharp. However, he was not critical enough of Russian and European classic works."⁴⁸

All of those far-left, negative comments about Western literary and art works from the central authority established a problematic guideline for the Cultural Revolution. Those documents set the precedent for totally negating Western music in the Cultural Revolution. Those

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⁴⁷ Ibid, 265.
followed. The Communist leaders’ chief method for criticizing those works was political, namely using the so-called "class analysis method" to negate all works that seemed to express imperialism, capitalism, or revisionism.
Chapter Four: Beethoven’s Reception During China’s Cultural Revolution

During China’s Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), the core need of the country was still to construct a socialist society and to justify the socialism and communism championed by China’s Communist Party. However, because the class struggle became fierce during the period, the only acceptable lens through which to analyze Western works was “class analysis,” or so-called "Marxist historical materialism." At the time, revolutionists used class analysis as a weapon to classify almost all Western music as anti-revolutionary and, thus, evil. Throughout the ten years of the Cultural Revolution, Beethoven’s music was performed on some special occasions, and in later stages of the Revolution, some positive opinions on his works were published, as the class struggle had eased a little. But overall, Western music, including Beethoven’s music, was largely banned and experienced severe criticism from various parties, such as the “Red Guards,” centrally authorized writers, and some music scholars.

The Chinese Communist Party justified its anti-music position on the grounds that the war was won through the contributions of workers and peasants, rather than through the work of the bourgeoisie to which the intellectuals belonged. Through the 1960s, the Party’s belief in the superior value of workers and peasants was gradually woven into the mainstream ideology of the Cultural Revolution, so that intellectuals’ social status declined and left them as the targets of criticism. In 1966, the Party government published the official Five Yi Liu Notice, which explicitly placed intellectuals at the bottom of society. It was the highly educated

49 “Red Guards” is a product of China's Cultural Revolution, and the word “red” represents their nature of revolution. They are not soldiers, but mainly young students. The Red Guards, which caused social unrest and promoted the Revolution, were an important force in the Revolution.
intellectuals who desired and could appreciate the rich and delicate arts, but being at the bottom of society, they did not have the resources to advocate for the arts. Meanwhile, the elite classes of peasants and workers could not understand the arts, and thus had no inclination to advocate for them. Beethoven's reputation in China experienced a decline during the revolution, as his fate reflected that of China’s intellectuals.

**Criticism of Beethoven’s Music**

In the early stage of the Cultural Revolution, the Red Guards used “Big-Character” posters to criticize both classic Chinese and foreign literary and art works in an explicit and forceful way, and treated those works as the products of broken feudalism, capitalism, and revisionism. In addition to the posters, the Red Guards also published various tabloids, using political epithets to completely negate and criticize all Western musical works.⁵¹

The critical articles written by the Red Guards were combative and content-empty, but the critiques written by the centrally authorized writing committees were commanding discourses with absolute power. Such secretive and highly favored writing committees were very active during the Revolution. The prominent committees in the music field were “Chu Lan” (which was controlled by the Ministry of Culture, led by Jiang Qing and Yu Hui-Yong), and the “Ding Xue Lei” committee (controlled by Shanghai Municipal Party, which was led by Zhang Chun-Qiao and Yao Wen-Yuan). On one hand, all the committees flattered Jiang Qing as the “Flag-bearer of literary and art works,” and on the other hand, they criticized classic Chinese and foreign literary and art works. Examples of criticisms of Western music are described

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⁵⁰ “Big-Character” Poster is a kind of poster posted on the wall to promote propaganda during the Revolution.
From late 1973 through the spring of 1974, the “Gang of Four”\textsuperscript{52} held a nationwide discussion about program music and absolute music, emphasizing large-scale criticism of Western music. During this time, the “Chu Lan” writing committee published several consecutive articles to support the criticism, representing the official attitude of the central government. Those articles on Western music used the typical "class analysis" method to belittle and negate Western music. The Chu Lan argued that literary works reflect the condition of society, and that in any class of society, class struggle always inevitably exists between classes under certain historical conditions. Many of the Chu Lan’s articles reflect the belief that all musical works reflect social content, inevitably containing specific content about class, and that there is no social content without involving class content. For example, the Chu Lan stated, “during the rising period of capitalism, the works of bourgeois composers, such as Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven, reflect the social content of their bourgeois revolution—their opposition to the feudal system—and reflect their political bourgeois ideology.”\textsuperscript{53} The Chu Lan also commented that those composers adapted to the trend of historical development, replacing the feudal dictatorship with a bourgeois dictatorship, and concluded that their works were progressive within their historical conditions at that time.\textsuperscript{54}

The Chu-Lan were not the first to criticize bourgeois humanitarianism, one of the main targets of attack during the Cultural Revolution. All concepts related to humanitarianism were open to criticism, and all human love was considered as hateful things. During the Revolution,\textsuperscript{52} “Gang of Four” is the leading force of the Cultural Revolution, and it consists of four people: Jiang Qing, Yao Wen-Yuan, Zhang Chun-Qiao, and Wang Hong-Wen.\textsuperscript{53} Chu-Lan. "The in-depth Criticism of the Bourgeois’ Human Nature." \textit{The Red Flag}, 1974, 22.\textsuperscript{54} Chu-Lan. "The Discussion Should Pay Attention to." \textit{People's Daily}, Jan. 14th, 1974.
human love and a humanitarian spirit were not advocated; instead, hatred of the West was preeminent. As a result, the fierce class struggle was seemingly endless. For example, the Chu Lan also wrote,

Beethoven’s works vividly reflect the political ideal of the German bourgeois revolution, and have become the most outstanding representatives of German music. However, classical composers, such as Beethoven, stand in the bourgeois position to reflect the social content, so they inevitably carry their social class bias. 55

The Chu Lan argued that those composers’ works advocated bourgeois humanitarian thought, which was deceptive at the time. For instance, Chu Lan stated,

Western music’s representative work, Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, advocates all humans to embrace and love each other, which is to promote bourgeoisie humanitarianism thought. In the early nineteenth century, this thought reflected the bourgeoisie’s revolutionary request to oppose the feudal hierarchy, and the feudal separationists’ ideal of a divided nation. However, Beethoven’s work of advocating human love across social classes is forever unrealizable in a class society. It is under this false cover of “human love” that the bourgeoisie cruelly exploit the proletariat and working class to an extreme extent. 56

The Chu-Lan’s writing repeatedly used the theory of class analysis to criticize the “human nature” advocated in Western musical works. The authors analyzed Beethoven’s music solely by analyzing his bourgeois class attributes, and thus subjected his works to rejection. All of the Chu-Lan’s comments apparently followed the central direction set by Lin Biao and Jiang Qing: "Bourgeois music is decayed and downfallen." 57 During the Cultural Revolution, the only Western music work that received full praise was The Internationale.

By 1974, the barrage of Chinese critiques of Western music was well underway. The Chu Lan published a comment in The People’s Daily saying, "A musical work uses ‘moonlight’ as its

56 Ibid.
57 Jiang, Qing. "The Speech to the Literary and Art Field in the Convention of Proletarian Cultural Revolution in Beijing." People’s Daily, Nov. 28th, 1966.
title. Using a class-struggle viewpoint to analyze the title, we can conclude that by using these bizarre sounds to present the moonlight, the work reflects the bourgeois’s filthy, corrupted lifestyle and decadent appeals to emotion.”

Similarly, the Chu Lan listed all the works of Beethoven in "the ode of capitalist dirty stuff." Not until People's Music Publishing House republished Romain Rolland’s *The Biography of Beethoven* in 1978 were Beethoven and the historical status of his music "rehabilitated."

In the campaign of criticizing program music and absolute music, in addition to “Chu Lan”’s publication, which was under the direct manipulation of the "Gang of Four," a similar type of press prevailed nationwide. Most of these articles were published under the absolute pressure of the instructions of the "Gang of Four" and under the exemplary guidance set by “Chu Lan.” All levels of government felt obligated to follow the critical tone, rejecting Western music in order to prove that they were not anti-revolutionists. For instance, an article entitled "Music Carrying No Social Attribute Does Not Exist: Discussing Western Music’s Class Nature," written by Theory Researching Team of the Art and Music Institute of Tianjin, pointed out that during the period of the bourgeoisie’s rising, when they were fighting against the feudal system, bourgeois composers revealed their utilitarian purposes in their music. The article cites Beethoven as an example of a bourgeois utilitarian composer, and argues that Beethoven's works, such as *The Fifth Symphony* and the *Appassionata* Piano Sonata, reflect the French bourgeoisie's values.

The authors further argued that in 1814, European feudal rulers held a reactionary

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Congress of Vienna, and concluded a reactionary “holy alliance” to brutally suppress and persecute progressives. The German bourgeoisie made concessions to the feudal forces under the pressure of that time, and feeling deeply pessimistic and disappointed, Beethoven was one of those who compromised with the feudal aristocracy. He even wrote some devoutly religious music in his later years that he dedicated to the reactionary feudal rulers. The article simply saw all the religious music composed by Beethoven as his concessions to the feudal aristocracy. The article omitted one of Beethoven’s important works, Missa Solemnis, probably because the work praises the highest ideals of humanity and is full of deeply philosophical connotation.

During China’s Cultural Revolution, "religion" was viewed as "reactionary," and religious music was seen as a tool to advocate "heresy.” As a representative composer who wrote religious music, Beethoven was labeled as a traitor to revolution, and all his religious music works were criticized and banned.

Throughout the Cultural Revolution, with the exception of a few approved musical styles such as Model Operas and songs of Mao’s Quotations, music was almost entirely banned, especially the Western style. Further evidence of Beethoven’s fall in popularity can be seen in performance records of the period. Before the mid-1960s, Beethoven's works were included as examples in textbooks for professional music education, such as Acoustics Tutorial and Musical Form. By 1966, in the midst of the Cultural Revolution, teaching Western music was forbidden, and China’s professional music education was stalled. With no exceptions,

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Beethoven’s music had been forbidden to the general public for a decade. Additionally, before the mid-1960s, Beethoven's music was the most frequently performed of all Western composers’ works. To take China’s Central Orchestra as an example, according to Zhou Guang-Qin, from 1956 to 1964, it performed Beethoven's works 38 times. Beethoven's Ninth Symphony was even played to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, which marked the official approval of Beethoven and his music.63 However, after 1965, Beethoven’s work was not played even once for seven years. Not until 1972 did his works begin to be heard again, and then only infrequently, privately, and among the top leadership.

**Special Events and Different Voices**

During the early 1970s, Sino-U.S. relation smoothed somewhat, mainly because the Soviet Union’s might significantly increased, and the U.S. wanted to draw China over to their side to some degree in order to balance the Soviet Union’s power. In 1972, the adviser of the United States National Security, Henry Kissinger, visited China. China’s premier, Zhou En-Lai appointed Li De-Lun, the permanent conductor of China’s Central Orchestra, to prepare Beethoven’s symphony for welcoming Kissinger. Li proposed performing Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony in discussions with Jiang Qing and Yu Hui-Yong. However, Yu thought the symphony, which advocated "fatalism," was anti-revolutionary, and declined the proposal. Yu eventually decided to perform the *Pastoral Symphony* for Kissinger, as he believed the work primarily concerned the power of nature.64

From March to September of 1973, the London Philharmonic Orchestra, Vienna

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63 Ibid, 317.
Philharmonic Orchestra, and Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra successively came to China to perform for the public. However, China’s government required that the musical selections be determined by China’s central government. Because those orchestra knew China’s national condition, all of their performing lists included China’s revolutionary music, such as "Yellow River," "The Red Detachment," and "The March of Workers and Peasants." But the Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra also included Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony in their concert. At first, China’s central government did not reject the symphony, but just when the orchestra’s plane arrived in Beijing, Jiang Qing raised an objection to the symphony. She insisted that the symphony advocated the anti-revolutionary concept of "fatalism." Eventually, the government decided to replace the Fifth Symphony with the Pastoral Symphony. The U.S. embassy official Nicholas Platt gave an excuse to the Philadelphia orchestra; he explained to the orchestra that the Pastoral Symphony was more suitable to be performed in China because China’s revolution was a revolution of peasants, and the Pastoral Symphony depicted rural scenery that was familiar to China’s revolutionists. He added, “In the fourth movement, the severe storm is a reflection of the hardship those revolutionists suffered, and in the fifth movement, the expression of joy is a reflection of the pleasant mood those revolutionists had after the success of the revolution.”

Late in the Cultural Revolution, Jiang Qing asserted, "Research on Western music is needed." Shortly thereafter, a Western Music Research Committee consisting of more than 30 people was established to write a work entitled Western Music History. Jiang Qing commanded that the book be “not for pure academic research, but for class and political

65 Ibid.
After three years of work, the committee finished the book in 1976. *Western Music History* does encapsulate the typical characteristics of Western music research of the Cultural Revolution period; the committee’s mode of analysis is Marxist historical materialism. Even though their analyses of Western music were different from the Big-Character Posters written by the Red Guards and the articles written by centrally authorized writing committees, they were still bound to the far-left ideologies. For example, the book defines Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* as a philosophical work that reflects the bourgeoisie’s values and goals. The committee interpreted the work as showing that life is difficult, full of contradictions and struggles, and that nevertheless, by persevering on the difficult and tortuous path, people can reach perfection. The committee defined perfection as "hundreds of millions of people unite[d] together, and everybody loves everybody mutually and closely."68

The book also offered a detailed analysis of Beethoven’s *Ninth Symphony*. According to the committee’s reading, the first movement of the symphony was meant to make people feel that life was full of hardships, and that courage and persistence were needed to conquer such difficulties. The second movement, the book explained, displayed a vibrant energy and faith to fight against the hardship. The third movement expressed sympathy and consolation to suffering people, and the fourth movement expressed the sacred and noble nature of human love and friendship.69 Thus, even though the book still defined Beethoven as a bourgeois musician to be criticized, it also offered a relatively neutral analysis of his music, which was significant given the mainstream opinion of Beethoven at that time. This analysis also reflects

67 Ibid, 27.
that the Resolution was eased to some degree during the Revolution’s late period of time.
Epilogue

After 1976, the year that marked the end of the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese Communist Party conducted investigations into which of its cases of condemnation had been “innocent, false, and wrongful.” The Party found Western culture to be innocent. What is more, the Party described the Cultural Revolution as “ten years of turmoil,” thereby undermining the values they had advocated during the Cultural Revolution and vindicating those they had condemned.

After the "Gang of Four" had been destroyed in 1977, the year that also marked the 150th anniversary of Beethoven’s death, Li De-Lun proposed a concert of Beethoven’s music. The performance was to be on March 26, the date Beethoven had died 150 years before. Li De-Lun proposed the idea to China’s Vice Minister of Culture, with the thought that the event could prove Beethoven’s innocence. However, the Vice Minister did not dare to make such a decision, and he proposed the idea to the Minister of Culture instead. The minister proposed the idea to the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee for instructions, and finally the Department proposed it to the Political Bureau of the Central Committee. Not until 9:00 pm on March 23 was Li informed that the Central Committee had approved his proposal, and that a performance of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony would be permitted. On March 26, China’s Central Orchestra performed the symphony for the public—the first time Beethoven’s music was performed after the Cultural Revolution.

After Beethoven’s music had been officially performed for the public, the Central Committee decided to publicly broadcast Beethoven’s music nationwide. Musician Yi Lei
assessed this historical landmark in his article “Beethoven’s Success in China.” He stated, “In the warm spring of 1977, I was still in the military. One morning after I had just finished breakfast with my comrades, I heard China’s Central Radio broadcast the words, “Next, let’s listen to Beethoven’s Appassionato Sonata, which was advocated by our great revolutionist Lenin.” Of all Western musicians, it was Beethoven whose work was broadcast first after the Cultural Revolution. The nation-wide broadcast was meant as a signal of the innocence of “bourgeois music” and a dismissal of the far-left ideology.

By 1978, in the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, the Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress, Deng Xiao-Ping, formulated an official policy of reform and opening-up. Deng instructed, “Western culture should be correctly interpreted and disseminated to the general public in China. Sealing ourselves off from the world is stupid. We need to learn from advanced Western culture and improve ourselves.” Ever since that point, China had been gradually opening up to the outside world and becoming increasingly willing to learn from other cultures’ precious heritage. Among that heritage is, of course, Beethoven’s music.

After the ups and downs that Beethoven experienced in China throughout the twentieth century, today he has come to hold the same high status he once did. He is again considered the “God of music,” just as he was back when Li Shu-Tong first introduced him to China in 1906. In recent years, Beethoven has become the best-known Western composer in China. His music has been rewritten back into China’s music textbooks, and it is once again frequently played by

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orchestras all around the country. Chinese attitudes toward and interpretations of Beethoven and his music have become more and more similar to those of Westerners, and the Chinese have begun to pay more attention to the aesthetic than the utilitarian aspects of his music. Perhaps now that the Chinese have come to appreciate Beethoven for his aesthetic qualities, rather than for his utility, his future reputation will be more secure.

After experiencing decades of the shifting perceptions in China throughout the last century, Beethoven’s music became the subject of academic research in the 1980s. Initially, the study was immature, and even maintained some features of the Revolution; yet the research was still valuable in that various academic schools emerged from it, and academic thinking became more independent. So it was that on the rubble of the Cultural Revolution, Chinese scholars of Western music awakened from their “confusion, entered a deeper, more mature rethinking stage,” and called for “the reestablishment of Western music study in China.”

In the last decade of the 20th century, a batch of significant academic papers on Beethoven was published. In addition, amateur researchers of Western music have studied the subject matter for many years, and have offered unique, original insights into Beethoven's work. Still, Chinese scholars have many gaps in their theory and knowledge of Beethoven, and they have a long way to go to reach the academic frontiers in their work on the great composer. Over the years, some people have thought that the greatest obstacle to the study of Western music in China has been the problem of getting accurate historical data, facts, and explanations of the literature, but this may not be the case. Rather, the lesson of history is that we must be objective in evaluating Western culture, Western music, and individual musicians, and resist the

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influence of utilitarian political purposes. Academia should be independent of, not subservient to, politics.
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