

PREFACE

This work is a study of a music association (*yinyue hui* 音乐会) and its repertoire in Beixinzhuang village, located in the suburbs of Beijing. The Beixinzhuang Music Association (BMA) is a laicised Buddhist band, its membership consisting of fifteen “peasants” living in the village. During the 1950s, they learned Beijing *yinyue* (*jing yinyue* 京音乐 “Beijing music”) from a local monk. To my knowledge, this is the only laicised Buddhist band organized by peasants playing Beijing *yinyue* in the region.

In China, there are several performance genres that originated in Beijing. Beijing *yinyue* is one of them. It is performed primarily in the Beijing area, some counties of Hebei Province, and Tianjin Municipality, which lies to the southeast of Beijing. Related traditions are found in other areas of North China as well, notably in Shanxi and Liaoning provinces. With more comparative research done in these regions, a better picture will emerge on northern Buddhist music as a whole.

Beijing *yinyue* is a Buddhist instrumental music played by a wind and percussion band. Its repertoire includes over one hundred “labeled melodies” (*qupai* 曲牌)¹, which musicians arrange into suites of ten or more tunes. The musical instruments used are two cylindrical reed-pipes (*guanzi* 管子), two mouth organs (*sheng* 笙), two bamboo flutes (*dizi* 笛子), two frames of gongs (*yunluo* 云锣) and several percussion.²

During the last century, many Chinese scholars regarded Western culture (including music) as categorically superior to their own. As a result, most forms of traditional Chinese music were officially rejected in school systems and classical European music and theory taught instead. Today, professional

¹ Originally, *qupai* was a type of verse for singing, which emerged in the Southern Song (1127-1279) and Jin (1115-1234) Dynasties and became popular in the Yuan (1271-1368) Dynasty. After Yuan, many popular songs and instrumental music pieces were also called *qupai*, though it is not clear to what extent these melodies were passed on unchanged. Every *qupai* has its own name. These pieces have been widely used in Chinese traditional music.

² The instruments used in Beijing *yinyue* will be discussed in Chapter IV.

composers, all thoroughly trained exclusively in Western music theory, write in an essentially Western style. The composing of traditional Chinese music has virtually come to a standstill. The influence of Western music has also brought about basic changes in the construction of instruments, musical orchestrations, and attitudes regarding vocal production. Musicians in the conservatories and Chinese ensembles now mostly play “improved traditional music.” Actually, local musicians in the countryside still play the older traditional music, but this kind of music is rarely heard abroad. Unfortunately, many Chinese music scholars still use the principles of Western European art music theory and scholarship to explain Chinese traditional music.

The first purpose of my study is to examine the BMA and its repertoire, using the principles of traditional Chinese music theory. In this way, the repertoire can be described and interpreted as it is understood by local practitioners, based upon Chinese music aesthetics and theory.

According to Alan Merriam, the task of ethnomusicology is not only to study the music but also to discover the functions of music in relation to other aspects of culture (Merriam 1964:47). Beijing *yinyue* is generally thought to be Buddhist music, yet it has been strongly influenced by Confucianism. As Chinese have always been extremely tolerant in religious matters, Buddhism and Daoism have flourished along with Confucianism as the three principal faiths of China (Tian 1997:3). Understanding the function of Beijing *yinyue* requires a study of it in relation to Confucianism.

As one of the greatest ideologies of China, Confucianism has had very strong influence on Chinese people. Many Chinese scholars have studied its importance. Ding Wangdao believes that “Confucius had an incomparably extensive, profound, and lasting influence on Chinese society” (Ding 1997:213). He further argues that during the last two thousand years, Confucianism was the mainstream of Chinese thought, and throughout this long period, the thinking and behaviour of people from all walks of society were invariably permeated with Confucianism. He concludes that whether in court, politics, or in the daily life of the common people, signs of Confucian influence can be seen everywhere. “Therefore, to understand China one has to understand Confucius ” (ibid.6). Thus, in order to properly understand Chinese traditional music, the ethnomusicologist must research the relationship between it and Confucian

ideology and theory. The present thesis is the result of such research conducted over a ten-year period. It is essential to note that the Confucian interpretations are based upon my own analysis of local culture and belief, for Chinese villagers can rarely explain the backgrounds of their tradition.

Another purpose of the research is to study musical change. Again, Alan Merriam points out that: “It is important that we record [world music] as widely and as swiftly as possible, but it is even more important that we study the processes of change ...” (Merriam 1964: 9). The musicians of the BMA play what is considered to be Buddhist music, but they are not Buddhist monks. When they play at funerals, their repertoire includes not only Beijing *yinyue*, but also popular songs and other pieces. In other words, the BMA maintains its traditional music, yet acquires new (even popular) repertoire, in keeping with its own innate sense of tradition and adaptation.

I have lived in Beijing for over twenty years, and undertook my fieldwork in the area during the last eleven years. After the Beixinzhuang Villagers’ Committee invited me to study their music in 1991, I often went to the village on weekends, or during vacations and holidays, to interview informants and learn their notation and music. Occasionally, I performed with the BMA band during actual funeral rituals. Ultimately, we became good friends. During the last eleven years, I arranged for their band to perform in Beijing several times, and Radio Beijing has broadcast their music. These activities gave them higher social status in the Beijing area and made their music better known.

In this thesis, all translations are my own except as identified. Terms that require more than one English word are hyphenated to identify them as specific, translated terms (e.g. “blowing-and-drumming players”). Chinese names and terms are transliterated throughout this paper in modern standard Mandarin. *Pinyin* spelling, the official romanization system of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) is used as a pronunciation guide.

This work will reveal two neglected treasures of China:

1. The continuing vitality of traditional Chinese music. Many Beijing *yinyue* pieces preserved by the BMA are ancient ones and therefore of great value. Yet, they are scarcely known outside of this region.
2. The continuing vitality of Confucianism. In the future, as the world moves inexorably into an era of globalization, I believe the Chinese would benefit greatly

from a renewed sense of appreciation for their ancient and time-honored principles of philosophy and behavior as embodied in Confucianism, just as the BMA has endeavored to do. The wisdom of Confucius allows the Chinese people to maintain their unique identity and to provide insights for their cultural survival into the twenty-first century and beyond.

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