EMBRACING WESTERN MUSIC VIA JAPAN:
On the Beginnings of Modern Music Education in China

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The last decade of the Qing dynasty (1902-1912) saw the emergence of the first generation of Chinese champions of Western music.¹ In Japan at the turn of the twentieth century a small number of Chinese students became formally involved in the learning of various kinds of Western music by enrolling in Japanese institutions. After their return to China, these Japanese-trained pioneers mapped out for themselves a significant place in the Chinese urban musical scene. Some dedicated themselves exclusively to Western music. Others were involved either simultaneously or successively in both Western and Chinese music. In all, these pioneers had a profound influence not only on the creation of Western-style musical education in China but also on the development of modern Chinese music.

This paper cannot give a detailed account of all those who were actively engaged in musical studies during this transitional period, that is, the very last decade of the Qing dynasty. Instead, it has chosen to focus on the lives and work of four of the most representative figures of this pioneering generation. These are Xiao Youmei (蕭友梅, 1884-1940), Shen Xingong (沈心工, 1870-1947), Zeng Zhimin (曾志忞, 1879-1929), and Li Shutong (李叔同, 1880-1942), all of whom, with the exception of Xiao, were known for their roles in the so-called School-Song

¹ The term “champions” is used here not in the sense of composers, instrumentalists, or singing virtuosos, but in the sense of song arrangers, songbook compilers, school music teachers, and translators of textbooks on Western music theory.
Although these four Chinese intellectuals shared a common scholar-gentry family background, early Confucian upbringing and a Westernized modern Japanese education, by the time they returned to China their careers had evolved in substantially different directions. Thus, Shen’s interests were almost exclusively in teaching and producing songs for school children; Zeng was known for his interests in Western music theory, his holistic approach to music education, and his advocacy of reforming Chinese music along Western lines; and Li – while his place in the annals of art history of modern China was undoubtedly due to his fame as an artist par excellence in the Renaissance sense – was also celebrated for his partiality for Schubert-style lieder (art songs) and his unsurpassed skill in composing lyrics to Christian hymn tunes. Xiao was different in that he was the only one among this pioneer generation who went on to pursue advanced study in the birthplace of Western music, Germany. Under the supervision of two of the most prominent German music theorists and musicologists, Hugo Riemann (1849-1919) and Arnold Schering (1871-1941), Xiao mastered skills in counterpoint, fugal writing, orchestration, and other compositional techniques, earning a doctoral degree in music education.3

The disparate character of these men is of particular significance. It points to the fact that the Chinese introduction of Western music was multi-faceted and by no means a monolithic enterprise. Their participation in Chinese musical life, in length of service and in type of activity, reflected considerable differences, as did the views they expressed about various questions concerning the nature and function of music in China. But in their totality they enable us to gain insight into certain conditions of Chinese musical life during the very last decade of the Qing dynasty and into some of the reasons for these conditions.

1. Pioneer Students of Western Music in Japan – An Overview

Compared to the tens of thousands of Chinese students who studied other subjects in Japan, the number of students involved in musical studies was extremely small. Only a handful did music, as opposed to the vast majority of the students who enrolled in the liberal arts, teacher training, and military studies. Writing in 1905, the Rev. J. Harada, based on figures obtained from the Chinese legation in Tokyo, mentioned that out of the 2,399

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3 Xiao Youmei embarked on his second overseas study journey in 1912, after serving briefly as Sun Yat-sen’s presidential secretary. In Germany he studied music theory and composition at the Leipzig State Conservatory of Music and at the same time enrolled in Leipzig University as a student of philosophy and education. In 1916, after successfully defending his thesis entitled Ein geschichtliche Untersuchung über das Chinesische Orchester bis zum 17. Jahrhundert (A Historical Study of the Chinese Orchestra Prior to the Seventeenth Century), he graduated from the University with a doctoral degree in music education.
students studying in Japan only “four are in the school of music.”⁴ According to Zhang Qian (張前), a music historian specialized in Sino-Japanese musical exchanges, altogether 77 Chinese students formally enrolled in various music schools in Japan between 1902 and 1920.⁵

The first Chinese student to enroll at the Tokyo School of Music (東京音楽學校) was probably Wang Hongnian (王鴻年, 1870-1946) who, while a student of law at Tokyo University, studied the organ as an elective during the 1902-03 academic year. In 1904, Zeng Zhimin (曾志忞), his wife Cao Rujin (曹汝錦), Xiao Youmei (蕭友梅), Xin Han (辛漢, better known by his pen-name Shi Geng (石更) and two other students started their music training at the same school. In 1907, there were nine Chinese students enrolled at the school. The total number in any given year, as far as the Tokyo School of Music was concerned, never exceeded twelve before 1919.⁶

Not all Chinese students studied at the state-funded Tokyo School of Music. Private schools where Chinese students took their music lessons included the Japan Music School (東洋音楽學校), the Tokyo Conservatory of Music (東京音楽院), the Music Academy for Girls, Girls' School for Music and Callisthenics, and other institutions.⁷

Without exception, all Chinese music students were privately funded and there is no record that government scholarships had ever been used for the purpose of learning music.⁸ Xiao Youmei, Xin Han and Li Shutong were granted government scholarships for studying education, law and fine art, not music.

2. Xiao Youmei and the German Classical Tradition

In her study of Chinese students and Japanese teachers in the decade of 1895-1905, Paula Harrell describes “the typical student” in the turn of the twentieth-century Tokyo as someone “in his early twenties, rather well educated, a product of the privileged class, yet likely as not from a family whose fortunes were on the downturn. His motives for going abroad to study included personal advancement, but also a vague yearning to contribute to a strengthened China.”⁹ Xiao Youmei, who more than anyone else was to profoundly influence the history of modern Chinese music, was one such student.

Born in Xiangshan (香山), the birthplace of Sun Yat-sen (孙中山), in Guangdong province on the eve of China’s defeat in the Sino-French War of 1884-1885, Xiao was tutored from an early age in the traditional manner by his father, who held the degree of xiucai (秀才, Licentiate). Xiao got his first taste of Western music in the Portuguese colony Macau (澳门) where his family moved to when he was a small child. In Macau, one of his neighbors was a Portuguese priest who liked to play the organ at home. So captivated was Xiao by the sound of the instrument that he, as he wrote years later in an autobiographic sketch, “could not stop admiring it” and very much “regretted not having the opportunity to learn to play the

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⁶ Ibid., pp. 372-78.
⁷ Ibid., pp. 276-77.
⁸ Ibid., p. 276.
In 1900, Xiao returned to Guangzhou (廣州) with his family. There, instead of enrolling him at a traditional Chinese school, his family sent him to Shimin Academy (時敏學堂, Shimin Xuetang), which was one of the earliest Chinese-run Western-style schools in the region, known for its modern curriculum. A year later, following the route of many ambitious young Chinese of some means, Xiao and nine other graduates of the school embarked on a study journey to Japan, where he stayed until 1910.11

Xiao’s stay in Japan followed a typical pattern at the time: intensive language study at a language school followed by a degree course in education at Tokyo Imperial University. But because of his interest in Western music he also took piano and singing as electives at the Tokyo School of Music.12 Like many radical students at the time, Xiao was also involved in political activism, joining the Alliance Society (同盟會, Tongmenghui), a secret society and underground resistance movement founded by his family friend Sun Yat-sen, Song Jiaoren (宋教仁), and others in Tokyo, in 1906. But unlike most of the radical students in Japan at the time, Xiao’s involvement in politics was not so much due to his political conviction as to his personal connection with Sun Yat-sen, who had been a close family friend ever since his Macau days. Through Sun, Xiao also became a close friend of Liao Zhongkai (廖仲愷, 1877-1925), one of Sun’s leading lieutenants in the Alliance Society, and Liao’s wife He Xiangning.

(何香凝, 1879-1972), a well-known artist. Because of Xiao's artistic interest and his seeming indifference to politics, Sun and his revolutionary associates often used Xiao's residence in Tokyo as a meeting place to avoid detection. Xiao served as lookout.13 His connection with the nationalists stood him in a good stead in later years.

Very little of Xiao's musical research survives. The only work dated at this time was a short article entitled “Yinyue gaishuo” (音樂概說, General Introduction to Music), which he wrote between February 1907 and April 1908. This brief article, serialised in Xuebao (學報, Journal of Academic Studies), a Chinese student publication in Japan, was the earliest ambitious attempt by a Chinese to familiarise the Chinese reading public with all facets of Western musical culture. Apart from introducing such basic concepts as tone, scale, interval, mode, melody, beat, tempo, rhythm and the like, Xiao Youmei’s article also contains passages on harmony, counterpoint, chords, form, modulation and other more sophisticated compositional techniques. Furthermore, Xiao also mentions such new disciplines as music psychology, acoustics and comparative musicology in order to illustrate the scientific basis of Western music.14

Because Xiao later went on to complete a doctorate in music in Germany and made his mark in the history of modern Chinese music in the two decades between his return from

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14 An excerpt of this article is reprinted in Chen Lingqun/陳聆群 et al. eds., Xiao Youmei yinyue wenji/蕭友梅音樂文集/The collected musical writings of Xiao Youmei. Shanghai: Shanghai yinyue chubanshe, 1990: pp. 1-2.
Europe in March 1920 and his death on December 31, 1940, most scholars tend to overlook his Japanese beginnings and concentrate on his later career. But Japan was where it all started. If Xiao’s curiosity for Western music was aroused in Macau, his penchant for “serious” or “classical” music was unquestionably fostered in Japan. His formal enrollment at the Tokyo School of Music certainly enhanced his interest in the music of the First Viennese School (1740-1825) in Western art music. The Tokyo School was the only specialized musical institute in East Asia at the time where aspiring musicians could be instructed in singing, piano, organ, orchestral instruments, harmony, theory, history of music and methods of music instruction.

As several scholars have pointed out, German influence and standards had started to predominate at the Tokyo School of Music after the appointment of a German composer, Franz Eckert (1852-1916), as a music consultant to Monbushō (文部省, Ministry of Education) in 1883. The appointment of an Austrian musician, Rudolph Dietrich (1867-1919), after Eckert’s resignation in 1886 further strengthened the German-Austrian influence. Other German nationals such as Anna Löhr also taught at the school. Given this background, it was small wonder that the school “became an important centre for the study and performance of Western music, operas, symphonies, and chamber music.”

During Xiao’s time there, the Tokyo School of Music had become so utterly Germanized that Izawa Shūji’s (伊澤修二, 1851-1917) guiding principle of blending Japanese music with elements of Western music was gradually abandoned. As a result, a committee for the study of Japanese music had to be formed in 1907 to address the problem. One of the experiments carried out by the committee was the use of the five-line staff notation to notate Japanese traditional music. This was to have a lasting impact on Xiao Youmei. Years later when he began to reform China’s traditional music along Western lines, he repeatedly argued for the adoption of the Western staff notation. In the 1930s, Xiao personally followed the Japanese example by painstakingly transcribing traditional Chinese repertoire including kunqu (昆曲) into Western staff notation.

Xiao’s training at the Tokyo School of Music also oriented him towards the more specialized conservatory-type of training. As seen through his later roles first as Dean of Studies at the

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18 Howe, Luther Whiting Mason: International Music Educator, p. 72.


20 Ibid.

Conservatory of Music of Peking University (1922-1927) and then Director of the National Conservatory of Music in Shanghai (1927-1940) – the first Chinese specialized musical institution geared to turning out professional musicians, composers and teachers – Xiao certainly adopted a professional and “scientific” approach to music education.\(^22\)

Xiao’s long stay in Japan (1901-1910) and his association with the Tokyo School of Music (1904-1910) may be part of the reason why after a short stint as Sun Yat-sen’s presidential secretary he chose to go to Germany for more advanced study in music. As Sondra W. Howe has pointed out, “Germanism was an important influence in the Meiji period and the specialized education of the German universities was admired.”\(^23\) Xiao was certainly well disposed towards things German, especially German classical music. According to Xiao’s niece Xiao Shuxian (萧淑娴, 1905-1991), when living in Beijing in the early 1920s, Xiao decorated his study with portraits and busts of Johann Sebastian Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert.\(^24\) In his own compositions Xiao also betrayed a strong Prussian-German influence, using chords and musical idioms favored by Bach, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert.\(^25\) Unlike the majority of the pioneers he was little interested in simple, march-like songs. Instead he demonstrated much preference for German lieder, as evidenced by the songs he composed and edited in the early 1920s. For the rest of his life Xiao remained faithful in both his taste and his own compositions to the tradition of the German classics.

3. Shen Xingong and the Introduction of School Songs

If Xiao’s almost ten-year stay in Japan was responsible for sowing the seeds of his love for Western art music, Shen Xingong’s ten-month sojourn there accounted for his life-long passion for Europeanized Japanese school songs.

Like Xiao, Shen Xingong, inspired by the reformist ideas of Kang Youwei (康有为) and Liang Qichao (梁启超), also went to Japan for the purpose of getting an advanced education in Western learning.\(^26\) But Shen differed from Xiao and other pioneers in that he belonged to

\(^{22}\) The historical significance of the conservatory has been pointed out elsewhere. See Chapter 6 of Jonathan Stock’s *Musical Creativity in Twentieth-Century China: Abing, His Music, and Its Changing Meanings* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1996) for a description of the conservatory tradition before and since 1949. The conservatory produced China’s first generation of professional composers, performers, theorists, and musicologists, and music educators. These graduates came not only to “dominate the musical life of the intelligentsia of the treaty ports” but also to “be regarded as authorities for acceptable musical standards and behaviour” throughout the country even to this day. See Isabel K. F. Wong, “From Reaction to Synthesis: Chinese Musicology in the Twentieth Century” in Bruno Nettle and Philip V. Bohlman eds., *Comparative Musicology and Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 43.


\(^{24}\) Xiao Shuxian/萧淑娴, “Ershi niandai de Xiao Youmei xiansheng/二十年代的萧友梅先生/Xiao Youmei in the 1920s.” in *Xiao Youmei jinian wenji*, p. 120.


an older generation and was already a degree holder before going to Japan in 1902.  

Shen’s interest in Western learning was aroused after attending lectures given by the English missionary and translator of Western scientific literature, John Fryer (1839-1928), at the Shanghai Polytechnic (格致書院, Gezhi Shuyuan) in the 1890s. In order to familiarize himself with more Western knowledge, he worked as a Chinese language instructor at St John’s College, an American-style liberal arts university founded by the Anglican missionary bishop of Shanghai, Samuel Isaac Joseph Scherecheskey (1831-1906), from 1895 to 1897. It is possible that Shen’s interest in Western music started at this time. St John’s had always emphasized the importance of music in education and choral singing especially had been an integral part of the extracurricular activities at the St John’s campus.  

Shen Xingong’s Japanese sojourn represented a discovery of career path even though his experience in at the Kōbun Gakuin (弘文學院, Vast Learning Academy), the school nicknamed the “Flagship of Chinese Education in Japan,” was not a happy one. Deeply impressed with the way in which singing was used in Japanese schools of all levels he was convinced that a similar system of music education was needed in China to impart modern knowledge and extol patriotism. But unlike Xiao, Shen was essentially an amateur musician because he never had any formal training in Western music. Shen certainly did not seem to have done any formal music training during his stay in Tokyo. “When the Chinese students’ association invited Mr. Suzuki Kemejiro (鈴木米次郎, 1868-1940) to teach them songs,” wrote Shen years later,  


27 For a highly eulogistic biographical sketch of Shen by his grandnephew, see Shen Qia/沈洽, “Shen Xingong zhuan/沈心工傳/Life of Shen Xingong,” Yinyue yanjiu/Music Research, 1983(4): pp. 54-8. For studies in English, see Liang, pp. 45-49; Yuen, pp. 144-51.


“I also went along.” As with most Chinese students in Japan at the time, Shen was quick to put knowledge to work and to integrate study with real life. “After learning only a thing or two about making songs,” Shen wrote, “I began to write my own songs.”

Shen Xingong’s interest in school songs prompted him to form the Society for the Study of Music (音樂講習會, Yinyue Jiangxi hui) in November 1902. In spite of its short existence (two months), this Tokyo-based student organization succeeded to a certain extent in accomplishing its goals of learning Western music theory and school song composing. The above-mentioned Suzuki Kemejiro, a prominent music educator and teacher of the Tokyo Higher Normal School, was one of the Japanese teachers who taught Shen and his fellow school-song enthusiasts rudiments of Western music theory and techniques of school-song writing.

Historians of modern Chinese music generally regard 1903 as the crucial year in which yuege (樂歌) gained a stronghold in Chinese schools. In February that year, Shen Xingong began to teach yuege at the Nanyang Primary School in Shanghai. For this pioneering role, Shen is extolled as “the father of school songs.”

The term xuetang yuege (學堂樂歌) (lit., school songs or songs for schools) is used as a broad and a specific term. In a broad sense, it signifies a musical phenomenon that emerged at the beginning of the twentieth-century, exerted the highest level of influence during the ensuing two decades and ran through to the 1930s. In a narrow sense, it denotes the type of European-style singing that was introduced to the new-style schools (學堂, xuetang), as opposed to the old-style private academies (私塾, sishu). As a new genre distinct from traditional musical forms, one of the salient features of the school song was its extensive use of imported tunes, mainly from Europe, America, and Japan, to fit new verses.

Writing in November 1920, Shen himself gave the following account of his part in the beginning of music teaching in China:

When modern schools were first established in our country, singing was the only subject that was missing in the school curriculum. I went to Japan and learned a thing or two about school songs under the guidance of Suzuki Kemejiro, a professor of school songs at the Tokyo Higher Normal School. After returning home in 1903 I began to work as a teacher at Nanyang Primary School and hence the start of [the practice of] singing and dancing. The first school [outside the Nanyang Primary School] to invite me to teach music was the Shanghai Wuben Women’s Academy. In addition, the Nanyang Middle School also employed me as a part-time teacher to deliver music lessons. Whenever I taught music at these schools, the classroom was always filled to overflowing. So full was the classroom that some of them had to stand outside.

34 Zhang Qian, Zhong-Ri yinyue jiaoliu shi: p. 297.
35 The earliest reference to Shen’s role as the originator of school song courses in China is found in Chen Maozhi, “Xiaoxue changge jiaoshoufa xu”: p. 124.
36 Qian Renkang, Xuetang yuege kaoyuan: p. 1.
37 Cited in Shen Qia ed., Xuetang yuege zhifu.
Whether or not Shen was the first person to start singing classes in Shanghai is of little concern to our present study. What matters is that from this time on, singing European-style school songs began to take hold in modern Chinese schools. Chen Maozhi (陳懋治), principal of Nanyang Primary School and a long-time associate of Shen, wrote in 1905:

[After the initial success of Shen's classes], various private schools followed suit by introducing singing classes in their school curriculum one after another. Meanwhile private and public schools in various provinces also started music courses after students who had studied music in Japan returned home and began to teach what they had learned in Japan.38

By the late 1900s teaching school songs had become ubiquitous. Wang Guowei (王國維, 1877-1927), arguably the first to provide a systematic exposition of the concept of aesthetics education to the Chinese reading public,39 was at one delighted by and concerned with the phenomenon. In 1907 he was compelled to write about the need to focus on the aesthetic value of school songs and be critical of what was being taught in the school-song courses.40

Shen Xingong shared Liang Qichao's instrumental view of arts and literature and believed that singing had a major role to play as a tool of national regeneration. This conviction saw him actively involved in setting up music societies, and running summer schools and short-term training courses for potential music teachers. Early in 1904, for example, he and another Japanese-trained music educator, Gao Yanyun (高硯雲), founded a musical society in Shanghai to promote the benefits of school-song singing in education and social reform.41 Encouraged by the warm response to his effort, Shen offered further singing classes for members of the elite Shanghai Study Society (滬學會, Hu Xuehui), to which Li Shutong belonged. In autumn that same year he also organized the Society for the Teaching and Practice of School Songs (樂歌講習會, Yuege Jiangxihui) at the Shanghai Wuben Women's Academy (務本女塾, Wuben Nüshu). Among the forty to fifty adult participants of Shen's Yuege Jiangxihui were such later leading educators as Xia Songlai (夏頌萊), Wang Yincai (王引才) and Wu Xin (吳馨).42 It was largely due to Shen's effort that singing school songs went beyond the confines of modern schools, broke the age barrier, and became a widespread social phenomenon that pervaded all strata of Chinese society. Huang Yanpei (黃炎培, 1878-1965), a noted reformer and promoter of vocational education, was so impressed by Shen Xingong's work that he credited him as a path-breaker in China's education.43

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38 Chen Maozhi, “Xiaoxue changge jiaoshoufa xu”: p. 124.
43 Huang Yanpei/黃炎培, “Chongbian Xuexiao changge ji xuel/重編學校唱歌集序/Preface to the Revised Edition of School Songs,” reprinted in Zhang Jingwei, *YYSL*: p. 137. Chen Maozhi remarked in spring 1905: “Nowadays in the part of Shanghai where a forest of school buildings stands one’s ear is filled with the sounds of musical instruments and songs. This is all due to the effort of Mr. Shen Xingong and the work of the Society for the Teaching and Practice of School Songs.” See Chen Maozhi, “Xiaoxue changgexiaoshoufa xu”: p. 124.
Shen Xingong and the Proliferation of School-Song Books

With the advent of singing classes came the demand for singing textbooks. Shen Xingong once again played a key role in the proliferation of school songs. He is regarded as the first Chinese to compile and publish an anthology of school songs. This, however, is not exactly true. Zeng Zhimin’s anthology, Jiaoyu changge ji (教育唱歌集, Anthology of Educational Songs), appeared a month earlier (April 1904) than Shen’s anthology Xuexiao changge ji (學校唱歌集, Anthology of School Songs). But of all school-song writers and compilers, Shen was undoubtedly the most influential and most prolific. From 1904 to 1937 he wrote over 180 school songs and published fourteen volumes of song collections.

Shen’s song anthologies can be seen as a response to “the sudden, urgently felt need for comprehensive knowledge beyond China’s traditional categories of learning.” The first volume of his Xuexiao changge ji series was so well received that within one year it was reprinted five times.

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Fig. 4. Shen (10th from left) and a group of trainee music teachers in Shanghai, ca. 1904. From: Shen Qia, ed., Xuetang yuege zhifu Shen Xingong (Taipei: Zhonghua minguo zuoqujia xiehui, 1990).

References:


47 Reynolds, China, 1898-1912: The Xinzheng Revolution and Japan: p. 118.
times. Encouraged by Shen’s success, other leading educators such as Hua Zhen (華振, 1883-1966), Zhao Mingchuan (趙銘傳, 1868-1940), Ye Zhongleng (葉中冷, 1880-1933), Xin Han (辛漢), Hou Hongjian (侯鴻鑑, 1872-1961), and Hu Junfu (胡君复), all of whom were trained in Japan, also became actively involved in the compiling song anthologies. This gave rise to a great publishing carnival of songbooks that ran from 1904 to the mid 1920s. Something of the craze for school songs can be seen in the fact that in the year 1904 alone, nearly eighty school songs were published in Chinese newspapers and periodicals. From 1903 to the eve of the May Fourth demonstrations in 1919, some 1300 school songs had appeared in various Chinese publications. The following table, even without including songs published in various journals and newspapers, gives an idea of the magnitude of songbook publishing in the last years of the Qing dynasty.

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<td>Li Shutong</td>
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<td>Hubei xuewuchu</td>
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<td>Xiaoxue changge jiaokeshu, chuji (Song textbook for Primary Schools), Introductory level.</td>
<td>Shangwu yinshuguan</td>
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<td>?</td>
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<td>?</td>
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<td>Xuexiao changge 學校唱歌 (Collection of School Songs)</td>
<td>Shanghai zhongxin shuju 上海中新書局</td>
<td>1906</td>
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<td>Wang Jiliang, Hu Junfu</td>
<td>Change youxi 唱歌游戏 (Singing Games)</td>
<td>Shangwu yinshuguan 商務印書館</td>
<td>1906</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xin Han</td>
<td>Zhongxue changge ji 中學唱歌集 (Collection of Songs for Middle Schools)</td>
<td>Shanghai puji shuju 上海普及書局</td>
<td>1906</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ye Zhongleng</td>
<td>Xiaoxue changge chuji 小學唱歌集 (Collection of Songs for Primary Schools), Vols. 1-3.</td>
<td>Shangwu yinshuguan 商務印書館</td>
<td>1907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ye Zhongleng</td>
<td>Xiaoxue changge chuji 小學唱歌集 (Collection of Songs for Primary Schools), Vols. 1-3.</td>
<td>Shangwu yinshuguan 商務印書館</td>
<td>1907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lu Baoheng, et al.</td>
<td>Xinbian changge ji 新編唱歌集 (Newly-Compiled Collection of Songs)</td>
<td>Hubei guanshuju 湖北官書局</td>
<td>1907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xuebu bianyi tushuju 學部編譯圖書局</td>
<td>Chudeng xiaoxue yuege jiaokeshu 初等小學樂歌教科書 (Elementary Song Textbook for Primary Schools)</td>
<td>Xuebu tushuju 學部圖書局</td>
<td>1907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jin Yi</td>
<td>Xin Zhongguo changge 新中國唱歌 (Songs for New China)</td>
<td>Hongren guan 宏人館</td>
<td>1907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chen Jun, et al.</td>
<td>Xiaoxue changge jiaokeshu 小學唱歌教科書 (Song Textbook for Primary Schools)</td>
<td>Shangwu yinshuguan 商務印書館</td>
<td>1907</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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51 For a brief bibliographical account of this anthology, see Han Guohuang/韓國鐄, “Zaoqi Xiyue Dongjian zuozheng de faxian/早期西樂東漸佐証的發現/The discovery of evidence concerning the early transmission of Western music to China,” in Zi Xi cu Dong, Vol. 1: pp. 8-14.
The proliferation of school-song books had an impact far beyond the field of music. Although initially intended for teaching purposes, Shen Xingong’s school-song series, for example, received such widespread use during the two decades between their first publication in 1904 and the rise of a new type of urban popular songs and musicals by Li Jinhui (黎锦晖, 1891-1967) in the late 1920s that they were a major contributor to the popularity of Western-style vocal music. So popular were Shen’s songs that a concerned Li Shutong wrote in 1906:

“Boys must have high aspirations” (男儿第一志气高, Naner diyi zhiqi gao) before they know much about music and those learning to play the organ begin to play “556655322123” before they learn the correct finger technique.52

“Boys must have high aspirations” was Shen’s first widely circulated hit song initially entitled “Physical exercise – Military drill” (軆操–兵操, Ticao-bingcao). The tune was adapted from a Japanese children’s song and “│55 66│55 3│22 12│3 0│” are the first four bars of the song.53 Writing in 1937, Huang Zi (黄自, 1904-1938), the Yale-trained composer and future Dean of Studies at the National Shanghai Conservatory of Music, recalled that when he was two or three years old his mother sang him songs written by Shen. When he started school in Shanghai at the age of seven the first music lesson the teacher taught him was a song by Shen.54 The novelist, literary theorist and historian Shen Yanbing (沈雁冰), better known by his pen name Mao Dun (茅盾, 1896-1981), also recalled the lasting impact Shen’s school songs had on him during his formative years and claimed that he still remembered the tune and lyric of Shen’s most famous song Huanghe (黄河, Yellow River) even in his later years.55

53 For a thorough musicological examination of the origins and involvement of the song, see Qian Renkang, Xuetang yuege kaoyuan: pp. 1-5.
55 Qian Renkang, Xuetang yuege kaoyuan: p.7.
Reasons for the phenomenal popularity of the school songs were not their artistic sophistication or melodic excellence but their simplicity and their social and political relevance. Shen’s songs were popular because they were easy to sing and could be easily adapted to serve various purposes. As can be clearly seen in the following table, the same compilers continued to be the driving force behind the school-song book-publishing phenomenon after the founding of Republican China.

### SCHOOL-SONG BOOKS PUBLISHED 1912-1918

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author/Editor</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shen Xingong 沈心工</td>
<td><em>Minguo changge ji</em> 民國唱歌集 (Republican Songs), Vols. 1-4</td>
<td>Shangwu yinshuguan 商務印書館</td>
<td>1912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shen Xingong 沈心工</td>
<td><em>Chongbian Xuexiao changge ji</em> 重編學校唱歌集 (Revised Edition of a Collection of School Songs), Vols. 1-6</td>
<td>Shanghai wenming shuju 上海文明書局</td>
<td>1912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wang Dechang, et al. 王德昌等</td>
<td><em>Zhonghua changge ji</em> 中華唱歌集 (Song Collection for New China), Vols. 1-4</td>
<td>Zhonghua shuju 中華書局</td>
<td>1912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hua Hangchen 華航琛</td>
<td><em>Gonghe guomin changge ji</em> 共和國民唱歌集 (Collection of Songs for National Citizens of the New Republic)</td>
<td>Shangwu yinshuguan 商務印書館</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hu Junfu 胡君复</td>
<td><em>Xin changge</em> 新唱歌 (Newly-Composed Songs)</td>
<td>Jiaoyubu 教育部</td>
<td>1913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feng Liang 馮棨</td>
<td><em>Xinbian changge jiaokeshu</em> 新编唱歌教科書 (New Textbook for Singing Songs)</td>
<td>Guangzhou shudetang 廣州樹德堂</td>
<td>1913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feng Liang 馮棨</td>
<td><em>Jun guomin changge jiaokeshu</em> 軍國民教育唱歌集 (Collection of Songs for the Education of a Military Citizenry)</td>
<td>Guangzhou yinyue jiaoyushe 廣州音樂教育社</td>
<td>1913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yu Yuan 余芫</td>
<td><em>Ertong changge</em> 儿童唱歌 (Children’s Songs)</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>1913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhang Xiushan 張秀山</td>
<td><em>Zuixin zhongdeng yinyue jiaokeshu</em> 最新中等音樂教科書 (The Latest Music Textbook for Middle Schools)</td>
<td>Xuanyuan ge 宣元閣</td>
<td>1913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Li Yanxing 李雁行, Li Zhuo 李倬</td>
<td><em>Zhongxiao xue changge jiaokeshu</em> 中小學唱歌教科書 (Singing Textbooks for Primary and Secondary Schools), Vols. 1-2</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>1913</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Just as Shen appropriated melodies of foreign and Chinese indigenous songs to serve his social, political and pedagogical purposes, later propagandists from both the Communist and Nationalist camps used his songs to express their respective political and nationalist concerns. This is nowhere clearer than in the military tunes which Shen appropriated from the Japanese navy. These were repeatedly set to new lyrics and used in military campaigns or at public rallies for mass mobilization.\(^56\) Shen himself was certainly quick to use his songs to express his social and political aspirations. Shortly after the founding of the Republic, for example, Shen wrote such songs as Zhonghua Minguo liguo ge (Founding Song of the Chinese Republic), Meizai Zhonghua (Magnificent China), Geming jun (Revolutionary Army), and Geming jun kaixuan (Triumph of the Revolutionary Army) to suit the political sensibilities of the new republican elite.\(^57\)

Given Shen and other school-song writers’ functional approach to the use of school songs, some historians of modern Chinese music hold them responsible for the rise of mass singing in modern China, claiming the school songs were essentially the forerunners of “qunzhong gequ” (songs for the masses) and “geming gequ” (revolutionary songs).\(^58\)

5. Musical Sources of the School-Song Books

Qian Renkang (錢仁康, 1914-2013), in his exhaustive study of the sources of the school-song music, has demonstrated that Europeanized Japanese school songs constituted one of the major root sources of the school-song melodies.\(^59\) This is hardly surprising given the crucial role Japan played in China’s reform in education. When proponents of the school-song movement in China first started writing or, strictly speaking, arranging songs, they naturally turned to Japanese school songs for inspiration. In some cases they followed the Japanese model blindly, substituting Chinese song lyrics for the original Japanese versions.

Shen Xingong, for example, was influenced in no small measure by Izawa Shūji. As illustrated by the following two examples, Shen’s Xuexiao change ji series was in fact directly inspired by, if not entirely based on, the song series, Shōgaku Shōka-shū Shohen (小學校唱歌集

\(^57\) Shen Qia, “Shen Xingong zhuan”: p. 60.
\(^59\) Qian Renkang, Xuetang yuege kaoyuan: pp. 64-109.
Fig. 5. Shen's earliest song “Ticao” and its Japanese originals.
From: Zi xi cu dong, vol. 2

Fig. 6. Contents page of Shen’s Xuexiao changge ji, vol. 2 (1906)
Shen’s method of teaching the scale and rhythm was also based on the methods Luther W. Mason had introduced to Japan in the early 1880s. For example, following Pestalozzian methods, Mason laid a strong emphasis on the value of the song method as opposed to note-reading. Shen followed Mason’s example by including theoretical instructions in his song anthologies rather than publishing them in separate book form.

By the mid-1900s, however, the period of servile imitation and indiscriminate adoption had come to an end. Zeng Zhimin wrote in 1905:

> When I first arrived in Japan [1901], I went to concerts and visited Japanese teachers. So impressed was I that I worshiped my Japanese teachers as if they had descended from a different planet. By the time I entered the Tokyo School of Music in winter 1903, however, I had begun to have grave doubts about the overall musical levels of the Japanese, the competence of the Japanese music teachers and the different ways they treated their students.

By 1906, Zeng had become so disillusioned with the standards of musical education in Japan that he began to urge those Chinese students who were serious about studying music “not to come to Japan but go to Europe.”

Zeng was not alone; even Shen Xingong grew bored with Japanese melodies:

> In the process of learning to write songs, I began by mainly selecting Japanese melodies. But nowadays I am no longer fond of these songs. I rather prefer European melodies. The small tonal range of Japanese tunes may be pleasing to the ear, but the tunes are trivial. By contrast, the tonal range of Western melodies is more complete and clear, and the music suggests a noble spirit.

Disillusionment with Japan led Chinese compilers of songbooks to turn to European, American and even traditional Chinese music for resources. Anthologies compiled from the late 1900s contained a large number of tunes adopted with or without modification from nineteenth-century European and American school songs as well as Chinese folk tunes.

Shen Xingong, as reflected in his later songbooks, showed a particular partiality for European folk melodies and Christian hymn tunes. This may have something to do with his early association with the missionary college St John’s. Other Chinese school-song writers and songbook compilers such as Ye Zhongleng, Hua Zhen, Zhao Mingchuan, Jin Yi and Hu Junfu also made frequent use of German, French, English and Scottish folk songs and American marching tunes in their song collections. Of the tunes most popular with Chinese songwriters and compilers were the French folksong *Ah! vous dirai-je, maman* (better known as *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star*), the Scottish folk tune *The Bluebell of Scotland* and the American minstrel

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64 Qian Renkang, *Xuetang yuege kaoyuan*: pp. 111-270.

65 Ibid.: pp. 276-82.
song *Rosa Lee*. The last named tune was so popular that Zeng Zhimin, Shen Xingong, Zhao Mingchuan, Xin Han, and Hua Zhen all included it in their songbooks.

Chinese school-song writers also set lyrics to the melodies written by Henry Rowley Bishop (1786-1855), Stephan C. Foster (1826-1864), Harvey Worthington Loomis (1865-1930), Annie F. Harrison (1884-?), and J. P. Ordway (1824-1880). Only few early Chinese songwriters made use of melodies composed by such classical composers as George Frederic Handel (1685-1759), Carl Maria von Weber (1786-1826) and Richard Wagner (1813-83).

In their searching for tunes that could be set to texts in proper rhythm, rhyme and phrasing, some Chinese school-song arrangers, such as Shen Xingong, also demonstrated a noticeable predilection for Chinese folk songs. Like Julia B. Mateer before him, Shen made good use of folk tunes such as *Molihua* (茉莉花, *Jasmine*) and *Fengyang huagu* (鳳陽花鼓, *Drum dong of Fengyang*). This contrasted sharply with Izawa's generally disparaging attitude toward Japan's indigenous musical tradition. Although he stressed the importance of teaching Japanese music, Izawa often held Japanese music, especially popular music (俗曲, *zokugaku*) in low esteem. Howe even goes as far as to suggest that Izawa's exception of court music (雅樂, *gagaku*) from criticism and his limited advocacy of traditional Japanese music “were perhaps to please his superiors.”

### 6. The Introduction of, and Controversy over, Number Notation

In emulating the Japanese example, early Chinese practitioners of Western music abandoned the traditional Chinese practice of singing by rote and adopted a new system of teaching sight-singing: number (or cipher) notation.

Known in China as *jianpu* (簡譜, simple or simplified notation), this method was based on the figure-notation proposed by Rousseau in 1742. It is also known as Galin-Paris- Chevé method. The method gained wide currency in France in the second half of the nineteenth century and was later spread to Switzerland, the Netherlands, Russia and England. The main characteristic of the method is its use of numerals 1-7 instead of the seven notes of the diatonic major scale with number zero representing the musical rest. It was based on the “movable
do” principle and was designed to help both students and “their often less than technically accomplished teachers.” 74 Because it was better suited for community singing and easy to master, it was favored by a number of social reformers. Leo Tolstoy, for example, used the method to teach peasant children music on his estate at Yásnaya Polyána. 75 The use of number notation became so widespread in Japan after Luther W. Mason’s appointment in 1880 that almost all Japanese songbooks published in the late Meiji period were notated in this method.

There were mainly two channels through which this notational method was introduced to China: Chinese students in Japan and Japanese teachers in China. On the one hand, early Chinese school-song writers learned the method through contact with their Japanese teachers and their familiarity with Japanese textbooks. 76 On the other hand, Japanese teachers employed by the Qing government and local officials taught this method at various normal schools and private educational establishments. The popularity of the notation was further enhanced when major publishers such as the Commercial Press in Shanghai were induced to issue songbooks employing this method. 77

Yet the Chinese copying from Japan was not without difference. Unlike most of the Japanese school-song writers who treated number notation as an “approach device” and presented it in conjunction with standard staff notation, the majority of their Chinese counterparts abandoned the use of staff notation altogether in order to make the reading of music more widely accessible. Consequently the mastering of staff notation was left only to more serious students. In treating number notation as an alternative form of notation early Chinese school-song writers and compilers introduced to China a system that was only suitable for basic community singing. The limitations of number notation were quickly exposed when more sophisticated music pieces were introduced. Because most of the Chinese school-song writers did not present number notation in conjunction with ordinary staff notation, students were at a loss as to how the two forms of notation were related. With no understanding of the staff notation, students were musically ill-equipped to tackle the works of Western composers such as Bach, Mozart or Beethoven.

The use of number notation was not universally approved in spite of its popularity. Dissenting voices without exception were from persons with better training in Western music. Zeng Zhimin, who was hailed by Liang Qichao as the first person to enter the Tokyo School of Music and to devote his life to the study of music, was perhaps the first to advocate the use of the European five-line notation. 78 Although himself a keen promoter of school songs,
Zeng never treated number notation as an alternative form of notation in its own right. In the teaching texts he compiled, Zeng always followed the Japanese example by presenting numerals in conjunction with staff notation. Clearly he intended to limit the use of number notation to the earliest learning stages. Having two forms of notation together (see Fig. 7) was his way of ensuring that the student would grow accustomed to the eventual use of staff notation.

Fig. 7. Zeng Zhimin’s Haizhan. Source: Jiangsu, No. 7 (1903): p. 67.

Li Shutong was also quick to voice his doubts about the wisdom of adopting number notation once he had begun to attend lessons in piano, music theory and composition at the Music Academy in Ueno Park (上野音樂學校, Ongaku Gakkō) in 1906. He wrote:
The Japanese used number notation in their shōka-shū published ten years ago; but nowadays they all use the five-line notation even for songbooks designed for kindergartens. [In contrast] number notation is still used in most of the recently published songbooks in China and taught in most of the Chinese schools. This does not seem to be quite right.\(^79\)

In his subsequent work, Li not only notated all his songs in Western five-line notation but also regretted having used number notation in his \textit{Guoxue changge ji} (國學唱歌集, Songs for National Learning). He even went as far as to urge his Chinese publishers to destroy the printing blocks and never reissue the anthology in number notation.\(^80\)

Li Shutong’s advocacy of staff notation may seem unexpected, as he had been a user of number notation prior to his departure for Japan in autumn 1905. But his was not an isolated case. Reformers of Chinese music at the time commonly held that Chinese music was somewhat backward. Staff notation, along with functional harmony, counterpoint, orchestration, and the superior manufacturing of Western instruments like the piano, was considered more “advanced” and “more scientific.”\(^81\) In fact, calls to substitute standard staff notation for China’s indigenous notational systems and to replace the “movable do” with the “fixed do” system were to become a recurring theme.\(^82\)

Yet despite repeated attempts to popularise staff notation, number notation was to remain the most popular notational system in China even to this day. A casual perusal of song anthologies and music textbooks for schools published in China throughout the twentieth century reveals the extraordinary popularity of number notation. Even as recently as 1979 when the Chinese government began the colossal project to collect and preserve living folk music repertories from all regions of China, number notation was preferred over staff notation.\(^83\)

7. Controversies Concerning School-Song Writing

Shen Xingong and most of his fellow school-song arrangers and writers choosing to use European and American popular tunes rather than relying on European classics to carry out their pedagogical goals is not surprising. It is first and foremost indicative of the pioneers’ musical pragmatism and their utilitarian impulses. After all, the Chinese promoted European-style school songs not because they admired Western artistic values but for practical and extra-


\(^80\) Ibid.


Gong, Hongyu, Embracing Western Music via Japan
musical considerations. To the pioneer songwriters, music was first and foremost a tool for propagating their social and political ideals. Their primary consideration was not to elevate the music tastes of the populace but to encourage as many people as possible to take part in music making. To achieve this objective they needed to produce short and simple songs which could be easily learned by the uninitiated. This was why lyrics rather than tunes were emphasized. But these songs could not just be simple slogan-like agitprop. To be an effective tool, they had to be artistically attractive as well. In this respect, the Chinese encountered difficulties not dissimilar to those met previously by the Protestant missionaries.84

The over reliance on foreign popular songs is also attributable to a general lack of formal training in Western music on the part of these pioneers. This lack of training sets them apart, both in ideas and practice, from those better trained in Western music like Zeng Zhimin, Xiao Youmei, Li Shutong and, later, the May Fourth promoters of Western music who prized the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European musical practice as the highest achievements of Western musical culture.

In experimenting with setting new lyrics to existing tunes and composing new songs, Shen Xingong, like the Protestant missionaries before him, placed a strong emphasis on the primacy of lyrics and the qualities of simplicity. Commenting on the phenomenal success of Shen's songbooks in 1906, Chen Maozhi used such adjectives as “natural”, “pure”, and “straightforward yet charming” to characterize Shen’s songs.85

Shen's lack of advanced music training and his emphasis on simplicity led him to focus almost exclusively on singing in unison with little interest in part-songs. He was content with simple melodic lines and unsophisticated rhythmic patterns with no attention to harmonization. His most renowned work Huanghe (黄河, Yellow River), for example, is written in the Western major mode C, 4/4 meter and the notes used are all within the natural register of a child's voice. Although Shen used semitones and a variety of note values, including quarter rests, dotted quarter notes, dotted eights, and occasional sixteenth notes and so on to create variety, the majority of the notes are simple half or quarter notes.86 These are also the principles followed previously by the missionaries.

Shen was by no means alone in stressing the principle of simplicity in school-song production. As Paul Bailey points out, “During the last years of the Qing… reformers and revolutionaries promoted the use of a more accessible written language free of the rigidities and obfuscation of the classical literary style.”87 Ye Zhongleng, compiler of the hugely successful textbook series Xiaoxue changge chuji (小學唱歌集, Collection of songs for primary schools), wrote in 1907: “As far as setting lyrics to existing tunes is concerned, it is important that the lyric should be written in an elegant yet easy to understand style.”88 Earlier Zeng Zhimin had

84 Starting from the early 1890s missionary attention to writing hymns in Chinese musical idioms and setting hymn lyrics to pre-existing Chinese melodies became such a phenomenon that the missionary journal The Chinese Recorder often carried lengthy articles debating the pros and cons of such practices.
85 Chen Maozhi, “Xuexiao changge er ji xu”: p. 155.
86 For a musicological analysis of this song, see Qian Renkang, Xuetang yuege kaoyuan: pp. 6-7.
88 Ye Zhongleng, “Nuzi xin change sanji liyan/《女子新唱歌》例言/Foreword to New Songs for Girls,”
expressed similar sentiments in the preface to his own song anthology *Jiaoyu changge ji* in 1904:

School song lyrics used in European and American elementary schools are written in a style easier than normal readers. In Japan also, most of the school songs are composed in plain everyday language. Children find them easy to understand yet fun to learn. [In contrast], the so-called school songs taught at our schools are written in a style that is ten times harder than normal school readers. In some cases, one single character or one sentence may require several pages of explanatory notes. Even so, children are still having difficulties understanding them. How can the purpose of teaching school songs be served if we persist using this kind of songs to teach our children?89

While Shen’s partiality for simple language and melodies may have stemmed from his experience in teaching songs to large classes of untutored children and adults, Zeng’s similar point of view may well have been influenced by the Japanese Genbunitchi (言文一致, language simplification) movement.

Starting in the pre-Meiji nineteenth century, the Genbunitchi movement aimed at replacing the difficult literary styles used in the Tokugawa period with a simple style approximating the spoken language. As a movement of far-reaching significance, the Genbunitchi also had its manifestation in the field of music education.90 Tamura Torazō (田村虎藏, 1873-1943) and Nassho Bejirō (納所辯次郎) were among the first to apply the principles of the Genbunitchi to song textbook compilation by making “the song texts simple and easily understandable.”91 This resulted in the publication of the ten-volume school-song compilation *Kyōka tekiyō yōnen shōka* (教科適用幼年唱歌, Childhood songs for school use) in 1900, not long before Zeng Zhimin’s arrival in Japan. Believing that “for small children one ought to write pieces that are based on their conversational every-day language,”92 Tamura Torazō further experimented with teaching Genbunitchi school songs at the elementary school attached to the Tokyo Higher Normal School.93 It is of course difficult to ascertain exactly how much Zeng was influenced by this Japanese movement. But judging from the following passage Zeng wrote in Japan in 1904, it is safe to say that he was certainly in agreement with Tamura Torazō on the need to replace the traditionally stilted poetic diction with lyrics written in plain speech:

As far as writing lyrics is concerned, it is better to be plain and simple than ornate. Instead of being too concerned with subtlety and elaborate diction, it is better to be straightforward and natural; and rather than using ancient expressions overloaded with allusions, it is better to keep

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92 Ibid.: p. 84.

93 Ibid.: p. 82.
the lyric plain and simple so that the lyric can flow smoothly.\(^\text{94}\)

Not every school-song writer was content with writing songs in the vernacular, however. Some school-song writers complained about the time and emphasis given to such exercises at the expense of literary elegance. Compounded of pride, suspicion, and resentment, criticisms were particularly aimed at the palpable neglect shown to China’s own cultural accomplishments. Even the most reasonable and cosmopolitan music critics showed evidence from time to time of a resentment that was clearly very close to the surface. Wang Guowei, for example, made his dissatisfaction clear by declaring publicly that insofar as artistic value and aesthetic appeal were concerned, new school-song lyrics were immeasurably inferior to ancient masterpieces.\(^\text{95}\)

8. Li Shutong’s Thoughts and Practice of School-Song Writing

Among a chorus of dissenting voices, Li Shutong’s was perhaps the loudest. Li, like Wang Guowei, was concerned that an all-out acceptance and imitation of Western styles would lead to the abandonment of native artistic traditions. He was particularly alarmed that in their eagerness for European and Japanese songs the early Chinese school-song writers were neglecting highly developed traditional art forms such as the various styles of classical poetry-writing (詞章, cizhang). Instead of applauding Zeng and Shen’s efforts with unreserved enthusiasm, Li made his stance clear by publishing his own song anthology appropriately entitled Guoxue changge ji in Shanghai in June 1905. \(^\text{96}\)

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94 Zeng Zhimin, “Jiaoyu changge ji xue,”: p. 208. It is interesting to note that while Shen Xingong and Zeng were advocating the use of simple language in school-song writing, Chen Duxiu (陳獨秀, 1879-1942) and Hu Shi (胡適, 1891-1962) were also busy promoting the importance of baihua (白話, vernacular) in literary reform. See Chow Tse-tsung, *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1967: pp. 271-72.


The publication of Li Shutong’s anthology represented a facet of the school-song movement that had a deep attachment to China’s traditional cultural forms. Moreover, it signalled that not all reform-minded individuals were in agreement with Shen and Zeng in the way they promoted Western-style school songs in China. In contrast to Shen’s use of simple everyday idioms, Li, before he went to Japan, chose his song texts from such classical collections as the *Shijing* (詩經, *Book of Songs*) and *Chuci* (楚辭, *The Songs of the South*). He also set poems by Li Bo (李白, 701-62 A. D.), Li Shangyin (李商隱, 813-58 A. D.), and Xin Qiji (辛棄疾, 1140-1207 A. D.) to tunes selected from the traditional *Kunqu* and other traditional repertoire. Furthermore, against the general trend of setting texts to patriotic marching songs, Li selected melodies that resembled ritual music but also showed a particular fondness for Christian hymn tunes. Several of the songs included in his anthology are set to hymn tunes. For example, *Ai* (愛, *Love*) is based on the hymn *Jesus Loves Me* by William B. Bradbury; both *Huashen* (化身, Incarnation) and *Nan’er* (男儿, Men) take their tune from the hymn *Nearer, My God, To Thee* by Lowell Mason; and *Wuyi* (無衣, Having no clothes) uses the music of a hymn by Sarah Hart entitled *Little Drops of Water*.97

Li’s deep attachment to China’s classical poetry and traditional music remained undiminished even after he began formal study of oil painting at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts (東京美術學校, Tōkyō Bijutsu Gakkō) and the piano, music theory and composition at the Music Academy in Ueno in 1906.98 In fact, Li’s stay in Japan served to reinforce his faith in China’s literary tradition. Writing in 1906 under his pen name Xi Shuang (息霜), Li remarked:

> After I arrived in Japan and did some desultory readings of Japanese school songs, I discovered that about ninety-five percent of the lyrics are actually modelled after our ancient poems. (Most of the major Japanese writers of song texts are well versed in classical Chinese poetry). In recent times Chinese scholars have been so preoccupied with preparing for the imperial exams (帖括, tiekuo) that they neglected the art of poetry writing (詞章, cizhang). As a result, [the art of] classical poetry and prose writing has been frowned upon. Later when Western learning was introduced and became fashionable, the word *cizhang* almost fell into oblivion. Those who have neither learning nor skill treated it as trash and denounced this fine classical tradition as old and obsolete. As a result, the language of elegance is all but abandoned. Ironically when they heard Japanese school songs they marveled at them, eulogizing them as their ideal. Little did they know that what they considered to be quintessentially Japanese was actually a cast-off from our classical poetry.99

This attachment to Chinese literary and artistic tradition was not a spur-of-the-moment thing. It had its origins to his Confucian upbringing, political affiliation and his versatility in various Chinese traditional art forms. Son of a wealthy salt merchant and high-ranking

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Li Shutong, who also has the distinction of being “the first Chinese student to have received thorough training in Western art in Japan,” became known for his artistic flair in poetry, calligraphy, painting and seal carving when he was a still youngster living in the treaty port of Tianjin.

Li Shutong’s literary and artistic preferences were strongly conditioned by the intellectual milieu of the time and the kind of intellectual company he found himself in. He was essentially in harmony with the proponents of the guocui (國粹, National essence) movement in terms of intellectual temperament and literary practice. During his exile in Shanghai’s French concession (1898-1905), his circles of friends included Xu Huanyuan (許幻園, 1878-1928), Cai Xiaoxiang (蔡小香, 1862-1912), Yuan Xilian (袁希濂, 1874-?), and Zhang Xiaolou (張小樓, 1877-1950), all of whom were known for their artistic proclivities and their attachment to traditional Chinese arts. Together they spent much of their leisure time practising calligraphy, Chinese-style painting, seal carving, poetry composing and making music. In Shanghai, Li also spent much of his time cultivating the techniques of Peking opera singing and acting, an interest he had developed since his Tianjin days; he even established a reputation as a skilled amateur performer (票友, piaoyou).

Fig. 9. Li Shutong dressed in a Peking opera costume (1901).
Source: Hongyi dashi quan ji

100 Jin Mei, Hongyi fashi Li Shutong: p. 1.
Li Shutong’s interest in traditional art forms, however, did not mean that he was indifferent to Western learning and politically conservative. Like Shen Xingong, Li was strongly supportive of the 1898 Reform Movement and considered himself a member of the reform party led by Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao. One often-quoted example of his affiliation with the reformers is his carving of a seal bearing “Nanhai Kangjun shi woshi/南海康君是我師/Kang Youwei is my teacher.” After fleeing to Shanghai in late 1898 on the arrest of the reformers, he not only began formal Western learning, but also became involved with a group of radical revolutionaries. Beginning in 1902, for example, Li studied economics for a time at Nanyang Gongxue and while there, he and Shao Lizi (邵力子, 1882-1967), later known for his important role in the Nationalist government, became two favorite students of Cai Yuanpei (蔡元培, 1868-1940).

As one of the three most “notable” composers of Chinese school songs (the other two being Shen Xingong and Zeng Zhimin), Li Shutong differed from the majority of the school-song writers in many respects. But the most important difference, as far as music is concerned, was his partiality for the European-style art song and his effort to promote it in China. It has been rightly pointed out that Li’s attainment in various forms of classical Chinese poetry writing enabled him to write his lyrics in “a new form of literary written style which is comprehensible without sacrifice of the classical written structure.” As a songwriter, Li certainly exhibited a high degree of sensitivity to the relationship between the lyric and the melody. By carefully studying the melodies before writing the lyrics, Li succeeded in making “the Western melodies he adopts sound as though they were written for the Chinese lyrics.”

The unique qualities aside, Li’s songs, most of which were written after his return from Japan, indeed suggest a willingness on his part to embrace the Western art song tradition without reservation. Unlike his contemporary songwriters, Li’s songs were often written with piano accompaniment and harmonization. His most celebrated three-part song Chunyou (春游, Spring Outing), for example, is a good example of his skilful use of this transplanted musical form.

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107 Ibid..
109 Unlike Shen and Zeng, who made their impact mainly in the realm of music education, Li was known for his versatility in all branches of the arts. Borrowing Joseph Levenson’s term “amateur ideal”, Chang Chi-jen, a historian of modern Chinese music, likens Li to the European “Renaissance Man.” See Chang, “Alexander Tcherepnin, His Influence on Modern Chinese Music” (Ed.D. diss., Columbia University College, 1983), p. 19. I would not go as far as quoting Levenson’s term to categorise Li’s whole artistic endeavours, as Li’s participation in music and the fine arts had a strong utilitarian ring to it and was by no means just for the purpose of “self-cultivation”. But it is clear that Li Shutong’s literary and artistic accomplishments do reflect his holistic approach to the arts.
111 Liang, “Western Influence on Chinese Music in the Early Twentieth Century”: p. 64.
9. Zeng Zhimin and the Introduction of Western Musical Theory to China

Coincided with the emergence of the first generation of Chinese songwriters and arrangers, the first decade of the twentieth century also saw the appearance of Chinese compiled or translated textbooks on Western musical theory. As in the case of school-song compilation, Chinese students trained in Japan, Zeng Zhimin especially, played a leading role in the translation and compilation of instructional materials in China.

Like Shen Xingong, Zeng Zhimin was born in Shanghai to a family of wealthy but progressive merchant background. He went to Japan with his wife Cao Rujin in 1901. While his wife studied singing and violin at the Tokyo School of Music, Zeng enrolled as a law student at Waseda University (早稲田大学, Waseda Daigaku) at his father's request. However, early records of the Tokyo School of Music show that from 1904 to 1907 Zeng studied singing and piano lessons there.113

Differing from the majority of his fellow songwriters and arrangers, Zeng Zhimin believed that the practical and theoretical aspects of music formed an essential partnership and the early steps in musical education should encourage the principles of musical theory to proceed in equal measure with instruction in singing and instrument playing. This stress on music theory is clearly reflected in the number of books and articles he either authored or translated. Zeng began to write about musical theory before he formally enrolled at the Tokyo School of Music. His first work, entitled “Yueli dayi (樂理大意, Introduction to music theory), was published in the Tokyo-based Chinese student periodical Jiangsu (江蘇) in 1903. In 1904 he published a book entitled Yuedian jiaokeshu (樂典教科書, Textbook of Musical Grammar) in Tokyo. In 1906 he published first of his series, Yuedian dayi (樂典大意, Outlines of music theory).

Although around that time a number of similar books had been published by Christian missionaries such as Elias B. Inslee, John M. W. Farnham, Julia B. Mateer, Carstairs Douglas, and Timothy Richard, Zeng's book, based on an English textbook translated into Japanese

\[^{114}\text{Zeng Zhimin, “Jiaoshou yinyue zhi chubu”: p. 107.}\]
\[^{115}\text{For an account of music textbooks published before Zeng's writings, see Gong Hong-yu, “Jidujiao}\]

Fig. 11. Zhen Zhimin (2nd right), his wife Cao Rujin (2nd left) and his brother-in-law Cao Rulin (曹汝霖, 1st right) in Japan (1901). From: Han Guohuang yinyue wenji, vol. 1.

Fig.12. Cover pages of Yuedian jiaokeshu (1904) and Yuedian dayi (1906)
129

by Suzuki Komojiro, seems to be the first of its kind ever written by a Chinese with no Christian affiliation.116 Because of his formal training in Western music, Zeng was able to define sounds, notes, stave, rise and fall, and so on in a much more scholarly manner than his Chinese contemporaries. Of particular significance was Zeng’s introduction of a welter of technical terms and their definitions into the Chinese lexicon.117

Unlike Shen and the majority of school-song compilers, Zeng was also interested in the more sophisticated compositional and performing techniques of Western art music. In autumn 1905, barely a year after his enrolment at the Tokyo School of Music, he published his “Hesheng lüeyi” (和聲略意, Basic Principles of Harmony) in installment in the Tokyo-based radical Chinese student periodical Xingshi (醒獅, Awakened Lion).118 Yet, Zeng’s interest in advanced Western compositional techniques did not seem to dampen his enthusiasm for simple song writing because in the same year he also wrote “Jianyi jinxingqu” (簡易進行曲, Simple Marches).119

10. Zeng Zhimin as a Musical Pedagogue

Zeng Zhimin’s attention to the practical uses of music also saw him devoting much energy to the musical effect of school singing. For him, unless students were taught singing in a systematic way and instructed in musical theory, nothing enduring could be achieved.120 Because of this conviction, Zeng published as early as 1903 his article “Singing and Methods of Teaching Songs” (唱歌及教授法, Changge ji jiaoshou fa).121 A year later, he wrote “Basic Steps in Music Teaching/教授音樂初步/Jiaoshou yinyue chubu,” which was an adaptation of Luther Whiting Mason’s The National Music Teacher Course published in 1870122 and partially translated into Japanese by Yaichi Uchida in 1883 as


116 Zhang Qian, Zhong-Ri yinyue jiaoliu shi: p. 287.
118 According to Chen Lingqun, Zeng’s article is the earliest of its kind ever written by a Chinese. See Chen Lingqun, “Zeng Zhimin”: p. 45.
121 Jiangsu, No. 7 (1903): pp. 59-74.
Ongaku shinan (音樂指南, A handbook for music).

Zeng also stressed the importance of keyboard instruments in learning music. From an advertisement placed in Xingshi (醒狮) in 1905, we learn that his Fengqin lianxi fa (風琴練習法, Methods of Playing the Organ), along with his Jiaoyu changge ji, Guomin changgeji (國民唱歌集, Collection of Songs for National Citizens), and other teaching manuals, were to be published in Shanghai by the Kaiming Book Co. (開明書店, Kaiming Shudian). In a lengthy article he wrote in 1904 he suggested manufacturing Western organs and pianos as one of the four ways to reform Chinese music. Organ playing also featured prominently in the detailed curriculum he prescribed for serious learners of music. For kindergarten and primary-school music teachers, he recommended the two-volume organ manual Fengqin jiaoze ben (風琴教則本, Manual for Organ Playing) published in Japan should be used as a textbook. But for those intending to work in secondary schools should study the more advanced manual Gaodeng fengqin jiaoze ben (高等風琴教則本, Manual for Advanced Organ Playing) in addition to Fengqin jiaoze ben.

Zeng Zhimin not only wrote about the importance of instrumental music in music education he also practiced what he preached. After returning to China in 1907, he, like Shen Xingong before him, joined with two Japanese-trained musicians to hold a summer music course in Shanghai teaching Western brass, woodwind and percussion instruments as well as Western music theory to the general public. In the following year, Zeng set up a school for underprivileged children and purchased various Western instruments for teaching use. He even established a forty-piece orchestra at the school with himself as conductor and his wife as concertmaster.

It should be pointed out that although Zeng showed a keen interest in the technical aspects of Western music, it would be wrong to assume that he was a believer in art for art’s sake. On the contrary, Zeng’s promotion of Western music theory was motivated as much by his belief in the social value of Western music as by his interest in its artistic form. He repeatedly emphasised the moral and ethical virtues of music in education and his conviction that the exclusion of music in China’s traditional education was partially responsible for China’s decline as a civilized nation. He wrote in 1903:

Music is emphasized by people in countries as far as Europe, America and as near as Japan whenever they talk about education. Singing as a subject of study in elementary schools is ranked as highly as their national language... Music can inspire good feelings and help cultivate joyful disposition and therefore as a subject of study it is indispensable.

In 1904 he reiterated his utilitarian viewpoint by stating that music was the most urgently needed tool to bring about a total transformation of Chinese society. He even went as far as

125 Zeng Zhimin, “Yinyue jiaoyu lun”: p. 56.
to assert that music brings more benefits to society than it does to the education of children. He spelled out the ethical, intellectual and physical benefits of music: music is good for ethical education because it fosters a sense of loyalty, filial piety, public-spiritedness, self-determination and independence; music is a good for intellectual education because it helps the acquiring of general as well as z knowledge; and music is good for physical education because it is conducive to the fostering of a martial spirit and to the development of physical agility.130

Apart from its apparent Confucian colouring, Zeng’s emphasis on the intellectual, physical and particularly moral benefits of music in education may be understood in the broader context of developments in Japanese educational thought at that time. Several writers have pointed out the moralistic tendency in Japanese educational thinking in the 1880s and 1890s.131 Zeng’s rationale certainly bears a strong resemblance to statements Izawa Shūji made in his introduction to Shōgaku shōkashu shōhen (小學唱歌集初編, A selection of songs for primary school students) in 1881.132

Zeng might also have been influenced by the writings of the American educator David Perkins Page (1810-1884), whose Theory and Practice of Teaching was translated into Japanese (彼日氏教授論, Peiji-shi kyōjuron) as early as 1876. Page chose music “not as an end in itself or for its artistic merits… but for its practical effectiveness in character building, maintaining good order, and promoting clear enunciation and good reading ability.”133 The didactic and moral underpinnings of Page’s views of music teaching would have certainly struck a harmonious chord with anyone with a Confucian educational background:

[Music] promotes good reading and speaking, by disciplining the ear to distinguish sounds; and it also facilitates the cultivation of the finer feelings of our nature. It aids very much in the government of the school, as its exercise gives vent to that restlessness which otherwise would find an escapement in boisterous noise and whispering – and thus it often proves a safety valve, through

210.

130 Ibid..
132 Izawa Shūji’s introduction is cited in Eppstein, “Musical Instruction in Meiji Education”: p. 28.
133 Eppstein, “Musical Instruction in Meiji Education”: p. 4.
which a love of vociferation and activity may pass off in a more harmless and a more pleasing way…

Music is the language of the heart, and though capable of being grossly perverted… its natural tendency is to elevate the affections, to soothe the passions and to refine the taste… It is the united testimony of all who have judiciously introduced singing into their schools that it is among the best instrumentalities for the promotion of good feelings and good order.\(^{134}\)

Zeng’s belief in the primary importance of music as a tool in social and political reform also led him to view China’s indigenous musical traditions from a strongly utilitarian perspective. This is manifested in his formation of a clear distinction between the types of music to be used or discarded. As a man well versed in Chinese traditional learning he was well aware that China had a long tradition of using music as a means of education. But the so-called traditional “liu yi” (六藝, six arts) practice, in his view, was lost.\(^{135}\) Chinese music of his time, he declared, was only a kind of “social music” (社會音樂, shehui yinyue). By “social music,” Zeng was referring to Chinese popular entertainment music such as the solo songs (小曲, xiaoqü) dominant in urban centers, theatre music (戯曲, xiqü), and song-narratives (曲藝, qüyi). In his view, this type of music was for sensual pleasures, and, as a cheap form of entertainment commonly practiced and enjoyed by people of low socio-economic stratum, it was morally degenerate and licentious. Because these kinds of music had no value in exalting ethical virtues, Zeng argued, they were not appropriate to be used in schools or as an agent for social and political change. Moreover, because of its degenerate nature, this music had to be replaced by “school music” (學校音樂, xue xiao yinyue). The term “school music” suggests that it was only used within China’s modern schools. In fact, what Zeng meant was a new type of music, namely Westernised music capable of functioning as a didactic tool. In Zeng’s view, this kind of music was not only more refined artistically, more scientific in terms of its notation, but, most importantly, capable of promoting social and political change.\(^{136}\)

In essence, Zeng’s distinction between “school music” and “social music” can be understood as a natural outgrowth of the traditional Confucian distinction between “vulgar music” and “refined music.” As Kuo-huang Han has pointed out, “For centuries Confucian scholars had shown sharp divisions in thought concerning the two types of music, namely, secular and refined (correct) music.”\(^{137}\) Confucius himself certainly had much to say about the harmful effects that vulgar music could have on a country and its people. One often-quoted example is his indignation upon hearing the music of the states of Zheng (鄭) and Wei (衛):

The tones of Zheng and Wei were tones of a world in chaos and compare to the dilatory ways of the people. The tones of the Mulberry Grove above the Pu River were tones of a state facing extinction. The administration was dissolute, and the people wandered about haplessly. They vilified their superiors and behaved with such selfish abandon that nothing could save the situation.

Zheng tones are of a mind that tends toward doting excess and licentiousness. Song tones are of a mind frail and effeminate. Those of Wei are of a mind rushed and vexed, those of Qi a mind

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\(^{134}\) David Perkins Page, *The Theory and Practice of Teaching* (1873), quoted in Eppstein, “Musical Instruction in Meiji Education,” pp. 4-5.


haughty and remote. All four of these are excessive in their (external) attractiveness, and they are, therefore, harmful to one's virtue.138

Due to the belief in the overwhelming power of music and the presumed relationship between music, emotions, moral character, and political governance, Confucian-trained scholars had a natural aversion to the type of music that was associated with sensual enjoyment. Coming from a privileged background, Zeng, as well as all the educated classes in China, was doubtless well versed in Confucian ideas about music and, as demonstrated by his division of music, he certainly shared Confucius' political and moralistic concerns.

While there can be no doubt that Zeng Zhimin's elitist and functional viewpoint owes its origin to his Confucian upbringing, his ideas and attitudes should also be placed in the context of Japanese musical iconoclasm. Zeng's contemptuous attitude toward Chinese popular entertainment music resembles a similar attitude towards indigenous Japanese secular musical tradition exhibited slightly earlier by his Japanese mentors. As mentioned above, Izawa Shūji, the most influential music reformer and educator of the Meiji era, was deeply ambiguous in his attitude towards popular Japanese music. A comparison of the following two passages, one by Izawa and the other by Zeng, shows a clear ideological affinity:

The popular music of Japan has remained for many centuries in the hands of the lowest and most ignorant classes of society. It did not advance moral or physical culture, but was altogether immoral in tone. It is against the progress of the education of society. It is against the introduction of good music into the country.139

There must be a clear distinction between “school music” and “social music”…. “Social music” has fallen into the hands of the low and humble classes and is no longer salvageable. What we should study is “school music.” Nowadays most of the “social music” is lascivious and degenerate. However, once “school music” is developed, music of the other kind will be eliminated through natural selection.140

Clearly both Izawa Shūji and Zeng Zhimin were deeply steeped in the moralistic tradition of Confucianism and both of them saw music primarily as a force for either good or evil. Seeing that the outcome of education is a moral one, both Izawa and Zeng believed in the importance of promoting music of the appropriate kind.

But unlike Izawa Shūji who had a grudging respect for some forms of traditional Japanese music such as the court music Gagaku (雅楽, ancient imperial court music and dances), Nō (能, theatre music), biwa (琵琶, Japanese short-necked plucked lute) music, and even some forms of “popular music” like Nagauta (長唄, a kind of traditional Japanese music which accompanies the kabuki theatre) and koto (箏) music, Zeng's iconoclasm was much more radical. As far as music is concerned, he argued, a fundamental change in thinking must take place:

We must not only get rid of the outworn ideas that consider everything archaic and traditional as good but also do away with the bad habit of chasing current fashions. If something is beneficial


to the country, we should invent it. But if we cannot invent it, we should adopt and imitate it.141

Reiterating the importance of a thorough knowledge of Western music as a prerequisite in ultimately creating a new music for China, he wrote, “Before we talk about music reform and create a new music for China, we must understand what music is.” Music, he argued, like any other scholarly subject, should be studied systematically and diligently. The first step in musical study, Zeng suggested, was music theory. “Those who know nothing about music theory should neither attempt to compose music, nor play musical instruments.”142

Conclusion

As seen above, the first decade of the twentieth century saw Chinese intellectuals assuming the role of agents of Western music. One salient feature of this Chinese agency is its utilitarian orientation which had been shared by missionaries and reformers before them. A small number of Chinese pioneers of Western music showed some genuine interest in the artistic and aesthetic qualities of Western music as an expressive art. But the vast majority were primarily concerned with the practical utility of European-style songs as a means for enlightening the populace, strengthening the country and transforming the society. Because of the important roles they played in the introduction of “school songs” as a means of social and educational reforms into modern Chinese schools, members of this generation are often termed songwriters (樂歌作家, yuege zuojia),143 song-arrangers, or “music educators” (音樂教育家, yinyue jiaoyuja).144 In other words, their historical significance lies not so much in their roles as agents of Western art music as in the part they played in promoting yuege (樂歌) in China’s modern school system. Due to their collective efforts a singing phenomenon known as the school-song movement (學堂樂歌運動, xuetang yuege yundong) came into being. In this sense, Chang Chi-jen, a Taiwan-based modern historian of Chinese music, is right in defining the term “modern Chinese music” as “a bi-product of political reformation and revolution.”145

Yet, despite their overtly utilitarian motives and selective approach to Western music, these early practitioners of Western music greatly facilitated the wider distribution of Western musical knowledge among the Chinese urban population and were largely responsible for instilling a set of new musical values in the minds of educated Chinese. This small but extremely influential group of pioneering students were responsible not only for the institutionalization of musical instruction in modern Chinese schools but also for the popularization of Western ways of teaching music in Chinese society. They were responsible for the formation of a new musical tradition in China.146

143 Qian Renkang, Xuetang yuege kaoyuan: pp. 1-2.