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CHOPIN, PIANOS AND EAST ASIAN MODERNITY

Reflections on 'cultural lag'

For music to have an identity, it seems, it must belong to someone. And when a claim to ownership is staked, signification is directed towards the stakeholder. Perhaps the clearest illustration of this is the trans-local appropriation of traditional (demotic) music right across Europe from the mid-nineteenth century to the present. Initially owned by local premodern societies, this music was claimed first by national schools of art music, then by the folklore movement, and finally by youth culture in various ethno-pop guises. In each case the claim was validated by a consensus forged by relevant socio-cultural communities, successively more wide-ranging in demographic, and the music acquired new meanings to meet the needs of those communities. Similar mechanisms, though less overt, can be identified in the transmission of art music, as I tried to demonstrate thirty years ago in a study of Chopin reception.[1] Generalising – no doubt rather too boldly – from the critical record, I argued for a 'Polish composer' in Poland, a 'Slavonic composer' in Russia, a 'romantic composer' in France, a 'salon composer' in England, and a 'classical composer' in Germany. In due course, Chopin also became a 'modernist composer', whether this was valued or denigrated. He was a figure ahead of his time, and was so characterised in several quarters, most notably in the new music circles of Russia and France.

These distinctive images of Chopin were prevalent in the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, and common to all of them was a presumption of European ownership. Accordingly, however 'Chopin' was constructed, his music was deemed to be available for export, for reception by communities far removed from its homeland. In our own time, however, Chopin's music no longer belongs to Europe. It is no longer exportable. To make this place-specific, I suggest that it is an anachronism to speak of Chopin reception in East Asia today, since he now belongs to these cultures too. Already by the early twentieth century, the piano had emerged as a potent symbol of modernity in parts of East Asia, and the competition successes of pianists from various parts of the meta-region – especially in the International Chopin Competition – have since become a matter of national pride.[2] This is especially true of Japan, where piano competitions can sometimes

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Jim Samson, 'Chopin Reception: Theory, History, Analysis', in John Rink and Jim Samson (eds), *Chopin Studies 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 1–17.

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At the Qualification stage of the 18th International Chopin Competition, 164 pianists from 33 countries were admitted. Of these, 43 were from China, 31 from Japan, and 16 from South Korea, adding up to well over half the total number.

invoke the spirit of the Olympics (it is fitting that Chopin's G minor Ballade accompanied Yuzuru Hanyu's triumphant figure skating performance at the 2018 Winter Olympics). In a characteristic gesture of outreach, and a brush with popular culture, this enthusiasm even extended to the popular *Manga* (and later *Animé*) series *Forest of Piano*, where the Chopin Competition served as a major theme, as referenced by Junichi Tada in our penultimate essay. And we need only turn – with Tim Summers – to the video games industry to note that the composer's status as a cultural icon, along with pedigreed connotative values, has been secured for a yet wider youth culture.

Accepting that it is unhelpful to speak of transcultural encounters between European music and East Asian communities today, we acknowledge that the picture looked very different in the early years of the trading missions. Jen-yen Chen reminds us that back then the impact of European music on place-restricted social elites (initially expatriate) within East Asia really did amount to a collision of contrasted musical worlds, though he is careful to avoid presenting this as too stark a binary. As is often the way with cultural transfer, this initial collision was then followed by a more protracted and nuanced dialogue. Some generalisations may be possible here. A collision of cultures, making the sparks fly, will typically represent an imported culture as an exoticism, a novelty, or both. Here the recipient culture may be susceptible to the charisma of alterity, while the donor culture may yield to the allurements of nostalgia. A dialogue between cultures, on the other hand, may take more diverse forms. A distant culture may be studiously preserved or inadvertently caricatured, not least through idealisation. It may become an object of facile imitation or a source of creative transformation. Whichever form is adopted, it remains a dialogue, 'an awareness of simultaneous dimensions', as Edward Said once expressed it,[3] though the teleology usually points to some form of acculturation in the longer term. For we are, in the end, creatures of the places we inhabit today, shaped more by our present than our (imagined) past.

Just how the history of this dialogue unfolded in East Asia is part of the subject matter of the present volume. It is arguable – indeed it has been argued at length by Jürgen Osterhammel – that a European discourse of paternalism towards 'the East' (as distinct from one of straightforward cultural curiosity) was developed only at a relatively late stage.[4] East Asian views of European culture, meanwhile, ranged from an initial bewilderment and mystification to grudging admiration and eventually envy, until by the late nineteenth century that culture had come to stand emphatically for modernity, for the positive values associated with an oxymoronic 'known new'. Of course, it is impossible to separate this story from the socio-political history of the wider region. First and foremost, it was about power, and especially so following the establishment

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Edward W. Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays* (London: Granta, 2000), 173.

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Jürgen Osterhammel, *China und die Weltgesellschaft: Vom 18. Jahrhundert bis in unsere Zeit* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1989); also *Unfabling the East: The Enlightenment's Encounter with Asia* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2018).

of the Treaty System in China in the mid-nineteenth century, as Yvonne Liao illustrates in her essay here. Two separate cultures encountered something new, after all, but only one of them came to regard this something as worthy of imitation, even to the point of renouncing indigenous values. And since that aspirational new – the new associated with Western power, success and perceived exceptionalism – endowed the modern with positive values, the new and the modern (by no means synonymous) joined forces in East Asia. Naturally, there were anxieties of identity, but for the most part the model aspired to was one that embraced an ideology of advancement, and in certain instances this was accompanied by the militarism and assertive nationalism associated with European imperial expansion. Only rather later did these cultures first admit and then embrace the past, even to the point where the modern (unlike the new) could itself be assigned to history.

Modernity in East Asia was a product, then, of the second half of the nineteenth century, at which point several constituent regions, with distinctive histories but subject nonetheless to pervasive and penetrative influence from Imperial China and Confucian thought, began to forge ever more differentiated cultures. These newly modernised regions, closely modelled on the industrialised nations of the West, were framed within national states or would-be states, given voice in newly formalised languages, and in due course validated by invocations of real or constructed national pasts. The end of the Edo era of isolationism in Japan in 1868 marked a symbolic starting point for this process of modernisation, as a succession of treaties signed with Western powers and a cluster of fact-finding missions to the West all culminated in the Meiji Restoration. This was predicated on an acknowledgement of cultural lag, a recognition that the premodern, 'peripheral' cultures of East Asia were behind the curve, when compared with the more dynamic cultures of the West, a position adopted somewhat later (from 1917) by the 'New Culture Movement' in China. It will be worth pausing for a moment on the term 'cultural lag'. When it was admitted to the critical lexicon a full century ago, it signified an unequal rate of change not between separate regions, though this was often a collateral effect, but between material and non-material cultures, and usually in recognition that the latter need some time to adapt to advances in the former.[5] As it happens, this broader perspective on cultural lag may help us to understand what is distinctive about East Asian modernity.

The technological determinism implicit in William Ogburn's concept of cultural lag is distinguishable from the economic determinism characteristic of Marxist theory. But similar questions are raised as to just what follows what in processes of historical change. For many commentators, from Max Weber onwards, Marxist criticism has seemed incapable of doing justice to the fluid circuitries involved in determining what follows what.[6] Where

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William Ogburn, *Social Change with Respect to Nature and Original Cult* (New York: Viking, 1922).

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Max Weber acknowledged this circuitry, arguing in particular that ideologies and cultural forms are not simply outgrowths of Procrustean socio-economic seedbeds, but have themselves some capacity to fertilise and replenish the subsoil. See, *inter alia*, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Oxford University Press, 2020); Ger. orig. edn. 1906.

imaginative culture goes, after all, trade and technology may follow stealthily, and so may politics. Conversely, where politics and trade go, imaginative culture may be dragged along behind. Many options are available, and many were in evidence during the emergence of European modernity. Here, the interplay between social, political and cultural forces can by no means be reduced to a single narrative. But in East Asia, beginning with, and especially in, Japan, the sequence was rather less equivocal. The modernisation of society was accomplished at such high speed in this region that an unusually rapid response was demanded of the cultural sphere. The resulting assimilation of Western culture was akin to the stage of modern nation-building characterised by Ernest Gellner as 'hostile imitation'.[7] It was a sequence that had already played out on the European periphery, and subsequent to that in the Eastern Mediterranean and Levant, before the ripples finally reached East Asia. The more distant the geographical space, it would seem, the more accelerated the transformation.[8] Music was part of this; witness the direct imitation, hostile or otherwise, first of (musical) forms of sociability, then of Western performance infrastructures, and finally of Western composition techniques. Cities, trade, science, and even the customary practices of daily life could all be modernised and westernised at speed, so why not music? It was a stratagem expressly designed to address the problem of cultural lag, and it was all-pervasive.

In keeping with a familiar archetype of musical nation-building, this process then yielded to the appropriation of indigenous traditions as a means of singularising national styles of composition. Again, this had been rehearsed on the European periphery, where national signifiers included modal types, bourdon fifths, dance rhythms and certain types of ornamentation. In West Asia, further markers appeared, notably the Hijaz tetrachord with its characteristic augmented second interval. And in East Asia, pentatonic collections were added to the pool of signifiers, as for example in Xian Xinghai's *Yellow River Cantata* of 1939.[9] In a seminal essay, Carl Dahlhaus argued that this investment in what he called the 'Volksgeist hypothesis' and in the principle of authenticity it embodied resulted in major changes to the syntax of music, which for him was no mere aesthetic product of socio-economical forces in the depths.[10] Dahlhaus was really making the anti-Marxist point that an idea – the idea of cultural nationalism – could change history. Of course, it begs the question of whether that idea was not itself socially produced. But it begs a further question. Investing in the dignity and generative power of national signifiers may indeed have changed musical syntax, but in practice these signifiers were highly generalised. They functioned as common, widely shared inflections of a uniform contemporary idiom, with national specificities largely determined by reception. The first paradox of musical nationalism, then, is that far from generating multiple

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Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism (New Perspectives on the Past)* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1983).

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Milica Bakić-Hayden, 'Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia', *Slavic Review*, 54/4 (1995), 917–931. It is too big a subject for this essay, but we should note that there is something of a step change between Central and East Asia in the reception of European music, arguably calling into question the 'rippling' metaphor used here.

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Barbara Mittler, *Dangerous Tunes: The Politics of Chinese Music in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the People's Republic of China since 1949* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1997), 283.

10
Carl Dahlhaus, 'Nationalism and Music', in *Between Romanticism and Modernism*, tr. Mary Whittall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 79–101.

divergent cultures, national schools of composition succeeded only in generating a unitary convergent culture, where the nation presents a variant on a shared and uniform contemporary idiom. The second paradox follows from the first. Since the signifiers were indeed commonalities (a Lydian mode, an augmented second, a pentatonic collection), the space between portrait and self-portrait – between external attribution and self-representation, and in the case of East Asia between orientalism and nationalism – was often surprisingly slight.

Two modernities, two modernisms

On the face of it, modernisation is a homogenising process, one in which the gradual development, or the rapid acquisition, of common infrastructures, institutions and social praxes tends to smooth over the differences stemming from separate cultural traditions. For this reason, it is perhaps no surprise that sociologists of different hues have understood modernisation as an engine of convergence, and have theorised this with reference to various understandings of social systems. It is unnecessary to elaborate in detail the social theory involved, beyond noting that for several theorists the powerful social action model developed by Talcott Parsons, a model favouring convergence, formed an indispensable reference point.[11] It is one, moreover, with special significance for our purposes, given Parsons's own scholarly interest in Japan. The social action model had its critics, however, including scholars as far apart in other respects as Jürgen Habermas and Shmuel Eisenstadt,[12] and Eisenstadt's critique in particular is germane, since it challenges the convergence premise by proposing that Japan constitutes a unique modernity, separate in kind from that of the West. So it is of some interest that Eisenstadt's proposition has been tested empirically in an intriguing study by Volker H. Schmidt.[13]

Schmidt offers us statistically supported snapshots of the social, economic, political, legal and educational systems of selected comparator nations, east and west, and his conclusion is a qualified endorsement of Parsons rather than Eisenstadt. However, since the study is systematic rather than historical, it leaves out of the reckoning any explanatory value held by the separate, differentiated journeys to modernity by these nations. It asks us to believe that if we take different routes to the same place, the journeys themselves will leave no trace on how we inhabit and experience that place. Compare this with Joseph Henrich's ambitious, and resolutely historical, study of the emergence of Western societies and Western thought.[14] Henrich's book argues – and again bolstered by an impressive statistical apparatus – that the birth of modern social and cultural institutions in the Western world, as well as the development of individualist mindsets, owed

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Initially in Talcott Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1937).

12
Jürgen Habermas, 'Talcott Parsons: Problems of Theory Construction', *Sociological Inquiry*, 51/3–4 (1981), 173–196; Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, *Die Vielfalt der Moderne* (Weilerswist: Velbrück Wissenschaft, 2000); see also his *Japanese Civilization: A Comparative View* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998).

13
Volker H. Schmidt, 'How Unique is East Asian Modernity?', *Asian Journal of Social Science*, 39 (2011), 304–331.

14
Joseph Henrich, *The Weirdest People in the World: How the West Became Psychologically Peculiar and Particularly Prosperous* (New York: Allen Lane, 2020).

a great deal to the shaping power of historically evolving religious thought and practice, and that this contributed to the demise of premodern social stratification and its replacement by functional differentiation.[15] By demonstrating just how singular, how 'out of step', modern Western culture really is in the wider context of world histories, Henrich also points to the enduring influence of more holistic modes of thinking elsewhere. He indicates, in short, that the residue of different cultural traditions is not easily dispelled by a convergent modernity, and that these traditions continue to differentiate societies that may look very much the same on the outside. This leaves open the possibility that East Asian modernity may exhibit something of a mask-like quality, where there is a mismatch between the adopted general model and the specific modes of its implementation and performance in this region.

A canonical East Asian discourse of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries engaged directly with this possibility. Thus, the novelist Sōseki Natsume (1867–1916) argued in 1902 that 'Japan has tried to absorb Western culture in a hurry and as a result has not had time to digest it'.[16] He was glossing an existing tradition of modernising discourse in Japan. As early as 1876, Yukichi Fukuzawa (1835–1901) had suggested that it was imperative to eliminate cultural lag, identifying a shortfall in both material culture and spiritual values, and even advocating what he called the 'de-Asianisation' of Japanese society.[17] It is telling that in his later years he was content to translate this into support for an aggressively imperialist agenda. Likewise, Sohō Tokutomi (1863–1957) argued for the rapid and accelerating modernisation of Japanese society, and he too transformed an early advocacy of Western models of democracy into ultranationalist agendas.[18] Much of this discourse, including its perilously easy slippage between social reform and political chauvinism, was absorbed wholesale in Korea, where it was harnessed by the struggle for independence following the advent of Japanese rule in 1910. In China, whose glories were in decline even as Japan was in the ascendant, the modernising discourse arrived somewhat later, and it was tempered by residual aspects of Confucian thought, as well as by pervasive anti-Western sentiment. Thus, a Fukuzawa-influenced modernising agenda proposed by the writer and political activist Qichao Liang (1873–1929) met with a traditionalist resistance from Binglin Zhang (1868–1936), with a meeting point of sorts achieved in the 1920s in some of the output of the important and highly influential writer and thinker Xun Lu (1881–1936). Xun Lu did indeed acknowledge the imperative of modernity, but he cautioned against carbon copies of Western models.[19]

The discourse is naturally more sophisticated and nuanced than this caricature précis suggests, but its coordinates – the double antonyms of East–West and Tradition–Modernity – were never really in doubt, and they continued to orientate social commentary

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For a history and interrogation of 'the West' as a concept, see Alastair Bonnett, *The Idea of the West: Culture, Politics and History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

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Quoted in 'Modernity: East Asia', *Encyclopedia.com*, accessed 19 April 2022.

17
Albert M. Craig, *Civilization and Enlightenment: The Early Thought of Fukuzawa Yukichi* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

18
John D. Pierson, *Tokutomi Sohō 1863–1957: A Journalist for Modern Japan* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980).

19
On Xun Lu, see Gloria Davies, *Lu Xun's Revolution: Writing in a Time of Violence* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), and for a useful general study, see Christopher Bush, 'Modernism, Orientalism, and East Asia', *Wiley Online Library* (first published 2013), accessed 21 April 2022.

in the era of so-called 'emancipation' that followed the Second World War. The geopolitical climate in East Asia in those years was defined by asymmetrical approaches to the space between East and West on the part of the two principal players, China and Japan, and I need hardly add that 'East' and 'West' here belong to symbolic as much as to either political or physical geography. At the same time, the cultural climate was at least partly defined by the convergent approaches of these same players to the space between past and present, between then and now. It is striking that, as the century unfolded, the tendency was to temper and qualify the new – whether that new was revolutionary and isolationist, as in China, or mimetic and eclectic, as in Japan – by digging deeper into local soil. Hence the neo-Confucianism that marked a prominent strand of Chinese thought later in the century, and likewise the coeval Japanese appeal to a premodern past from the perspective of a postmodern present.

We are already in the territory of cultural modernism, as distinct from socio-political modernity. In the early twentieth century, East Asian modernist movements in literature led the way, responding directly to counterparts in the West. They may have been dependent on wider societal change, including educational reform and an emergent framework of criticism, but they did not require the kind of infrastructure – in a developed public sphere – that is essential to music-making. An infrastructure is defined by Brian Larkin as the 'totality of both technical and cultural systems that create institutionalized structures whereby goods of all sorts circulate, connecting and binding people into collectivities',[20] and as this suggests it forms a network within which cultural institutions are intertwined with broader social practices and discourses. Institutionally, this meant the establishment of journals and publishing houses to promote criticism, conservatories and universities to nurture music theory, and orchestras, opera houses and concert halls to disseminate musical compositions. It should be the task of someone other than me to examine the complex relationship between such institutions and the practices they host, including the practice of pianism. In general, practices precede institutions. But they also outlive them. And as that implies, they retain an element of independence, even when they have been institutionalised.

Elsewhere I have looked at the historically evolving practice of pianism in Europe.[21] The three stages I identified – pre-recital, recital and post-recital practices – do not map precisely from European onto East Asian pianism, but there are some obvious parallels, allowing for a greatly compressed timescale. In East Asia the first stage foregrounded domestic settings of formalised sociability, where the piano was more often than not in an accompaniment role, but in key cultural centres it also embraced large, semi-popular concert series somewhat akin to the benefit

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Brian Larkin, 'The Politics and Poetics of Infra-structure', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 42/1 (2013), 327–343.

21
Jim Samson, 'The Practice of Early-Nineteenth-Century Pianism', in M. Talbot (ed.), *The Musical Work: Reality or Invention?* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), 110–127.

concerts of early nineteenth-century Europe. In due course the more structured piano recital was institutionalised, not least in response to a flow of visiting European pianists. But more than in Europe this second stage supported yet another institution, the competition, discussed here by both Alison Tokita and Junichi Tada. Competitions rewarded an ethos of technical perfectibility in the public arena (embracing some of the connotations of the term 'arena') that was not unique to East Asia, but that chimed with other manifestations of a differentiated collective *mentalité*. If there is essentialism here, it is tempered by our recognition – with Fengyi Zhang – that 'cultural dissonance' is both historically produced and subject to institutional inertia. The recital, like the competition, is still with us, of course, but the practice of pianism began to outlive both institutions in an age when for most people music came to be experienced in an electronically mediated form. And it is at least arguable – stereotypes aside – that in this post-recital stage, East Asia has been ahead of the game. In terms of cultural lag, musical culture adapted remarkably quickly to advances in technology – in recording methods, in the video games industry, and more generally in the 'app society' we are all familiar with today.

It is evident from Zhang's essay that there was serendipity involved in the transfer of a pianistic culture to China, with much depending on which tutor books happened to be used, and how they were translated and interpreted. At the same time there was an element of prescription, stemming directly from the political culture that came with the People's Republic. Much the same could be said of the teaching of harmony and composition, as we learn from two essays by Wai Ling Cheong and her colleagues. In one we are informed of the centrality of the Soviet textbook *Uchebnik garmonii* [Harmony textbook] by Igor V. Sposobin to the teaching of European music in virtually all Chinese conservatories (it was first translated in 1957–1958), with its Riemannian functions forming a reference point for subsequent debates about the nationalisation of harmony.[22] In the other the authors examine the transmission of dodecaphonic composition in China, describing a circuitous and somewhat surprising journey in intellectual history that involved the legacies of Ctirad Kohoutek, Ernst Krenek and Reginald Smith Brindle.[23] In both cases the central dilemma was how to reconcile the modernism associated with European music with national traditions and nationalist agendas, and in practice this often meant how to marry either functional harmony or 12-tone technique with pentatonic systems. Again, it all comes down to questions of ownership claims, as musical systems were hijacked by politics. Sposobin's textbook, we are told in the first essay, was 'entrusted with the political mission of nationalizing harmony in the heyday of ideological power struggles'.

The power struggles in question divided the nations in post-war years, and even split one nation into two. At their most extreme,

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Wai Ling Cheong and Hong Ding, 'Sposobin Remains: A Soviet Harmony Textbook's Twisted Fate in China', *Zeitschrift der Gesellshaft für Musiktheorie*, 15/2 (2018), 45–77.

23
Cheong Wai-ling, Hong Ding and Tam Yi Ching, 'From Berlin to Wuhan: Twelve-tone Composition and the Pedagogical Legacies of Kohoutek, Křenek and Smith Brindle in China', *Acta Musicologica*, 94/1 (2022), 48–67.

they resulted in North Korea's so-called Galloping Horse Movement of the late 1950s, which worked to eliminate all traces of elite culture and to promote indigenous creativity based on demotic traditions, as understood and arbitrated by Kim Il Sung.[24] In less extreme form, China too adopted the familiar cultural code-switching associated with state socialism. European classical music, its elitist origins conveniently forgotten, morphed into the 'property of the people', and at the same time established a forum for the competitive assertion of cultural prestige on the world stage. Just how Chopin in particular was appropriated by this political culture is explored in Cheong's essay in the present volume, but more generally we may note, with Samuel and Thompson, that both positive and negative myths were projected by socialist-realist propaganda.[25] There was the myth of socialist man, a progressive figure there to be celebrated by artists, and there was the myth of his political enemies, there to be demonised, for as Tzvetan Todorov has remarked 'the totalitarian state cannot live without enemies'.[26] In music, those enemies were first and foremost the avant-gardes of the West, cloned by purportedly apolitical modernisms in Japan and South Korea. *A prima vista*, we polarise the musical worlds of state socialism and Western or westernised democracies, but a substantial body of scholarship demonstrates that the avant-gardes were themselves subject to political influence as modes of counter-propaganda,[27] and in any case the codes began to lose their signifying power in the new global politics of the 1990s. Even more crucially, as I will argue in the next section, post-war political divisions masked a yet deeper cultural unity that does indeed distinguish East Asian modernism from its counterparts in the Western world.

Modalities

Derek Carew's title 'The Mechanical Muse' neatly encapsulates the coupling of technology and art that shaped the early history of the piano and pianism.[28] It is tempting to describe the ascendancy of this instrument as a perfect exemplification of Max Weber's celebrated principle of progressive rationality, the increasing rationalisation of resources and systems that Weber understood to characterise Western music and to separate it from Eastern traditions.[29] This extended well beyond the mechanics of instrument design to include the formalisation of equal temperament by the piano, as well as its capacity to embrace and activate within a single, self-contained instrument the entire complex science of tonal harmony. Let us add to this the projection of a rather particular mode of public virtuosity. Unlike the voice, where the material base is part of our being, or the violin, where it is like an extension of the performer, of the arm, the piano remains separate, an independent object, and something to be

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Keith Howard, 'Juche and Culture: What's New?', in Hazel Smith, Chris Rhodes, Diana Pritchard and Kevin McGill (eds.), *North Korea in a New World Order* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), 169–95.

25
Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson (eds.), *The Myths We Live By* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1990).

26
Tsvetan Todorov, *Voices from the Gulag: Life and Death in Communist Bulgaria*, tr. Robert Zaretsky (Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 1999), 7.

27
Inter alia, Frances Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (London: Granta, 1999).

28
Derek Carew, *The Mechanical Muse: The Piano, Pianism and Piano Music c. 1760–1850* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007).

29
Max Weber, *The Rational and Social Foundations of Music*, tr. Don Martindale, Gertrud Neuwirth and Johannes Reidel (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1958).

mastered (a tellingly gendered term). Here the material base has to be penetrated and transformed, in a dialogue between human and machine. The piano is 'played upon' by the hand, which can pound it into submission, engaging with it in furious combat, but can also caress it, gently coaxing a response. Through the hand, the virtuoso can demonstrate all but superhuman skills, and at the same time can display the most delicate human sensitivities. But the hand also symbolises work. It is an agent of well-rehearsed skill and dexterity. And in that sense the precision of the virtuoso taps into ancient traditions of craft, the finely-tuned workmanship of the artisan.

There is to this day a widespread piano culture in East Asia, modelled on Western traditions but also singular. Many aspects of Western music – its concert rituals and teaching institutions, as well as its repertory – were transplanted to these distant shores during Europeanisation, but of all of them the piano culture has become the most embedded. The piano became the primary musical symbol of modernity and progress in East Asia, resulting in something close to a fetishisation of the instrument, once characterised by Norman Lebrecht as 'piano mania'.[30] The 'mechanical muse', standing out in sharp relief against the 'natural' expressivity of the voice, represented to perfection the values of a competitive mercantile culture, well suited to projects of modernisation on a Western model. And the painstaking regime of practice that is a prerequisite of proficiency seems equally well attuned to an East Asian cult of learning, where the acquisition of skills is fundamental, as also the need for their competitive testing.[31] At risk of over-generalising, we might say that this preeminent agent of westernisation was grafted to perfection onto the East Asian mindset, exhibiting in multiple ways what some psychologists call 'prototypicality', meaning an appropriate fit between object and setting. It feels important to stress again that if there truly is an 'East Asian mindset', it can be understood and explained without reference to categories such as nationhood or race. National character needs no resort to qualities of innateness. It is quite enough to invoke the power and longevity of institutions, which is precisely what Jean-François Lyotard meant when he argued that tradition 'persuades', while the new 'promotes reflection'.[32]

This piano culture might be represented as an aesthetic response to modernity, to the rapid mechanisation of urban societies, and to technological innovation in all its forms. A surrender to mechanism is indeed a distinguishing feature of East Asian modernism, and it is evident no less in compositional praxes, most notably in a longstanding curiosity about, and enthusiasm for, Western music theory (as advocated at an early stage by the Chinese music historian Wang Guangqi[33]) and especially for systems such as dodecaphony. Schoenberg's method marked another determinate stage in Weber's progressive rationalisation of resources, but in this very linkage lies a key distinction between East Asia and the West. Theodor Adorno understood Weber's rationality as one polarity

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Normal Lebrecht, 'The Chinese classical-music revolution up close', *The Spectator*, 25 November 2017. In her essay here, Fengyi Zhang refers to a 'piano fever'.

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In her essay in this issue, Fengyi Zhang suggests that there may be more pragmatic reasons for this enthusiasm, based on traditional Chinese attitudes to learning.

32
Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Explained for Children: Correspondence 1882–85*, tr. Thomas M. Pefanis (London: Turnaround, 1998).

33
See the discussion in chapter 6 of Nicholas Cook, *Music, Encounter, Togetherness* (Oxford University Press, 2023 [forthcoming]). I am grateful to Nicholas Cook for an advance sight of this book in manuscript.

of a forcefield, of which the other polarity is *mimesis*,[34] and by this he meant an expressive, 'bodily' impulse rooted in ancient magical or religious practices and collectivities. These mutually dependent polarities draw attention to a dimension of European modernism that is much less apparent in the East Asian variety, its overcoming of the religious inheritance of art, or alternatively the transmutation of this into a fascination with mysticism and the occult. In East Asia the burden of the past did not bear down on the new in quite the same way. It is hard to discern any real equivalent to the fevers of Viennese expressionism, explosive and dissenting, during the first phase of modernism in the early twentieth century, when the forcefields between classical, commercial and modernist repertories, and also between their taste publics, were stretched to breaking point. Rather than living among the ruins, relishing the dirt and rebuilding from existing fragments, East Asian modernism from the start set about making something brand new and shiny. Those powerful forcefields – between the popular and the significant, the new and the traditional – were hardly instrumental.

That there was a *tabula rasa* becomes even more apparent in the second phase of modernism, the era of 'emancipation'. There are no doubt several ways to understand the new directions and alternative visions of these post-war years, but one suggestive approach is to view them in part as a response to the collective trauma induced by what some commentators like to call 'events'.[35] The political events in question hardly need spelling out, whether for Japan, China or Korea, but it may be worth adding that the fresh start they promoted also facilitated a form of 'cohort culture', a shift from genealogical to generational thinking, as discussed in different ways by Paul Fussell and Stephen Lovell et al,[36] and as evidenced by the emergence of artist collectives such as *Jikken Kōbō* and later *Group Ongaku* in Japan. Of course, a post-war *tabula rasa* also applied to the Darmstadt generation in Europe, where history was suppressed for a time, before slowly and inexorably creeping back. But, again, the approach in East Asia was singular. One way to fill the blank page, notably in Japan and South Korea, was to engage in a form of (depthless) imitation of the new music associated with the post-war avant-gardes of both Europe and North America, a lifting of surfaces, we might say, to produce ear-catching if one-dimensional sonorities. And while the results might sometimes lack the structural depth that enables a listener to move around within the piece, they created arguably just the kind of immediacy that was deemed to be lacking in European music at the time: a 'shot in the arm' for an enervated modernist tradition. Certainly, composers in these post-war years revelled in what Susan Sontag liked to call 'sensuous surface'.[37]

The music of Tōru Takemitsu is a *locus classicus*. Yet Takemitsu's increasing attraction to poeticised forms of traditional Japanese music, and from the 1980s onwards to simpler, even diatonic,

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Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedermann, tr. Christian Lenhardt (Abingdon: Routledge, 1984); orig. edn. 1970.

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Alain Badiou, *L'Être et l'événement* (Paris: Seuil, 1988); Derek Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004).

36
Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Stephen Lovell (ed.), *Generations in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

37
Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966).

harmonic structures, was not his story alone, but was indicative of a trend that included several of his coevals in Japan. If we were to sloganise it, we would refer to a global postmodern culture, and interestingly enough it led to a moment of convergence with China. Accounts of the modernisation of Chinese music, a process that began in the early twentieth century, proliferate, and they need only partial reiteration here.[38] It is enough to say that analogies with Soviet music, already germane in the first half of the century, became inescapable in the wake of the Civil War and the establishment of the Peoples' Republic. In both contexts the task was to professionalise traditional music, which had the effect, paradoxically enough, of both modernising it and classicising it. Like the folk ensembles in the Soviet Union, Chinese orchestras (to cite just one manifestation of a professionalised traditional music) created a distinctive category of musical culture designed to sit alongside European classical music, and to possess equal value. But much more than Soviet ensembles, these Chinese orchestras were (and are) modelled very closely on Western prototypes, even down to the mimicking of concert rituals, and the development of a corpus of original compositions. As to the other major category, European classical music, Chinese composers were naturally subject to political constraints; indeed, during Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution, performances of European music were prohibited. But in truth Chinese composers had never been quite so removed from native traditions as their Japanese counterparts. As Nicholas Cook remarks, 'there was a long Confucian tradition (inherited by Chinese Communism) of seeing art, society and politics as closely related'.[39] So there was rather less of a caesura between Chinese versions of modernism and a wider postmodern aesthetic that came into its own in the 1990s. At this point the past invaded the present in East Asia more generally.

From the start, a characteristic of modernism as a cultural movement in Europe was that the modern self-consciously crafted an image of its own past. This began to glimmer way back in the 1850s, especially in the Weimar debates of that time, but it came to fruition in the 1920s through Schoenberg's development of serialism as a mode of neo-classicism, with the early dodecaphonic compositions stilling the frenzy of Viennese expressionism by invoking the formal archetypes, and even the phraseology, of a classical inheritance. However, the invocation of the past in the 1990s was of a rather different order, in both Europe and East Asia. It was much more akin to the restorative nostalgia that, as Svetlana Boym remarks, so often follows change and innovation.[40] The main point here is that not only did this postmodern aesthetic represent a moment of convergence between Japan and China, but that it extended yet more widely, to Europe and beyond.

This returns us to our starting point, the question of ownership. The present essay is hardly the place to debate attempts to map

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Among several key texts are Barbara Mittler, *Dangerous Tunes: The Politics of Chinese Music in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the People's Republic of China since 1949* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1997); Frederick Lau, *Music in China: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Yang Hon-Lun, 'Power, politics, and musical commemoration: Western musical figures in the People's Republic of China 1949–1964', *Music and Politics*, 1/2 (2007); Jonathan Stock, *Musical Creativity in Twentieth-Century China: Abing, his Music, and its Changing Meanings* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1996). Chapters 6 and 7 of Nicholas Cook, *Music, Encounter, Togetherness* draws much of this together, while at the same time presenting a distinctive viewpoint.

39
Cook, *Music, Encounter, Togetherness,* pagination not determined at the time of writing.

40
Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

a 'global history of music' or to analyse 'transcultural musicking'.[41] But it is perhaps the place to note that, within our global present, certain singularities, stemming from distinctive regional histories, continue to assert themselves, and not least in approaches to the Western canon. Canon formation, integral to the story of European music, is given a very particular twist in East Asia, and is often tantamount to a mystical project of autonomy and exceptionalism. This is exemplified by the phenomenon of the 'composer society', with Chopin societies in particular acting as forums for a form of reverential fandom. These societies, targeting the amateur music lover rather than the music professional, register a special kind of ownership claim, and one that is sometimes advanced to the exclusion of any interest whatever in the music of other composers (in Tokyo I encountered some rather extreme manifestations of this fandom, and it is perhaps significant that – at least before the arrival of the pandemic in early 2020 – Japanese formed by far the largest group of foreign visitors to the Chopin Museum in Warsaw). Composer fixation of this kind is arguably a further dimension of singularity in East Asian musical culture, and no composer has been more susceptible than Chopin. Why is this? I suggested earlier that the piano has been all but fetishised in East Asia. I now suggest that more than, and before, any other composer, it was Chopin who gave the piano its truly idiomatic voice, forging a uniquely intricate pianistic counterpoint that takes its starting point from the potentialities and the limitations of the instrument itself, a counterpoint in which graduated dynamics allow voices to emerge and recede freely, even to the point where (as Charles Rosen once suggested to me) it is sometimes left to the performer to decide where a voice actually begins. It was no doubt this perfect fit of musical idea and medium that led Claude Debussy to suggest (according to Marguerite Long) that 'with the piano alone Chopin discovered everything'.[42] And it is perhaps one of the reasons that he is not just fetishised, but iconised, in East Asia today.

ABSTRACT

For music to have an identity, it seems, it must belong to someone. I will argue that in the twenty-first century Chopin no longer belongs to Europe. Can we really speak of 'Chopin reception' in East Asia today, given that he now belongs to these cultures too? Already in the early twentieth century, the piano emerged as a potent symbol of modernity in East Asia, and today the success of East Asian pianists in the International Chopin Competition has become a matter of the greatest national pride for relevant nations.

In this paper I will ask if socio-political modernities in East Asia, and the cultural modernisms that followed them and responded to them, are distinguishable from those of 'the West'. Which are the common factors, and which the unique, bearing in mind that modernists of both East and West cultivated and relished temporal distance (now *vs* then), as well as spatial distance (here *vs* there)? In addressing cultural encounters between East and West, I heed Jürgen Osterhammel's caution against prematurity in the identification of dichotomous discourses. I also invoke the theoretical concept of 'cultural lag', a concept of some vintage, but one that can have explanatory value when we consider the counterpoints and synergies generated between science, politics and culture in both East and West.

In reflecting on Chopin in East Asia, I contextualise cultural transfer in several ways. These include aesthetic responses to collective trauma, not least through the establishment of a *tabula rasa*, or alternatively through a mode of (depthless) imitation that celebrates what Susan Sontag called 'sensuous surface'. They also include a surrender to mechanism, and a tendency to fetishise or iconise cultural figures. All of these are arguably symptomatic of East Asian modernisms.

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