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Commentary

Nathan John Martin

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[1] I was reminded, in reading the opening chapters of 黎青主 Li Tsing-chu's 音樂通論 in Edwin K. C. Li's elegant English translation, of my experience, in the late spring and early summer of 2018, of visiting Hong Kong for the first time—how that city's built environment, natural setting, mixture of cultures, babel of languages, range of foods, and so on could seem (to someone born and partly raised on the west coast of Canada—not irrelevantly, in this context, another former British colony) at once profoundly familiar and exceedingly strange. Li Tsing-chu's book is, among other things, a call—if not, perhaps, entirely to abandon received Chinese ways of conceptualizing music, then at least to supplement these with ideas borrowed from "the West" (西方), by which he essentially means Germany, where he lived and studied between 1911 and 1922. So for a reader like me, whose grounding in academic musicology was still largely shaped by these same Germanic traditions, a striking feature of the text is how it reflects familiar tropes and themes back through the glass of a very different intellectual sensibility.

[2] Take, for instance, the insistence on music's "autonomy" (獨立) with which the discussion opens. Though the word (*Autonomie, Selbstständigkeit*) became central to the high modernist conception of the musical work that came to underlie much early-to-mid twentieth century German musical thought (think Adorno or Dahlhaus), it is probably not in the first place a properly or intrinsically aesthetic concept. Etymology is informative here: αὐτός ("self") + νόμος (various meanings, including "melody"; but in this context "law") —so in effect, "self-legislating." An autonomous region, for instance, is one that makes its own laws (is self-legislating or self-governing), rather than being subject to some outside authority (whether in the form of an external power or a distant central government). The term also plays a central role in Kant's moral philosophy. To be free, in Kant's somewhat paradoxical-sounding definition, is to be subject to laws of your own devising. So this looks like a case in which a term having its original niche in the realm of politics or ethics has been transferred over into aesthetics. (I will have to leave it to those whose Chinese is much better than mine to comment on Li Tsing-chu's choice of 獨立 to translate the German concept.)

[3] What exactly the concept of "autonomy" should mean, however, when transferred over into aesthetics is a little unclear. You might think that, by analogy, it should entail the claim that works of music are in some sense "self-governing," or perhaps "self-generating." That claim might in turn imply something like the high modernist injunction that each work creates its own (radically new and different) organizing principles; or at the other extreme, it might amount to Schenker's view that each piece emanates outward from the *Ursatz* (or, somewhere in between, Réti's that each grows outward like a crystal from its own unique motivic cell). In practice, though, talk of music's "autonomy" tends to index something more like its (putative) lack of

practical function or utilitarian value. Such talk grounds, for instance, the distinction German musicologists sometimes liked to draw between "functional music"—music that exists to be danced to, or as an aid to devotional practices, or to tell the infantry to advance—and "art music" proper. As such, assertions of music's autonomy tend to shade over into a commitment to "art for art's sake," and perhaps to lead one to (or justify after the fact—which is the cart? which the horse?) a distaste for opera or program music and a comparative valorization, say, of string quartets by Brahms.

[4] Li Tsing-chu, on the other hand, presses the term "autonomy" into the service of a somewhat different agenda. In particular, he uses the claim that "Music is an autonomous art" (音樂是一種獨立的藝術) to argue (1) that "Music is not a subsidiary of ritual" (音樂並不是禮的附庸) and so (2) that "Music cannot be monopolized by the literati" (音樂不可以由文人包辦). In saying this, Li Tsing-chu is, I gather, intending to sweep away two major assumptions of the tradition to which he is the legatee. Imperial court music in, say, the Qing dynasty—I do know enough to assert this fairly confidently—is intimately bound up with other kinds of court rituals. As such it falls under the administration of that particular class of scholar–officials (文人) variously referred to in European languages as "literati" or "mandarins" who acceded to their posts through their success in the imperial civil-service examination system (科舉), which tested their knowledge of the Confucian classics. Music, Li Tsing-chu is saying, should be the province not of these scholar–officials, but rather of musicians (like himself).

[5] Having dismissed these received traditions, Li Tsing-chu then insists that "to understand what Music is, you need to seek help from the West" (所以你要知道什麼是音樂，你還是要向西方乞靈). The rapid survey of European views on music that follows leads him quickly back to the authority of the Greeks (in this, he was clearly a keen student of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century German culture, and picked up on its phil-Hellenism), and to the conviction that "the Greeks considered Music to be a form of language" (希臘人要把音樂當作是一種的語言), and in particular a kind of "language of the soul" (一種靈魂的語言).

[6] As a distillation of the surviving texts and fragments that Greek writers from Philolaus and Archytas to Aristides Quintilianus and his contemporaries produced concerning their own musical culture, this is a rather dubious synopsis. But it quite accurately reflects the kinds of views that Li Tsing-chu found in Hermann Abert's *Die Lehre vom Ethos in der griechischen Musik* (1899), which he cites as his principal source. Abert writes, for instance:

> So one went about investigating the individual parts of music in their psychic effects and making these available for ethical ends. A theory was developed that reached to the most individual details and that was codified in the first place by philosophers and then, following them, later by music theorists proper: the theory of ethos in music.
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> It is based on the assumption of tight interrelationships resting on the principle of motion between pitch and rhythm, on the one hand, and the emotional life of human beings, on the other. Its main claim is: audible movements are able not only to represent and mirror the movements of the soul, but also to produce them.
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> So ging man denn daran, die einzelnen Seiten der Musik auf diese ihre psychischen Wirkungen hin zu untersuchen und ethischen Zwecken dienstbar zu machen. Es bildete sich eine bis ins Einzelnste gehende Theorie, deren Hauptgrundzüge in erster Linie die Philosophen und, ihnen folgend, später die eigentlichen Musiktheoretiker festgestellt haben, die Lehre vom Ethos in der Musik.
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> Sie geht aus von der Annahme enger, auf dem Prinzip der Bewegung beruhender Wechselbeziehungen zwischen Klang und Rhythmus einerseits und dem menschlichen Gemütsleben andererseits; ihr Hauptsatz ist: die hörbare Bewegung vermag die Bewegung der Seele nicht nur darzustellen und widerzuspiegeln, sondern auch zu erzeugen. (pp. 2–3)

[7] This mode of thinking, and the general conviction that Greek music and the Greek language provided a uniquely efficacious medium for the kind of affective transmission envisioned has a very long European pedigree, one running back from Abert through Rousseau to Girolamo Mei (could Mei in fact be the otherwise unattested "Curt Mey" cited at one point in the text?). And such ideas were, of course, pivotal in the invention and then subsequent development of recitative and of opera in general. As Nietzsche wrote, parodying Rousseau in *The Birth of Tragedy*:

Recitative should count as the rediscovered speech of those ancient peoples; opera is the resurrected land of that idyllic or heroic good character that in all of its actions equally follows a natural artistic drive.	Das Recitativ galt als die wiederentdeckte Sprache jenes Urmenschen; die Oper ist das wiederaufgefundene Land jenes idyllisch oder heroisch guten Wesens, das zugleich in allen seinen Handlungen einem natürlichen Kunsttriebe folgt.

[8] Or as Rousseau himself put it, rather more directly: "les tragédies des grecques étoient de vrais Opéra."

[9] If I am right about this largely tacit presence of Rousseau in Chapter 1 of the 音樂通論 (Rousseau is mentioned once in passing), this observation might help to explain something that I found initially puzzling about the excerpt given here, namely the abrupt shift in Chapter 2 to a concern with "pretense" (虛偽). Of the various cases considered, a striking one concerns the role of feigning and dissimulation in musical performance:

For example, a song full of sorrow should evoke a sense of sadness in the general audience, shouldn't it? If even an ordinary listener would feel a sense of sadness when listening to a song filled with sorrow, then shouldn't the singer also feel overwhelmed by grief? However, if a person is overwhelmed by grief and unable to control their emotions, how can they sing a song well?	比方一首充滿了哀感的歌，不是很應該令一般聽眾都感覺得悲從中來麽？一般聽唱一首充滿了哀感的歌的人尚且應該感覺得悲從中來，那末，那個唱歌的人不是亦很應該悲不自勝麽？但是，一個悲不自勝的人，話都說不出來，那裏還能夠唱出很好的歌呢？

[10] Such questions will, of course, be entirely familiar to readers of Diderot's *Paradoxe sur le comédien*. And they naturally arise precisely in the context of an aesthetic theory that takes affective transmission—from singer to listener, artist to audience—as the *sine qua non* of artistic activity. *Si vis me flere, dolendum est primum ipsi tibi*.

[11] Fascinating, to return to the note on which I began, to find these longstanding tropes reappearing in so unexpected a context.

Nathan John Martin
University of Michigan
School of Music, Theatre and Dance
1100 Baits Dr.
Ann Arbor, MI 48109
natha@umich.edu

Prepared by Andrew Eason, Senior Editorial Assistant