
Editorial: Chinese Electroacoustic Music Today

The editors of the issue have, for many years, studied the vertiginous development of electroacoustic music in China. By residing in the country, organising conferences and symposia and creating personal connections, deep relations were established with the musical community. This led not only to the publications of articles, but also to the book *Electroacoustic Music in East Asia* (Battier and Fields 2020), which had the originality of gathering only contributions by local composers and scholars from East Asia. Much of this was realised as an outcome of the Electroacoustic Music Studies Asia Network (EMSAN), as does this present issue, on the theme of electroacoustic music in China today.

Difficulties of translation were expected and encountered for our issue. Another hurdle was that the conception of a scholarly article in electroacoustic musicological research in China follows quite different habits. This led to a substantial amount of discussion between authors and editors. It was of course our premise that the issue would present a portrait of current views on electroacoustic music in China today, mostly from the prism of local composers and scholars who, in the end, have been responsible for the majority of articles. The others came from Western authors who have had a sustained relation with China. Otherwise, the local authors affirm here a *Chineseness* that is sometimes difficult to grasp for outsiders, no matter how familiar they may be with the culture.

The issue opens with two articles by co-editors. Annie Yen-Ling Liu, a scholar who has previously published on Chinese electroacoustic music, investigates the ubiquitous postulation in much of the early literature of a unique compositional language that can be referred to as a 'Chinese model'. She retraces the concept from the earliest works in the 1980s, up to today. In so doing, she provides a solid conceptual foundation, and the reader will find a superb list of bibliographical references. The second article by co-editor Marc Battier delves into the question of finding stylistic gradients in Chinese electroacoustic music, as he observes that, in China, many composers have crossed boundaries in a fashion rarely observed in other cultures. That consideration resonates deeply with several contributions from Chinese authors in

the issue, although Battier discusses the categorisations provided by interculturalism studies.

The following contribution written by Zhou Qian, a Shanghai composer and teacher, studies the work of several composers from the perspective of compositional techniques, including sound spatialisation. What is of importance is that the selected composers have studied abroad (Zhou herself having studied at CNMAT, UC Berkeley, and CCRMA, Stanford University). With a foreign advanced education, how these composers address the notion of Chineseness in their work is a theme that emerges in the article.

Discussing the state of electroacoustic music in China involved the perspective of foreign composers who are attracted by working with traditional Chinese instrument performers. Anthony De Ritis, an American composer, has had a long experience with such an approach in his own work. He also alludes to the question of Chineseness in electroacoustic music through a number of pieces from Chinese and foreign composers.

That very theme is then looked at from different perspectives. Li Qiuxiao is particularly intrigued by how three composers dealt with Chinese plucked strings instruments. Two of them used the guqin, a seven-string zither often accompanying the recitation of poems, and one wrote for the pipa, a four-string instrument. In her article, Li studies how noise, inherent in plucked strings, is integrated in the electroacoustic materials. This led the author to considerations of how Western and Chinese composers handle noise in their work.

The juxtaposition of a Chinese instrument and electroacoustic sounds was also addressed by Yang Ting and Zhou Ran, from Shenzhen University. In their contribution, however, they analyse a piece for pipa and tape with electroacoustic sounds, *Mist on a Hill*, written by a French composer for a Beijing performer. In so doing, the authors bring a fresh and original framework inspired by a Chinese approach to musical analysis, something that would be most unexpected in the Western tradition.

Following is a number of articles from Chinese authors who discuss specific aspects of composing in China. Each is a vivid account of the questions and solutions encountered in working on the edge of

several cultures and yet honouring their strong Chinese heritage. For this, they convoke music, art, poetry and other cultural elements. Thus, Yang Mengchun and Xu Zhixin, in studying a mixed piece for voice and tape, rely on the concept of *liubai*, which comes from the context of Chinese painting. The authors show how this artistic notion can be traced in the musical composition they analyse. Another aspect of Chinese electroacoustic music is studied by Wang Xinyu and Hu Ting. They discuss the use of spatialisation in a work by one of the most famous Chinese composers, Zhang Xiaofu. They back up their argumentation with a thorough evocation of historical examples of the mastering of spatial movements in electroacoustic music. It was indeed important to give the category of spatialisation a place in our issue, as it is of primary concern for Chinese composers. Another approach addressed is that of the use of audiovisual elements. This is discussed by Zhao Xiaoyu and Sun Zhenwei, in the multimedia contributions of Zhang Xiaofu, mentioned earlier, here presented in detail.

It seemed important also to include in this issue some aspects of Hong Kong activities. Three authors, who reside and work on the island, drew a portrait of some specific traits of what is going on there. Ryo Ikeshiro, Damien Charrieras and PerMagnus Lindborg chose to, as they say, chart the scenes of sonic arts in Hong Kong. They are not only scholars, but also actively contribute by their own work, often mixing sounds and visuals. Being the only contribution from that city, the article presents a broad landscape of the rich activities found there.

The thematic issue concludes with a new voice from China. Wang Jing, from Zhejiang University, has recently published a book dealing with aesthetic and historical aspects of audio art and electroacoustic music in China. In this article, she examines the question of improvisation more closely from both Eastern and Western philosophical perspectives.

In addition, two off-theme articles are included in the issue: from the Stockholm KMH Royal Institute of Music, Mattias Sköld questions the visual representation of timbre while taking examples from the repertoire; Sam Gillies, from the University of Huddersfield, discusses an early piece by Roberto Gerhard for a theatre play.

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REFERENCE

Battier, M. and Fields, K. 2020. *Electroacoustic Music in East Asia*. New York: Routledge.

Note: As is customary in Asia, Chinese family names precede given names.