The Evolution of Western Representations of China through an Operatic Lens

by

Alan Luis Phillip Rodi
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Introduction

As a musician and composer with an interest in East Asian Studies and Chinese musical practices, I have always been intrigued at how different Western composers treat the East. From catering to downright offensive stereotypes to using tasteful quotation of authentic Chinese music, the history of portraying the East in the arts is rich and varied. The end result, however, is not always clear in meaning; intentions of the composer may clash with public perception, and inherent details in the libretto play an enormous role in the interpretation. Both from a musical history perspective and with close musical analysis I hope to address several important pieces in the operatic tradition that have treated the East in varying manners. Traveling through about two hundred years of operatic history,¹ I explore three operas and their authors to examine how their intentions match with the execution of their representation of the East.

The three pieces come from very different worlds of operatic tradition. *Le Cheval De Bronze* (1835), composed by French composer Daniel Auber with librettist Eugène Scribe, is a work of the opéra comique style set in a world of nearly complete fantasy. The plot features the sudden appearance of magical horse atop a hill in Shandong Province that transports any man who rides it

¹ Three hundred if we include my brief mention of Vivaldi’s *Teuzzone*. 
to the planet Venus. Loaded with burlesque images and cheap humor, the piece is the lesser known of the three works I am analyzing and serves as a stepping stone into viewing the much more widely performed works Turandot and Nixon in China.

Turandot (1926), composed by Giacomo Puccini with libretto by Giuseppe Adami and Renato Simoni, is a very different story. My analysis of the opera comprises the bulk of my thesis, exploring a wealth of documents analyzing the piece as well as reviews and criticisms concerning the recent rise of new productions and adaptations in China. The piece is another work of fiction set in a mythical China with a despotic princess who challenges any potential suitors to answer three riddles should they wish to become her husband. When they inevitably fail the riddles, she has them beheaded. The piece is loaded with images of savagery and cruelty in both the text and the musical interpretation, but behind the façade of offensiveness is actually a great deal of work by Puccini to quote authentic Chinese melodies and show a surprisingly strong understanding of Chinese music.

The third piece, Nixon in China (1987), by John Adams with libretto by Alice Goodman, is a modern work of a drastically different backdrop inspired by Nixon’s meeting with Mao Zedong. Instead of eroticizing the East, the piece is entirely void of potentially offensive “Chinese-isms” but rather
portrays many Chinese historical figures with a deep and understanding attention to detail, using a vast array of sources for developing character traits beyond their outward public personas. Rather than mocking a sense of exoticism of the Chinese, Adams instead uses the libretto to satire the ideology of the Communist Party itself, taking a new spin on operatic treatments of the East.²

² Some notes on Romanization: Many of the texts use the now obsolete Wade-Giles Romanization of Chinese words, such as Peking in place of Beijing or Mao Te Tsung in place of Mao Zedong. I have modernized the spellings of historical figures when not in a written quotation but left the invented names as written.
Early Visions of China: *Le Cheval De Bronze*

Daniel Auber (1782-1871) was a prolific French composer of opera with a specialty in opéra comique. Beginning with attempts at Italian airs and French romances and concertos for violin and cello, in 1811 he transitioned into writing for opera.\(^3\) Making few attempts at serious pieces, he tended to focus on lighter and comedic forms.\(^4\) Known more for works such as *Leicester, La muette de Portici,* and *Fra Diavolo,* *Le Cheval de Bronze* is an often overlooked piece that highlights a bizarre trip to China, the planet Venus, and back.

*Le Cheval de Bronze* has fallen in and out of obscurity since its creation, paling in comparison to the popularity of *Turandot* and *Nixon in China.* The opera was nonetheless initially well received, with 84 performances in its first year staged around the world from London in December 1835 to St. Petersburg in January 1837 and finally to New York in October of 1837. Afterwards, the piece almost immediately fell out of the common repertoire.\(^5\) Despite a short revival in September 1857, twenty performances ended in another abrupt disappearance of the work. One later attempt in 1889 by Engelbert Humperdinck with his own personal arrangements also failed due to the competing popularity of Arthur Sullivan’s operetta *The Mikado* (1885),

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effectively saturating the market for “burlesque Oriental opera.” Only very recently has Le Cheval de Bronze resurfaced, this time in Germany in March of 2012 at the Komische Oper Berlin with translation by Bettina Bartz and Werner Hintze, and only time will tell whether the opera has any hopes of a future. The piece, despite its apparent cycle of obscurity, is a fascinating example of treating China with so little sense of historical accuracy that even the music itself bears no resemblance to the East. Essentially a work of slapstick comedy, the piece lacks commentary and depth of character and serves as an early example of developing fascinations for the East through the arts.

Premiering March 23, 1835 in Paris at the Opéra-Comique, Le Cheval de Bronze (The Bronze Horse) presents a bronze horse that has mysteriously appeared on a hill outside of Shandong province in China, transporting unsuspecting individuals who climb onto its back to Venus. There, they are left to the mercy of a number of female sirens led by the Princess Stella. The plot follows Péki, a woman dressed as a man disguised among a group of

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6 Auber, Le Cheval de bronze, xii.
9 Auber, Le Cheval de bronze, ix.
men who travel to Venus, and only she is able to resist the sirens’ powers of seduction.

The work avoids Chinese motifs and musical imagery, but instead reads more as a fairytale. Neither borrowing from transcriptions of Chinese music nor from Chinese opera tradition, the piece was largely western both in text and composition.\textsuperscript{11} The librettist, Eugène Scribe, reportedly wrote the plot based on a tale from \textit{The Arabian Nights} entitled “Les Sept Fils du Calender.”\textsuperscript{12} The text is an opéra comique filled with situational comedy and eroticism in the Venus scenes, “capturing the taste of the time.”\textsuperscript{13}

Act one begins with Tchin-Kao celebrating the engagement of his daughter Péki to the man Tsing-Sing. Tsing-Sing’s fourth wife, Tao Jin, and Péki are unhappy with the arrangement as Péki is actually in love with a farmer name Yanko. In the midst of this love polygon, the Crown Prince of China, Yang, arrives to the scene to hear Yanko telling the news of the bronze horse and the magical ride it can supposedly give to any who ride on its back. Prince Yang and Tsing-Sing decide to see this for themselves. In Act 2, Tsing-Sing returns alone from Venus and retells his experience with Yanko, and suddenly both turn to stone. Péki is thus determined to investigate the cause

\textsuperscript{10} Spelled Shantung in the original Wade-Giles Romanization.
\textsuperscript{12} Auber, \textit{Le Cheval de bronze}, x.
of these odd events and sets off to the bronze horse to rescue Yanko from his stone prison. Act 3 begins with Péki arriving on Venus disguised as a man. She finds Prince Yang still there, who then kisses Stella and returns to earth. Taking advantage of the moment, Péki grabs Stella’s magical bracelet and both she and Stella are transported back to earth where they find Prince Yang has also turned to stone. Péki frees Yanko and the Prince with the magical bracelet, but turns only a part of her father Tsing-Sing back, promising to free him entirely only if he allows her to marry Yanko. He agrees, and thus the romance is settled. Péki is free to marry her true love Yanko, while Prince Yang can marry the Princess Stella.14

The piece is a work of pure fantasy, using the East as a mere means of heightening the sense of magic and mystery void of much depth of plot or character. That the opera takes place in China at all seems to be largely secondary to the plot. Interestingly, while the opera itself has not had a popular production cycle, the one piece of the opera that has remained in any common repertoire is the overture. About seven minutes long, the piece is an extended introduction of the narrative (a known specialty of Scribe)15 featuring the “rushing” theme of the horse from act 1 followed by an andante movement with Péki’s theme, finally followed by a preview of the theme

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13 Auber, Le Cheval de bronze, x.
from a serenade in act 2. The piece, like the rest of the opera, sounds largely western and free of any Chinese musical imagery.

The representation of China as a setting for fantasy in Le Cheval de Bronze is just the beginning in a long line of exploiting the location for its curiosity as a land of exoticism and mystery. Earlier operas had touched upon the subject but never with such a bizarre plot. More than one hundred years earlier, for example, Antonio Vivaldi’s opera *Teuzzone* (1719) with libretto by Apostolo Zeno similarly lacks any musical quotation of the East, but its story is rather plain in comparison featuring a political battle for the throne left vacant by the Emperor of China where his widow and rightful heir Teuzzone fighting for the throne. It concludes with the protagonist Teuzzone reclaiming his rightful spot as emperor and pardoning those who did him any wrong. The piece, however, lacks much scholarly analyses and is in a similar position to *Le Cheval de Bronze*, similarly troubled in the number of realized productions. Only when we look towards later composers of opera do we begin to see more complex representations of China and its treatment as less of a place of exotic fantasy and more of a region rooted in reality.

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14 Auber, *Le Cheval de bronze*, x.
15 Auber, *Le Cheval de Bronze*, x.
16 Auber, *Le Cheval de bronze*, x.
17 Except for one unlucky conspirator who he has put in jail for life for his unrepentence.
Turandot

Regarded as perhaps the greatest post-Verdi Italian composer, Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924) is a prominent figure in the modern operatic repertoire. With Libretto by Giuseppe Adami and Renato Simoni based on play by Carlo Gozzi (1762), Turandot is an opera in three acts that runs an hour and forty-five minutes returning to the eastern exoticism of his earlier work Madama Butterfly, but instead of Japan, we find ourselves transported to mythical China in a land ruled over by a despotic Princess who beheads potential suitors if they are not able to answer her three riddles. The idea for the opera was first rejected by Adami and Simoni in March 1920, and countless revisions and rejections of scenes later, as became common in Puccini’s tumultuous composing career, Puccini actually died of throat cancer before its competition. Later completed by Franco Alfano, a younger member of the Italian generation of opera composers, the piece premiered in 1926 two years after Puccini’s death.19

The piece itself creates yet another realm of fantasy, a China rooted not in fact but rather in exoticism and savagery. Despite the overtones of a primitive China ruled by an evil bloodthirsty princess, Puccini’s intentions in the music are not quite that of subjugation and exploitation, but rather he
takes inspiration from actual Chinese melodies and complex compositions in an authentically Chinese style. Nonetheless, the piece is schizophrenic at times, the intention behind the music occasionally lost due to the narrative underneath it. The savage imagery often evokes a sense of later of what would later become Hollywood representations of “the natives,” while at the same time we are faced with an inspiring collection of musical genius.

The Libretto

The text itself is riddled with historical impossibilities and is a work of high fiction: while set in Ancient Beijing in the Forbidden City, the palace itself was constructed hundreds of years after the events in the opera supposedly took place. The fictional Princess Turandot declares she will marry any prince who can answer three riddles; those who fail are beheaded. Littered with images of savagery, the text presents a rather unflattering and historically inaccurate portrayal of the Chinese.

Act one begins amidst a populated scene at sunset for the execution of the Prince of Persia, the latest man to fail the riddles. As the prince is killed, the Prince Calaf enters the scene to find himself captivated by Princess Turandot’s beauty and vows to win her affections. Meanwhile, the Emperor of China’s three ministers Ping, Pang, and Pong as well as Calaf’s father

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Timur and his slave girl Liù enter to dissuade Calaf from pursuing Turandot. Ignoring all advice, Calaf rings the gong that signals the arrival of the next suitor.

Act two opens with Ping, Pang, and Pong recalling the countless executions since Turandot’s decree while optimistically dreaming that she will one day find true love and bring peace to China. Meanwhile in the square of the royal palace, the Emperor Altoum personally asks Calaf to give up his quest for Turandot’s love to spare further bloodshed when Turandot arrives to explain the meaning behind her edict. Inspired by the tale of an ancient princess who was betrayed by a man, the challenge of the riddles is her attempt at remaining pure. To Turandot’s dismay, Calaf proceeds to answer the three riddles correctly. Turandot is shocked and begs Altoum to free her from her own binding decree, but he refuses. Calaf offers the princess one more chance, providing her with his own riddle. Her task is to learn Calaf’s name by daybreak. If she succeeds, then he will willingly die. If she fails, he will take her as his bride.

In the third act, Ping, Pang, and Pong return to announce that Turandot has made a new decree that will have the three of them killed if the prince’s name is not discovered in time. After Ping, Pang, and Pong fail to

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20 Barbara Demick, “Beijing has thing for Puccini opera set in China,” Los Angeles Times, July 28,
persuade Calaf, several guards drag in Timur and Liù. Turandot enters to question Timur, but instead Liù steps forward to declare that she alone knows Calaf’s true name. Expressing her hidden love for Calaf, Liù grabs a guard’s dagger and stabs herself, shouting that through her sacrifice she hopes that Turandot will learn true love. Timur exits as the body is carried away, and Calaf and Turandot are left in a duet ending in a kiss. In the midst of both passion and shame, Turandot asks Calaf to leave forever. Instead, he reveals his name and leaves his life in her hands. In the final scene, Turandot announces to the emperor that she knows Calaf’s name. To great rejoicing, she declares his name is “love.”

The text itself has a complicated history from multiple sources, possibly tracing as far back as the twelfth century with Nizami Ganjavi’s poem *Haft Paykar*, a story of a Russian princess with similar themes. The princess hides herself from potential suitors in a location with a single entrance and surrounded by magical talismans. The task of discovering her requires the strength and wit to defeat the talismans and answer four riddles to ultimately succeed.

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23 Ying-Wei Tiffany Sung, “Turandot’s Homecoming: Seeking the Authentic Princess of China in a New Contest of Riddles” (MM diss., Bowling Green State University, 2010), 3.
The beginnings of a plot much more similar to Turandot come from a collection of Persian tales translated into French by François Péris de la Croix (1653-1713), titled Les mille et un jours (1710). In the third story in the collection we are introduced to the Prince Calaf, a man who travels to China where he learns of the princess Turandot. Suitors travel from around the world to seek her hand in marriage, but in order to do so they must first answer three riddles correctly or be beheaded. In a slight variation of the ultimate text of the Puccini opera, after Calaf challenges Turandot to learn his true name, he accidentally reveals it to Turandot’s maid Adelma. After she tells Turandot and is overcome with shame, Adelma commits suicide. This event causes Turandot’s heart to soften: she expresses her love for Calaf.24

When Carlo Gozzi (1702-1808) adapted Turandot to the stage, he sought to revive the use of commedia dell’arte and developed a play blending fairytale and fantasy with comic stock characters.25 This adaptation features a different set of characters with a similar plot, although Turandot and Calaf’s role remain unchanged. Friedrich Schiller translated Gozzi’s play into German, but in the process revised the roles even further. He changed characters Turandot and Calaf to suggest that Turandot’s cruelty is a product

of the inequality of the sexes in Asia rather than innate cruelty.\footnote{Sung, “Turandot’s Homecoming,” 14.} Calaf, meanwhile, instead of falling in love with Turandot for her beauty, instead sees her as an opportunity to lift himself out of a miserable life exile in China. Instead of a superficial love-at-first-sight scenario, he falls in love with her character and their common desire for freedom, Calaf from exile and Turandot from gender inequality.\footnote{Sung, “Turandot’s Homecoming,” 14.}

Puccini was most inspired by an Italian translation of Schiller’s version of 
Turandot, although he attributed Gozzi as the creator of the work.\footnote{Sung, “Turandot’s Homecoming,” 16.} A letter by Puccini to librettist Adami suggests a great respect for this iteration of Turandot and actually hints to a depth of character not obvious at first glance:

\begin{quote}
I’ve read Turandot and I don’t think we should abandon this subject…Simplify it as regards the number of acts so as to make it run smoothly and effectively; and above all heighten the amorous passion of Turandot which she has smothered so long beneath the ashes of her pride... All in all, I consider Turandot the most normal and human of all Gozzi’s works. In short, a Turandot filtered through a modern brain—yours, Adami’s and mine.”\footnote{Sung, “Turandot’s Homecoming,” 16.}
\end{quote}

Thus before Adami and Simoni had begun to write the libretto, Puccini already had a sense of the plot which would unfold. Puccini had quite the role in the libretto, suggesting in his letter to Adami in 1920 that he wished to
add a new character to “give a touch of charm.”\textsuperscript{30} This character would ultimately end up being Liù, replacing Adelma from earlier versions.\textsuperscript{31} In early drafts however, Puccini expressed a fear that much of the depth of character intended was being lost,\textsuperscript{32} a point I tend to echo in its ultimate stage adaptation. Ultimately this concern was never resolved as he died before the piece would reach its completion.\textsuperscript{33} Indeed, Puccini’s habitual lack of confidence in the work was commonplace before his death, perhaps best exemplified by his inability to finish the final scene.

**Public Reception in China**

Many have interpreted the plot of *Turandot* as a great insult to Chinese history, and for this reason it was never produced in China until the 1990’s in fear of upsetting the political establishment, although it was never explicitly banned.\textsuperscript{34} The first productions were hesitant to put on a complete show, and the ministry of Culture cautioned that “*Turandot fever*” should be avoided.\textsuperscript{35} For featuring a completely fictionalized plot featuring what appears to be a heartless despot ruling the land with fear, it does seem hard to blame them for such wariness about the piece. “This is not a convenient opera since it

\textsuperscript{31} Budden, *Puccini*, 426.
\textsuperscript{32} Sung, “*Turandot’s Homecoming*,” 17.
\textsuperscript{33} Sung, “*Turandot’s Homecoming*,” 17.
might arouse people to bloodthirsty acts,” wrote one editor of the official New China News Agency,36 revealing the feeling that the piece was not just disrespectful but potentially downright dangerous in the eyes of the Chinese government. Puccini’s choice to keep the commedia dell’arte characters of Ping, Pang, and Pong gives me similar concerns, the very names of the character reeking in offensiveness to a modern audience although such a choice of characters may have represented the sense of humor and taste of the time. It nonetheless serves to reinforce the supposed exotic Chinese identity, a strange people in a mysterious land in the East with incomprehensible names, language, and music. The wealth of historical errors similarly does no favors to Puccini, the impossibility of the setting in the Forbidden City suggesting a lack of close research of the setting and a treatment of the region as an object of mere fancy.

In order to make Turandot acceptable to Chinese audiences, staged productions feature exhausting revisions of the text, utilizing a sense of nationalism and newfound control over a piece that otherwise makes China appear to be a mythical land of savages. One 1995 production changed the setting to an imaginary kingdom in Central Asia to make the plot palatable to Chinese audiences, while only recently other productions have been much

more faithful to the original. One such 1998 production directed by Chinese film director Zhang Yimou actually staged the production in the Forbidden City.\textsuperscript{37} Other directors have strived to make the piece more authentically Chinese, particularly in a Sichuan opera adaptation by Wei Minglun.\textsuperscript{38} Wei Minglun has also adapted the work for Beijing opera as well as Yue opera, a number of attempts at redesigning a work that at first sight seems incompatible with a Chinese audience.\textsuperscript{39}

By the 2000’s, \textit{Turandot} had entered mainstream Chinese culture, a 2001 Guangzhou production adapted \textit{Turandot} into a ballet, and in 2003 the China National Beijing Opera Company staged a new Beijing opera version with an altered plot, adding “eighteen invading armies intent on conquering Beijing, which a brave and selfless Turandot is determined to protect.”\textsuperscript{40} Liù was also dropped from the production as the characters thought she would make the prince look bad, and Lu Ling, Princess Turandot’s nanny, was given a major role instead.\textsuperscript{41} In response to the changes, in a more recent production of the same Beijing opera adaptation in 2005, director Wu Jiang states, “actually, Oriental females are usually not as cold-hearted and cruel as

\textsuperscript{36} Demick, “Beijing has thing for Puccini opera set in China.”
\textsuperscript{37} Melvin and Cai, “Turandot in China,” 486-492.
\textsuperscript{38} Melvin and Cai, “Turandot in China,” 486-492.
\textsuperscript{39} Melvin and Cai, “Turandot in China,” 486-492.
\textsuperscript{40} Melvin and Cai, “Turandot in China,” 486-492.
Turandot in Puccini’s imagination. We’ve tried to make Turandot a more realistic Chinese woman.”42 There is thus a common trend in attempts at making the piece more acceptable and relatable to Chinese audiences who would otherwise be offended. Some adaptations in China have made even more drastic changes: a 2007 Shanghai Opera House production set *Turandot* in modern Shanghai, featuring a Prince Calaf in jeans using the internet to find the answers to Turandot’s riddles.43

A more recent 2008 production given the honor to be the very first production in Beijing’s new National Center for the Performing arts was much more true to the original, but still features edits to make the opera more agreeable to Chinese audiences. In his attempts to make the story less obviously fake in the 2008 production, designer Gao Guangjian mixed elements from six Chinese dynasties to invoke a sense of authenticity while still being aware of its anachronistic and impossible setting.44 Other changes include edits such as the removal of certain commonly used props such as severed heads on poles as well as the removal some of the more explicit lines in the text such as Ping, Pang, and Pong warning that “They strangle you in this place, impale you, cut your throat, skin you, tear you to pieces and

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42 Zhang, “BJ opera-based ‘Turandot’.”
44 Demick, “Beijing has thing for Puccini opera set in China.”
decapitate you, saw you and disembowel you.” Turandot herself was also changed in the version, becoming a “frightened young girl” rather than the usual intimidating figure with fantastic robes and long fingernails. To make the piece even more acceptable to Chinese audiences and the government, the piece most surprisingly did away with Alfano’s interpretation of the ending and featured a finale by Chinese composer Hao Weiya. His interpretation of the ending was similar to Adami’s method in that it was based heavily on Puccini’s final drafts of the last scene. He similarly attempted to adhere to Puccini’s style in the ending and even added a new aria for Turandot as well as a duet for Turandot and Calaf.

Adapted and altered in its every revision, Chinese productions of Turandot reflect a great uneasiness with the work and its portrayal of China. Attempts at making the work acceptable include changes to the libretto, changes to theatrical elements, as well as the incorporation of an ending by a Chinese composer. It will be interesting to see how the work continues in China, and I will certainly be following closely to see if the trend of adaptations to make the story more acceptable continues or whether there is eventually a push to show the work as it was originally envisioned. When

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45 Demick, “Beijing has thing for Puccini opera set in China.”
46 Demick, “Beijing has thing for Puccini opera set in China.”
47 Demick, “Beijing has thing for Puccini opera set in China.”
faced with a work that portrays a historically inaccurate and potentially offensive portrayal of your own country, however, the nationalistic desire to turn the story around is quite unsurprising. Interestingly, when interviewed about his choices, designer Gao Guangjian suggested that historical accuracy (or lack thereof) is only secondary, and that people do not go to the opera to learn about history, but simply go to productions of Puccini’s Turandot because, simply put, “The music is wonderful.”

The Music: Mo Li Hua and other Quotations

Perhaps Puccini’s greatest work, the piece exhibits some schizophrenic moments that leave me occasionally at a loss, but it otherwise finds redemption in Puccini’s aims. Amanda Holden notes that Turandot stands out from Puccini’s early operas as, despite his fear of losing his own creativity with his age, he paints

a riot of competing musical colours, each primarily associated with an element of the drama: the heroic prince, the proud princess, the pathetic slave girl, the bizarre ministers, even the hapless Persian suitor; all create their own musical atmosphere

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49 Demick, “Beijing has thing for Puccini opera set in China.”
during the course of Act I, and thus discretely dominate sections of the drama;\textsuperscript{50}

Andrew Davis is similarly fascinated with Puccini’s heterogeneous collection of music in \textit{Turandot}, describing it as \textit{stylistic plurality}, noting the piece as a whole makes a point of emphasizing the contrast between styles (such as east and west) and describing the opera as written \textit{with styles} rather than \textit{in a style}.\textsuperscript{51}

True in many regards to Italian operatic tradition, with long, fluid melodies and lyric vocal-orchestral climaxes, contemporary reviews of \textit{Turandot} indicate a simple dichotomy of two types of music in the opera: the familiar and authentic Italian Romantic music, and the non-Romantic, insincere and unfamiliar music, this comparison often preventing critics from analyzing the piece further.\textsuperscript{52} Also of interest is the shift of the singer and orchestral relationship in the transition from Romantic to the non-Romantic, the traditional voice–centered emphasis suddenly masked by the Asian themes periodically appearing in \textit{Turandot}. In the transition back to the Romantic style, the voice again becomes the focal point or \textit{voice-object}.\textsuperscript{53}

Andrew Davis takes careful note to avoid oversimplifying this process,

\textsuperscript{51} Andrew C. Davis, \textit{Musical Meaning and Interpretation: Il trittico, Turandot, and Puccini’s late style} (Bloomington Indiana University Press, 2010), 4.
\textsuperscript{52} Davis, \textit{Musical Meaning}, 24.
suggested some passages emphasize the voice more strongly than others, but rather than the above is just a common noticeable trend to different degrees.54

The orchestration of the Romantic sections tends to reinforce this point, the Italian operatic convention of doubling the vocal melody in the strings at the unison or octave, known as the *violinata or sviolinata*, essentially raises the importance of the melodic line while simultaneously decreasing the importance of the orchestral line as opposed to a separate melody and accompaniment alternative.

[It ]simplifies the musical texture and heightens the emotional register... emphasizes and underlines the melodic line itself, such that the melody has more directness and more prominence—more energy, and indeed more brute force—than it would otherwise have had in a standard homophonic, melody-and-accompaniment-type texture; and it lends an exceptionally rich, expansive quality to the overall sound characteristic of much of Puccini’s music... he seems to have used the *violinata* to manipulate the music’s affective intensity by strategically expanding or contracting the orchestral doubling.55

The piece “Non piangere, Liù” (rh I.43) is an example of this, the first doubling occurring at “Il tuo signore”, and by the point the first part of the piece has concluded, the doubling expands to include cellos, both violins, and winds doubling at the unison or octave. Puccini then takes a short retreat

before the doubling returns twice more, once at “che non cade” and again at “che non sorride più.”\(^\text{56}\)

Reinforcing the sophisticated treatment of orchestration in the eastern-inspired sections, the opera as a whole excels beyond a simple “blanket characterization of all things ‘Eastern.’”\(^\text{57}\) Rather than simple exoticism for the sake of exoticism, Puccini incorporates authentic Chinese melodies that he claimed from two main sources. One was the music box belonging to the Baron Fassini that Adami reportedly heard at Bagni di Lucca in August 1920 in his *Il romanzo della vita di Giacomo Puccini*, as well as a booklet entitled *Chinese Music* by J. A. van Aalst published in Shanghai in 1884.\(^\text{58}\)

In a letter to librettist Adami in 1920 he mentioned he had hoped to use Chinese folk melodies and use Chinese instruments in the orchestration to represent the “local color” of China,\(^\text{59, 60}\) suggesting at least some interest in treating eastern musical traditions with some respect. The piece *Mo Li Hua* (Jasmine Flower) was one such melody from the music box acquired from Fassini, quoted directly in the children’s chorus in the first act in “Là, sui monti dell’Est.” or “Mountains of the East”\(^\text{61}\)

\(^\text{59}\) Sung, “Turandot’s Homecoming,” 17.
\(^\text{60}\) Budden, *Puccini*, 426.
\(^\text{61}\) Ashbrook and Powers, *Puccini’s Turandot*, 95.
Figure 1. Melody and lyrics of Mo Li Hua and transcribed to C major.

Figure 2. Mountains of the East, from rh I.19 transcribed to C major

Puccini also used other pieces of music from Fassini’s music box, applying it to the melody for “Ferma! Che fai?” Turandot takes an excerpt from page 26 of Chinese Music Turandot, the first eight measures of the melody appearing in the three Ministers’ fuori-scena “Il talamo le voglio preparare” with slight alterations that Ashbrook and Powers point out such
as lengthening the whole note A’s as well as changing f to f# (rh II.19 + 12).\textsuperscript{64}

The second appearance of the melody occurs near the end of Act II set a semitone lower (rh II.67 + 2).\textsuperscript{65}

In addition to his quotations from authentic Chinese melodies, Puccini also invented several of his own, usually in his typical manner of constructing melodies of two short motives combined and “combined and recombined at various levels and in slightly varied shadings.”\textsuperscript{66} However, his efforts to capture the Chinese \textit{tinta}, or color, were not limited to applications of pentatonic melodies, but also included alterations of rhythms into irregular meters.\textsuperscript{67} In a letter to Adami on March 30, 1921, Puccini wrote,

\begin{quote}
I call your attention to Liù in the third [act]. It will be necessary to make an irregular meter [\textit{metro ineguale}]. I have the bit of music with a Chinese flavor [\textit{la musichetta di sapore cinese}] and it will be necessary to adapt it a little.\textsuperscript{68}
\end{quote}

This \textit{sapore cinese}, Ashbrook and Powers note, though Puccini was likely unaware of it, was authentically Chinese at a level “sophisticated far beyond that of the usual superficial exoticism of colonialist Europe.”\textsuperscript{69} His evolving melody of “Tanto amore segreto” was based on modulations from one pentatonic “module” into another through converting an “accessory tone

\textsuperscript{65} Puccini, \textit{Turandot}, 306.
\textsuperscript{66} Ashbrook and Powers, \textit{Puccini’s Turandot}, 99.
\textsuperscript{67} Ashbrook and Powers, \textit{Puccini’s Turandot}, 98.
into a principal one”, called biàn yín (exchange tone) in Chinese. The exchange tone in this example is E used as an upper neighbor to D in the pentatonic module C-D-F-G-A in measure 1-2, and in measure 3-4 it is exchanged for F, entering the pentatonic module G-A-C-D-E. Measures 5-6 bring back f, but it is exchanged for Bb as a lower-neighbor-tone to c, introducing us to the third pentatonic module Bb-C-D-F-G, leading the melody in measures 6-8 back into the first module of C-D-F-G-A.

In their analysis of this section, Ashbrook and Powers comment that it is highly unlikely that Puccini was thinking in terms of these technical terms, but rather was thinking in terms of utilizing a “Chinese” pentatonic scale in one hand and the accompaniment suggesting tonal centers in the other without too closely following European tonal-harmonic successions. Nonetheless, it is no small feat to so accurately represent a sense of “Chineseness” without delving entirely into stereotype. These feats, however, are occasionally lost to the audience.

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68 Ashbrook and Powers, *Puccini’s Turandot*, 98.
70 Ashbrook and Powers, *Puccini’s Turandot*, 100.
71 Ashbrook and Powers, *Puccini’s Turandot*, 100.
72 Ashbrook and Powers, *Puccini’s Turandot*, 100.
73 Ashbrook and Powers, *Puccini’s Turandot*, 100.
Despite its quotations of authentic melodies and often highly advanced incorporation of the Chinese musical style, the context in which these musical passages arrive is just as important to note as the technicalities of the passages themselves. When placed in context, the moments of apparent compositional awareness of quoting Chinese melodies and practices suddenly becomes much more opaque.

The imagery of the opera as it relates to the music cannot be discounted. The Metropolitan Opera production of Turandot, for example, features an inexplicable dragon from the Chinese dragon dance wandering throughout the crowd74 in the midst of the first act as the townspeople sing of their fear of Turandot and her love of death, introducing the executioner Pu Tin-Pao, (a name with no apparent meaning other than his name sounds vaguely Chinese) set to a backdrop of steady drum beats and periodic accents on the flutes and other woodwinds on a high C# with grace note D, evoking a sense of early Hollywood representation of “savage” Native Americans. The section brings with it a repeating melodic line that evokes similar imagery (rh I.10 +2-8) with the words “Oil it, grind it, let the blade flash, spurt fire and blood” (Ungi, arrota, che la lama guizzi, sprizzi fuoco e sangue!)75

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75 Puccini, Turandot, 26-29.
Barbara Demick of the Los Angeles Times notes that some music scholars have interpreted the opera as "an unconscious manifestation of racial arrogance," which is outwardly evident in scenes such as the above, but in many situations we instead see an accurate representation of actual Chinese melodies or artful interpretations created by Puccini himself. While there are certainly clear images of savagery inherent in the text and musical language, on a technical level many of the quotations are complex and deserving of respect. The opera certainly draws much from the comedic taste of the time, the *commedia dell’arte* characters of Ping, Pang, and Pong a prime representation of such, their appearances heightened by the reintroduction of pentatonic melodies and their very characters and even names serving as a comedic backdrop to the otherwise dark and savage imagery surrounding them. While the text itself is a source of much of this imagery, to which Puccini is not wholly responsible for other than in his selection of the piece to base his final work on, he makes plenty of interesting choices that at times counter the much easier option of inventing “Chinesey” melodies without

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76 Demick, “Beijing has thing for Puccini opera set in China.”
putting much thought into them, creating a polyphonic blend of styles with
taste while still occasionally submitting to expected stereotypes.

In a passionate and melodramatic review by Gaetano Cesari in the
_Corriere della Sera_ after _Turandot_’s premiere on the evening of April 25, 1926,
he had nothing but kind words laced with sorrow for Puccini’s final work
before his untimely death:

How extraordinary is the power of evocation possessed by
music which bears in itself the clear imprint of the composer’s
personality! Last night at the Scala Puccini was with us. He was
with the great public who had admired and applauded him in
the days of his most splendid triumphs. He was in the theatre
which, if it gave him some pain in the days of his striving, was
not less generous with praise and homage, as on that occasion
in particular when its genial conductor brought before the
public again, in new beauty and freshness, the composer’s most
vigorous opera…

…The performance, punctuated by frequent applause, ended
with a moment of silence, when the little, mangled body of Liù
disappeared behind the scenes followed by the procession of the
mourning populace, and a shrill E flat from the piccolo seemed
to tell once more of the fleeting soul and of the far-off and
forever impenetrable mystery, to which alike great passions and
obscure loves like little Liù’s come at last and are lost. Then,
from where he stood as conductor, Toscanini announced in a
low voice full of emotion that at that point Puccini had left the
composition of the opera. And the curtain was slowly lowered
on _Turandot_..77

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Nixon in China

John Adams (b. 1947) is one of the foremost American composers of the late 20th century, part of a generation inspired by minimalism and the works of composers such as La Monte Young and Terry Riley in the 1950s and 1960s.\(^7\) In *Nixon in China*, he demonstrates a modern operatic tradition drawing from avant-garde performance art as well as traditional operatic style, inspired by the libretto of poet Alice Goodman and the direction of Peter Sellars. At approximately two hours and thirty minutes long, *Nixon in China* is the result of Peter Sellars’ desire in basing an opera on Richard Nixon’s visit February 1972 with Mao Zedong.\(^8\) The opera follows the events of this visit closely, recreating many scenes that were publicized in the media at the time while at the same time traveling further into the inner thoughts of the historical figures involved, telling a much larger story at times contrary to the popular portrayal of their public personae.

The piece is a fine example of a text in which the status of the Chinese is elevated above that of simply “the natives,” but instead there is a great depth of character and attention equally distributed among the characters. The music itself is modern and sensitive, avoiding Chinese stereotypes, instead artfully satirizing the Communist party through a re-envisioning of

Jiang Qing’s *The Red Detachment of Women*, a revolutionary ballet featured in
the second act.

**The Libretto**

Described as a “polyphonic” collaboration by librettist Alice Goodman, she notes that the process was immensely collaborative and that Adams, Sellars, and Goodman all contributed in some way to the final product.\(^{80}\) Each individual brought something to the table, even down to different images for each character; the Nixon portrayed in the final version of the opera, Michael Steinberg notes, is not the same Nixon that Sellars envisioned, nor that of Adams or Goodman. Instead, it is an amalgamation of multiple ideas:

> The ‘real’ Nixon... is a polyphonic mélange in himself: whose Nixon, which historian’s, which witness’s, after all is the real Nixon? Goodman’s *Nixon in China* libretto is a wonder of human perception, generosity, wit, and the poetic resource. She is as essential to *Nixon in China* as da Ponte was to *Cosi fan tutte*...\(^{81}\)

The piece is divided in three acts. The opera begins in an airfield outside Beijing where an official delegation awaits the arrival of the Nixons and their entourage, who arrive in a fantastic display featuring a massive airplane appearing onto the stage. The meeting between the political figures

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\(^{81}\) Steinberg, “Nixon in China”, 111.
is initially cold, their demeanors warming up over the course of the three acts. The opera soon takes us to a meeting between Richard Nixon and an aging and frail Mao Zedong, where just about everything he sings is amplified by his secretaries and Zhou En-lai. After this meeting we finally move to the great banquet scene, bringing the two parties more closely together with a single toast by Premier Zhou and another by Nixon himself followed by countless iterations of the Chinese word for bottoms up, gan bei (千杯, Pinyin: gānbēi, literally: dry cup).

The second act has us follow Pat Nixon’s travels across the country, including a visit to a model pig farm. Eventually we move to the second scene featuring the viewing of Jiang Qing’s revolutionary ballet, *The Red Detachment of Women*, an extensive play-within-a-play scene in which, through the course of the performance, the line between fiction and reality is blurred as Pat and Richard Nixon become involved in the drama. The scene features a great deal of political satire, the music itself mocking the style of revolutionary opera and ballets of the time period, commenting on Jiang Qing’s apparent sterilization of the arts. The line between the two dramas is further blurred by the actor who plays Kissinger also performing in *The Red Detachment of Women* as the antagonist and evil landlord, Lao Tsu.
The final act is a long scene humanizing the six main protagonists commenting on their significance as individuals separate from their political personas. The characters sit in individual beds, recounting their individual thoughts and contemplating how exactly their life choices brought them to this place and time.

In their treatment of the text, Sellars, Adams, and Goodman had an unusual position in the world of opera where they were writing about individuals still living at the time of the piece’s premiere. Michael Steinberg writes,

> It is rare for us to encounter living and real characters on the operatic stage. Indeed, so accustomed are we to seeing singers in tights, crinolines, frock coats, tunics, flowing robes, and the like, that directors and designers can still induce a certain sense of shock just by dressing someone in something clearly recognizable as contemporary—clothes, not costume. Audiences drew in their breath, so “real” were these Nixons.\(^8^2\)

While highly aware of the public personas of each of the historical figures, the opera takes a different spin on their individual characters beyond simple caricature, such as a particularly remarkable emphasis on redesigning the persona of Pat Nixon, who in most portrayals in the media even after her death had been shown to have “a stoic and repressed personality.”\(^8^3\) Adams

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\(^8^2\) Steinberg, “Nixon in China”, 111.
redesigns Pat and makes her a centerpiece of the opera,\textsuperscript{84} Sellars writing that the operatic version of Pat said many things she would have never said in public although she was very strong in character:

Pat really does have this amazing spirit and strength in the ballet sequence – the stuff that Pat Nixon would have never said in public. But in private she was very strong that way, apparently… Her anger about Watergate was never expressed in public, but in private that was not the case. In public she always stepped back so Nixon could be in the spotlight, as women of her generation were trained to do, to be in support, to be your mama.”\textsuperscript{85} 86

Mao’s wife Jiang Qing\textsuperscript{87} was no exception to the alteration of the public persona. Mao’s fourth wife and last wife, she had a number of pseudonyms and was commonly called Madame Mao by the western media, she was an infamous force and member of the Gang of Four, and in many ways responsible for the Cultural Revolution. She was ranked third in the hierarchy of the Communist Party behind Mao and Zhou Enlai, and may have been the most powerful woman in the world at the time until her imprisonment.\textsuperscript{88} Richard Nixon himself writes in his memoir,

Chiang Ch’ing had none of the easy humor or warmth of Mao, Zhou, and the other men I met. I had observed the same characteristic in the young women who acted as interpreters and in several others we met during our week in China. The

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{84} Daines, “Nixon’s Women,” 8.
\textsuperscript{86} Daines, “Nixon’s Women,” 8.
\textsuperscript{87} Spelled Chiang Ch’ing in the old Romanization and used throughout the libretto.
\textsuperscript{88} Daines, “Nixon’s Women,” 16.
\end{footnotesize}
women of the movement, it struck me, were more humorless and single-minded in their total dedication to the ideology than were the men. In fact, Chiang Ch’ing was unpleasantly abrasive and aggressive. At one point in that evening she turned to me and in a challenging voice asked, “Why did you not come to China before now?” Since the ballet was in progress at that time, I did not respond. 

This sense of harshness present in the public mindset was not so interpreted in the opera text. Instead, we see the deeper side of Madame Mao, exploring her sensitivities throughout the opera despite the backdrop of repetition and musical satire of her work *The Red Detachment of Women* as well as of the Communist Party and its adherence to Mao’s teachings.

**The Music: An Opera of Diffuse Styles**

The music of *Nixon in China* is void of Chinese stereotypes and simple quotations in the interest of invoking a Chinese flavor, but rather we have soundscape of modern influences with quotations of Romantic music interspersed with moments of musical unpredictability in some of the scenes regarding *The Red Detachment of Women*. The opera as a whole is an example of Adams’ growth and flexibility between styles, Author Amanda Holden noting that *Nixon in China* demonstrates Adams’ move from stylistic allusion to Romantic music to actual quotation, as well as featuring the notable use of integrating musical and dramatic incidents as well as music for

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characterization, such as in an accelerating arpeggio figure in the second act transitioning into a tropical hurricane. She also claims the opera demonstrates the transition of Adams’ style in the “virtual abandonment of minimalist repetition… [replaced] by a new, highly lyrical manner, predominantly slow but very sensitive to the ebb and flow of action and, especially, text.” Some critics still call the piece minimalist, mostly for the frequent repetitions of text and musical patterns, but the piece also explores a great deal of practices in common with late nineteenth-century operatic practice. The music itself recalls the grandiose nature of full orchestras while actually relying on a small selection of instruments aided by synthesizer. In an interview nine years after the premiere, Adams mentions his inspiration for orchestration and arranging, inspired by white swing music from the 1940’s that he imagined the Nixons would have listened to at the time. With a personal connection to the big-band sound through his father’s time in a jazz band in the 1930’s and his mother’s stepfather’s ownership of a dance hall in New Hampshire, he used his parents, roughly the same age as the Nixons, as his model for the musical setting. When confronted with potential labels for the ultimate genre of music, Adams contests the label of

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‘postmodern,’ instead arguing that the so-called postmodern period of opera is one with diffuse styles.

Postmodern, a not very helpful term, came into usage about ten or twelve years ago. I don’t like it, because it defines what is happening now only by negation: “We are no longer modern.” I don’t think that periods like the present one are necessarily bad periods. In fact, they sometimes produce the greatest art—periods when experimentation and exploration have given way to the need for assimilation… minimalism represented a very pure point of view, as did serial music, and chance music—all these were very highly defined styles. The rules were strict and the earmarks unmistakable… either you were a Cagean, or you were a follower of the European avant-garde. It mattered intensely which party you joined. But this does not describe the scene now in the 1990s;95

The Red Detachment of Women and the Wife of Mao Zedong

Perhaps most interesting in its interpretation of China is Adams’ rendition of the Red Detachment of Women. Historically, the Nixons first meet Mao’s wife, Jiang Qing when they attend a performance of her ballet on the second night of the presidential visit.96 The actual ballet is a three-hour-long piece following a women’s militia, one of Jiang Qing’s eight stage works seeking to reform Chinese theater during the Cultural Revolution. Seeking to depict the “socialist present,” with women equal to men and the Communist party being the focus of a newfound strength in social and economic growth,

94 Weiss, Opera: A History in Documents, 331.
95 Weiss, Opera: A History in Documents, 331-332.
the piece is an odd mix of Western tradition mixed with Chinese influences.\footnote{Daines, “Nixon’s Women,” 18.}

For Madame Mao, ballet was second only to opera in its importance as a form of revolutionary theater. As a primarily female art form as opposed to the male dominated Chinese opera, the ballet was a means for her to express the struggle against patriarchy while adhering to Communist ideas.

The ballet premiered in October 1964 despite opposition from Zhou Yang, the commissar of culture at the time.\footnote{Daines, “Nixon’s Women,” 18.} The piece is based on historical events that took place between 1930 and 1931 on Hainan Island, where a women’s militia of Li peasants revolted against autocratic landowners sympathetic to the Kuomintang.\footnote{Daines, “Nixon’s Women,” 18.} A film made in the 60’s inspired Madame Mao to produce a ballet on the same subject, and she made a trip to Hainan Island in 1963 to interview women involved in the original militia. The research for the ballet was thorough, with musicians, choreographers and stage designers from the Workers, Peasants, and Soldiers Ballet Troupe sent to study the local Hainan Island culture and determine how to best incorporate it into the piece.\footnote{Daines, “Nixon’s Women,” 19.}

On a musical level, the piece was often sharply criticized. The media tended to be less interested in the work itself than in the irony of the Nixons
watching an anti-imperialist ballet, and when the work itself was analyzed it was criticized as unimaginative. Harold Schonberg in a 1972 review in the *New York Times* wrote it was “unadventurous... it stays close to D minor and related keys. It uses a few leitmotifs that represent various characters... largely the score is poster music, of a movie background nature, with a great climax toward the end that sings the praises of the workers and the peasants.”101 Other reviewers describe it as a “riot of clashing styles, with evocations of agitprop and Straussian voluptuousness stirred up with jazzy blasts.”102

Peter Sellars had thoughts of staging a version of the ballet before settling on *Nixon in China*.103 In Act 2, Scene 2, the ballet is contained as a drama within a drama, the version “unashamedly parodistic in its choreography and music and the liveliest part of *Nixon in China* in terms of stage action.”104 Curiously, Adams had never actually seen the original ballet, but had at least seen another of Jiang Qing’s, *The White Haired Girl* in San Francisco’s Chinatown.105 He was rather tentative on over-researching for the part, describing himself as “a little nervous about too much research when it

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103 Daines, “Nixon’s Women,” 19.
104 Daines, “Nixon’s Women,” 19.
comes to the creative act,” but still took the historical background into consideration.\textsuperscript{106} His opinion of the creative works of Jiang Qing was rather negative,

Despite Madame Mao’s intense desire to make the culture an explicitly Chinese homegrown event, the music she ultimately approved of for these ballets wasn’t Chinese at all; it sounded like watered-down bad Russian ballet music with bits of silent movie music thrown in. My ballet music is of course an essay in horrific kitsch, an attempt to make a score that sounds as if a committee wrote it.”\textsuperscript{107}

The piece serves to dramatize Jiang Qing and to compare Nixon and Pat through their spoken reactions to the piece, featuring several bits of direct interaction between the two dramas.\textsuperscript{108} Indeed, three female secretaries of Jiang Qing sing the thoughts of the ballet’s main character, Ching-hua throughout the piece. The course of the interactions between the opera and ballet is a progression of breaking down the original plotline of the ballet, Pat Nixon eventually entering the piece to defend Ching-hua from her attackers, a representation of the western model of emphasizing human rights conflicting with the revolutionary ideals of the Communist party.

The piece begins with Ching-hua in jail protesting the plight of the peasantry at the hand of an evil landlord and his henchmen, Lao Szu, who is played by the same actor who portrays Kissinger. The piece is the prime

\textsuperscript{106} Daines, “Nixon’s Women,” 19.
opportunity for humor and political satire, Pat even commenting on the character’s resemblance to Kissinger.

Ching-hua escapes from jail after a struggle with her captors, and after a scene of acrobatics and fight music, she is recaptured and raped by Lao Szu, who then orders his men to whip her to death. In response, Pat interjects and stands up, and Nixon merely asks her to stop and states that it is only a play.

Their involvement in the ballet is solidified when Pat runs up to Ching-hua in the midst of a storm, shielding her from the rain and reviving her, all set to a quotation from Wagner’s Magic Sleep music. “In a ballet by Chiang Ch’ing, physical healing can only be a precursor to ideological enlightenment,”109 writes Daines, and this ideological enlightenment comes with the Red Detachment of Women to teach Ching-hua in target practice and a bayonet drill. The women ultimately enter the landlord’s mansion in a final act of revenge. In the historical version of the opera, Ching-hua slays the landlord, but in the recreation she fails to do so. Scolding her, Jiang Qing stands up and interrupts the action (which she actually did in the midst of the Cultural Revolution, interrupting several performances mid-performance)110 with her aria “I am the wife of Mao Zedong.”

Jiang Qing
I am the wife of Mao Zedong,
Who raised the weak above the strong.
When I appear the people hang
Upon my words, and for his sake
Whose wreaths are heavy round my neck,
I speak according to the book.
When did the Chinese people last
Expose its daughters? At the breast
Of history I sucked and pissed,
Thoughtless and heartless, red and blind,
I cut my teeth upon the land
And when I walked my feet were bound
On revolution. Let me be
A grain of sand in heaven’s eye
And I shall taste eternal joy.\footnote{111}

Serving as a climax to the lengthy scene, the aria evokes a sense of both fear and pity, Jiang Qing “subscribing to the male hegemony,” as Daines notes, affirming her authority by her marriage to Mao.\footnote{112} The words are fraught with double meaning and play on words, her “feet were bound on revolution” commenting on the debilitating practice of foot binding and yet she was also bound on revolution. This asks the question: was this leap towards revolution voluntary? Jiang Qing is famous for declaring that she was but Mao Zedong’s dog in her trial following his death, suggesting her helplessness at the hands of his ideology, and in the singing of this aria her voice is similarly reminiscent of the political fervor the day, her foray into

\footnote{111}{John Adams, \textit{Nixon in China}, Libretto by Alice Goodman (Amsterdam: De Nederlandse Opera, 1988), 57.}
\footnote{112}{Daines, “Nixon’s Women,” 24.}
almost maniacal repetition in irregular rhythms the word “book” in reference to the Little Red Book clearly commenting on the group-think behavior prevalent in the midst of the Cultural Revolution, the followers of Mao Zedong and his ideals blindly accepting his word as an eternal truth akin to a religion of its own. In her own words, however, she comments on this blind following; she is quite aware of the subjugation of the people of China just as women have been subjugated at the hands of men. Her inner strength is palpable and terrifying, her words speaking of pain and revenge for years of suffering at the hands of others. In the final scene of the opera, we see more of her inner strength and resolve; she is forced to keep still and silent, lying low until the time is right. Historically, this end was interrupted by her arrest and the disbanding of the Gang of Four, Jiang Qing ultimately imprisoned for life.

Jiang Qing
I can keep still,
I can say nothing for a while.
While the sun moves on. Nothing I fear
Has ever harmed me, why should you?
Marshal your forces, I’ll lie low
The drought has made me thin and strong.
When they took off their coats and hung
Them over branches, and the pick
Scraped this eroded ground, I shook
With pure excitement

She is a tragic character despite the popular narrative of her cruelties and crimes, providing a conflict for the audience in recognizing the humanity of a misunderstood character. Despite the satire and mocking of the ideals of the Cultural Revolution through the play-within-a-play, we see a meaningful treatment of these historical figures foreign to most Western eyes. Dainer writes,

Rather than being presented simply “the natives,” the Chinese have autonomous identities of their own, which their hosts, like us, but dimly perceive. In this sense, Nixon in China cannot be compared to other operas whose characters undergo a process of self-realization in the environment of the non-Western other… the Complexity and detail with which the events from the Cultural Revolution in Nixon are re-created demonstrate a more sophisticated understanding of Chinese culture. 114

Throughout the course of the ballet, the Daines observes that the sense of musical parody gradually transforms back to musical sincerity 115 and continues to tackle issues of political and emotional significance both musically and textually, the clear parody morphing into a political commentary on Kissinger himself, the rape of Lao Szu a symbolic reenactment of his historic “rape of Cambodia.”116 Through this gradual transformation, Adams smoothly takes the listener through a dreamlike state, the lines of reality that were once blurred returning back to staggering reality.

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The harmony in the entire scene is a clash of styles and structured in multiple different ways, perhaps criticizing and emphasizing the chaos of the Cultural Revolution in an unsettling set of musical interludes that just can’t quite agree with one another. Sean Atkinson points out key characteristics of the harmonic nature of the scene, noting that Adams employs hexatonic cycles, non-cyclic neo-Riemmanian transformations, and traditional tonal relationships in the introduction to the ballet scene alone.\footnote{Atkinson, “Minimalist Music,” 83-84.}

The introduction to the ballet features harmonies traveling through the south hexatonic, one of the four cycles based on the four possible augmented triads. Hexatonic cycles consist of alternating parallel (P) and Leitton-weschsel (L) neo-Riemannian transformations, skip about and move back and forth seemingly without consistency except to emphasize the Bb-D-F# augmented triad with occasional sevenths added to the harmonies.\footnote{Atkinson, “Minimalist Model for the Study of Multimedia Compositions: A Case Study in Minimalist Music,” (Ph.D. diss., Florida State University, 2008), 83.}

![Diagram of the Southern Hexatonic Triad](image)

**Figure 4. The Southern Hexatonic Triad**
The scene also features one of David Lewin’s neo-Riemannian transformations, the SLIDE, with brief occurrences of F Major and B minor. The SLIDE motion retains the third between two triads and moves the outer notes by a semitone, a tool used often throughout the course of the opera as well as by other minimalist composers.\(^\text{119}\)\(^\text{120}\) There also an unexpected break in the harmonic style, Atkinson writes, when the *Red Detachment of Women* is first introduced in the ballet with an “unexpected turn toward functional tonality.”\(^\text{121}\) The root movement by fifth between A major and E major is the only place in the entire scene, he notes, to feature a strong tonal connection between harmonies.\(^\text{122}\)

From only a brief foray into the harmonic texture in the scene featuring *The Red Detachment of Women*, we can see a clear avoidance of any melodic caricatures of Chinese music. Adams himself even declared “At no point in this opera did I want to write fake Chinese music,”\(^\text{123}\) suggesting his intentions were very much in line with the end product (while the Turandot case is a bit more contentious). Nonetheless, Atkinson still astutely observes the nature of the use of hexatonic in a scene essentially satirizing a Revolutionary Ballet:

\(^{120}\) Atkinson, “Minimalist Music,” 85.
\(^{121}\) Atkinson, “Minimalist Music,” 86.
\(^{122}\) Atkinson, “Minimalist Music,” 86.
Maybe the extensive use of hexatonic systems is Adams’s way of making music that is not Chinese, but not entirely common to the ears of the audience either. If so, then the bleeding over of the hexatonic system onto what should be the stronger tonal system might suggest a dominance of the former over the latter: the uncommon over the common or the “weak above the strong.”

Thus while straying from any notion of the Chinese as an exotic object of curiosity, we still find ourselves with a sense that something isn’t right: the scene emphasizes the absurdity of both the situation of American dignitaries watching an anti-capitalist play as well as commenting on the absurd nature of the play itself to western eyes and ears. The use of such uncommon musical techniques is essentially the substitute for any musical branches into exoticism.

Called a “headline opera” by critics, the piece effectively latches onto the popular news fresh in the mind of many of its listeners, seeking to take advantage of the appeal behind the fanfare of such a well-known event. The opera restages famous scenes including Nixon’s “historic handshake” on the airport runway with Zhou Enlai, the visit by Pat Nixon to a model pig farm, the and the banquet at the Great Hall of the People, replaying events widely publicized on television and directly connecting with audiences.

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125 Weiss, Opera: A History in Documents, 328.
126 Weiss, Opera: A History in Documents, 328.
Weiss notes that in the piece, “plot is at a minimum”, and rather the opera revolves more around the individual personalities of the historical figures.127 The opera only uses these headline grabbing opportunities as a launching point for a deeper analysis of the emotional and political struggles of the popular figures, their dramatized actions and thoughts causing the audience member to consider what was actually occurring behind the scenes of these historic events.

Unfortunately, we do not have much to go with in terms of popular opinion of the opera in China itself, but it we can easily guess that it would be lukewarm at best. Daines writes,

Sadly, the impression that the opera made on Chinese audiences remains a matter for speculation. That the Xinhua Press Agency reviewed Nixon but advised that the opera could not be shown in China suggests that Nixon’s creators had done their work well. For the Chinese government at least, Nixon was a provocative opera. According to Sellars, the opera has aroused mixed reactions among Chinese audiences. “A lot of Chinese people are a little taken aback by the sexual images,” the director told me. “At the same time everyone admits that that is what happened. That’s what is interesting about the piece: everyone comes to it with things they like and don’t like and things about which they said ‘that’s exactly it’ or things where they said ‘no, no, no, it’s really different for that.’ That’s exciting, and I think that’s how it should be.”128

127 Weiss, Opera: A History in Documents, 328.
Conclusion

I have presented only a cursory glance at a series of operatic works by western composers and librettists displaying a wide spectrum of representations of China. Coming from completely different worlds of operatic tradition, Le Cheval de Bronze, Turandot, and Nixon in China paint radically different portraits of China. From the mystical fantasy to the almost unsettling realist interpretation, we can see a wide range of possible approaches. In the case of Turandot, the intentions of the composer do not necessarily match the end product, but with the wealth of preserved letters of Puccini’s we are able to delve deep into context of the composition and the libretto process. Similarly, we are able to understand much more of John Adams’ intentions in Nixon in China by virtue of him being a living composer, many interviews having been transcribed and made publically accessible.

I do not wish to suggest that Puccini, Auber, or Adams, were more or less respectful than one another of their representations of China, but rather that the approach to such a task is not a clear one with inherent rights or wrongs. In the case of Turandot, the public reception in China was clearly leaning in the direction of suggesting the piece was disrespectful where it took many significant edits to the text and music to bring it to popularity, but
the context of the musical composition process Puccini took was one of careful deliberation and quotations from authentic Chinese sources and his attempts at reinforcing an image of savagery is in a sense mandated by the libretto. Even the libretto, however, cannot be entirely culpable in the public reception, as the complex history behind its creation suggests that placing the setting in China at all may be unnecessary to the understanding of the piece, the historical inaccuracies allowing the piece to be seamlessly moved to a mythical, nameless kingdom in Asia. The Chinese reinterpretation that placed the text in an imaginary non-Chinese Asian kingdom certainly still captured similar imagery as the original production, but with such a simple alteration suddenly much of the criticism is lost.

As for *Nixon in China*, we see a deliberate shift to avoid direct quotes of Chinese folk music or traditional melodies, instead finding a satire of the Communist Party and the revolutionary ballet of Jiang Qing ripe with complex subtext and double meanings. The piece has yet to reach China, and likely will not any time in the near future due to the inherent criticism of the Chinese government built into the plot. The nature of the plot was centered on American fascination with the President’s trip, and indeed the story may not even resonate in a Chinese audience despite my hopeful thoughts on the
artistic potential behind translating such a work, especially the interpretation of *The Red Detachment Women* [back] into Chinese.

As the western fascination with China continues, we can expect to see more clever representations by foreigners of a whole different variety, drawing on different inspirations of both music and text. As the flow of information across the globe grows as well, we can certainly look forward to varying levels of response and criticism from China itself.
Bibliography


**Mao: The Musical – Compositional Note**

For the compositional component of my thesis I wrote a one act opera based on the cult following of Mao Zedong, satirizing the public perception of his acts by treating the popular slogans praising his name literally.

*Mao: The Musical* illustrates the fictional love story of Mei, a poor woman who lives alone and two men who each fight for her affections. Just as Mei begins to finally fall in love, her life is interrupted and forever changed by the arrival of Mao Zedong. Both a farce and a tragedy, the piece explores the nature of Mao’s cult following and the propaganda of the time period, concealing the horrific reality of the Great Leap Forward and the deaths of more than 18 million individuals.

The main literary inspiration is the phrase “Mao is Brighter than the Sun.” Seeking to create a narrative focus around the line, I determined to elevate Mao beyond the power of the sun by also becoming the moon, the heavens, and the earth. In the final scene, the characters have all given their bodies to China, sacrificing their ambitions and self-control to physically propel Mao to this great height. They remark that the sun, the moons, the heavens and the earth are all beautiful; they are all Mao. The reality, however, is that the death and starvation highlighted in the opening scene is still very present if not more pronounced by the time the opera concludes.

Making a conscious decision to blend fact and reality, I condensed the acts of the Cultural Revolution, the Great Leap Forward, and Mao’s birth and rise to fame in the span of a single musical number. The fictional love story set in the backdrop to Mao’s rise to fame highlights the plight of the common individual, Mei forced to conform to the male hegemony as she is married against her will after the arrival of revolution. Her inner strength and ability to see through the revolutionary propaganda proves meaningless in the grand scheme of things. Even Mao himself has a moment of doubt concerning the revolutionary fervor, questioning whether he can maintain the promises he has made to the people. He ultimately determines that he can only do so if he transcends the already god-like powers he appears to have, becoming the sun, the moon, the heavens and the earth only with the help of all of China.

The music is rhythmic and repetitive; the piece draws on inspiration from Chinese traditional music centered less on shifts of tonality and more on exploring the possibilities of rhythm and melodic interpretations. The lines are repetitive and at times maniacal, several numbers consisting of the Chorus members repeating the word ‘Mao’ ad infinitum. I hope to capture the herd mentality of the era and the lack of any hope for potential dissenters.
Libretto

Mao: The Musical
Written and composed by Alan Rodi

Mao

Mei, a single woman who lives alone. Soprano.
Performer, washed out Beijing Opera Performer. Alto
Long, a poor man in love with Mei: Tenor
Zhao, a rich man in love with Mei: Baritone
Mao Bass

Chorus Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass

Late 1800’s to mid 1950’s.

(First Act: Disheveled home setting with ambiguous spaces. An abnormally large flower is centrally planted, however it is not in great shape.

Mei
What has transpired?
My flowers will not grow.
There is no sun.
The future is unclear.
Only pain.
We fight amongst ourselves and live without harmony.

Long
I am poor.
There is nothing I can give her.
I have no food to share.
Is there any hope?
Will she notice me?
Zhao and Long
I love her.

Zhao
But all the wealth in the world
will not let her see how much she means to me.
I could provide everything

(Zhao and Long exit)

Mei
Disease.
Drought.
Disorder

(exit Mei, enter Performer, her mannerisms are wild and sharp, her voice piercing.)

Performer
Abandon the past
Seek a brighter future.
Although the sky be dark
See the smog of progress
We become proud bolts in a great machine.
Our children strong, hard workers all
Abandon all bourgeois thought
Alone we are weak, but together we can move the moon if we believe in industry.

(Mei enters the town market)

Mei
One single egg,
a slice of bread,
one a glass of milk,
one cup of flour?

Townsperson
The chickens are dead,
the cows are unfed,
the wheat is dry,
there is no hope.

**Chorus**
Disease and drought
Disorder and fear
What has transpired?
Where is the hope?

**Mei**
We can move the moon if we believe,
Yes we can move the moon if we believe.
We must believe.

**Chorus**
Disease and drought
Disorder and fear
What has transpired?
Why is it we live?
There is no hope.

**Mei**
The earth cries, and so do I.
I live alone.

*(enter Long)*

**Long**
Why such sadness?
Why such fear?

**Mei**
Disorder.
Disease.
Misfortune.

**Long**
Why such doubt?
Why such worry?
Mei
Disorder.
Uncertainty.
Misfortune.

Long
We must carry on to see the sun rise tomorrow.

Mei

Long
Happiness. Clarity. Great fortune.

Mei
You bring false promises

Long
I believe in tomorrow.

Mei
You are poor, like me.

Long
And yet rich in spirit.
There is good ahead.
There is hope.

Mei
Hope?

Long
There is hope.
There is love.

Mei
There is hope?
There is love?

(enter Zhao, exit Long)
Zhao
Dear Mei,
Why such sorrow?
Watering the soil with your tears
Why must you drown the soil with your tears?
Why such pain?
Marry me, instead.
And I’ll always stay with you.
Leave that poor scum alone.
Stay with me. You may have all you have ever desired.

Mei
I will not marry you.

Zhao
Come now, you cannot live like this.
Dear Mei, don’t end up like him.

Mei
Your words are unwelcome.

Zhao
The future is brighter with me.

Mei
There can be brighter days.

Zhao
What hope is there in a life like his?

Mei
Disease, Drought, Disorder, and Death.

(lights down. Exit Mei and Zhao)

(lights up on Chorus, dancing wildly with the good news)

Chorus
Good news. Good fortune. Good news.
News from the east. News from the west.
News from the north. News from the south.
Good news. Good fortune. Good news.
A child is born in a far off land.
Mao.
He leaves the womb and he does not cry but begins to sing.
Mao.
Good news. Good fortune. Good news.
A child grows strong, more than any man.
Mao.
He works the farm and does the work of ten oxen.
Mao.
He grows in intellect.
Mao.
He goes to school and he studies for thirty hours a day.
Mao.
He says he will liberate us all from misfortune.
Mao.
One by one our cities will fall under his glory.
Mao..
Mao.

(enter Mei and Long)

Mei
Good news. Good fortune? Good news?

Long
Happiness. Clarity. Great. Fortune

Mei
Good news. Good fortune? Good news?

(enter Zhao)

Zhao
Mei, have you heard what they say?

Mei
Good fortune.
Zhao
I have always had good fortune.
And you, too, can share my wealth.

Mei
I will find brighter days.

Long
Dear Mei, have you heard what they say?

(exit Zhao)

Mei
There may be good news far off,
but we are still here, poor and helpless.

Long
I believe we can find great wealth in our hearts.

Mei
But how can we survive?

Long
We must try.

Mei
I am uncertain.

Long
I can try.

Mei
But not alone

Long
We can try.

Mei
We can try.
Long
We can try.

Mei
We can try.

Mei + Long
We can try.

(exit Mei and Long)
(enter Performer)

Performer
Abandon the past.

Chorus
He brings revolution.

Performer
Seek a brighter future.

Chorus
Change our old ways.

Performer
Abandon the past.

Chorus
He brings revolution.

Performer
Seek a brighter future.

Chorus
Mao

(enter Mei and Long)

Mei
How can one man alone bring such miracles?
Chorus
Mao

Long
I believe brighter times are ahead.

Chorus
Mao
The sun rises over China.

Mei
I fear what this could bring.

Chorus
Mao. A new China is born.
We fight for the revolution. Mao.

Performer
Cast away your old feudalist thought.
Our backward ways are no more.
We must modernize.
A new China is born.

Chorus
Mao

Mei
Who is he?

Chorus
He brings revolution. Good news, good fortune, good news.

Mei
Who is he?

Chorus
Change our old ways. Good news, good fortune, good news.

Mei
Who is he?
Chorus
A new china is born.
We fight for the revolution.

Mei
Who is he?

Chorus
He is a scholar.
He has a book.
The Little Red Book.
His writings are like the sun.
He is the never setting sun.
No, he is brighter than the sun.
He will liberate our villages one by one.

Mei
Liberate from what?

Chorus
He brings revolution.
A new way of life.

Mei
What sort of life?

Chorus
A cultural revolution.

Mei
How will we do this?

Chorus
We leap forward.

Mei
Leap forward into what?
Chorus
A great revolution.
Long
I will protect you.
I will fight for this new China.
I will fight for you.
I will fight for the revolution.

Mei
Not now. You mustn’t. It is too soon.
Don’t leave me alone.

Long
There are hopeful times ahead,
and I will be a part of it.
I believe he will bring great things.
Goodbye.
Mei
Don’t leave me. Don’t do this.

Long
I must.

Mei
It’s too soon, don’t you see?

Long
It’s fate.

Mei
Don’t say this. Stay with me.

Long
I will fight for the revolution.

Mei
Stay with me.

Long
I will fight for the revolution.
Mei
Promise me you will return.

Long
I promise you.

Mei
You promise me.

Long
I will fight for the revolution.
Yes, I will fight for the revolution.

Mei
And our child.

Long
Yes, I will fight for the revolution.
I will fight for the revolution.
And our child?

Mei
And our child.

Mei + Long
And our child.

(Long gives Mei a little red book)

(exit Long)

Chorus
He is coming to greet us.

Mei
When?
Where is he?
Chorus
He brings great things.
Mei
What does he bring?

Chorus
Good fortune.

Mei
Good fortune?

Chorus
Good Fortune.

Mei
Good fortune?

Chorus
Good fortune.
Mao.

(enter Mao, exit Mei)

Mao + Chorus
Mao.

Chorus
Mao Zhuxi (Chairman Mao). Mao Zhuxi. Mao Zhuxi, I broke my leg while working in the fields and can no longer walk or support my family.

Mao
Bind your leg in Little Red Books and tomorrow you will walk again.

Chorus
Mao Zhuxi my child fell sick with a fever and now she is blind. She cannot see.

Mao
Put my portrait beside her crib and she will see the light from me.

Chorus
Mao Zhuxi, my chicken is gaunt and has not laid an egg in days.
Mao
Take this egg and tomorrow it will hatch into an ostrich
and it will lay one egg a day large enough to feed ten families.

Chorus
My friend has been deaf since birth.

Mao
Read him my teachings every night and he will soon hear the truth.

Chorus
Mao Zhuxi.
Grain production at an all-time high.
Starvation deemed illegal.
Mao, Mao, Mao, Mao, Mao, Mao.
He touched my dog and it became an ox.
He saved 49 kittens from a burning tree.
49 kittens.
He single-handedly lifted a grain silo that fell atop my grandmother.
Grandmother.
A Great Revolution
Surpass all other nations.
The combined output of our communes shall produce enough steel
for more cannonballs than there are enemies.
A great Revolution.
Surpass all other nations.
The combined output of our communes shall produce enough steel
for more cannonballs than there are enemies.

A Great Leap Forward.

Mao Zhuxi

Mao
Mao Zhuxi.

(exit Chorus and Mao, enter Mei and Zhao)
(Home setting, only things are less disheveled. A portrait of Mao hangs from the ceiling, the flower is growing. 1949.)

Mei
I am told this portrait of Mao will bring good fortune.
Already my flower grows under its glow.
The leaves are green, the petals are large and brimming with hope.
The skies are clear, the future is bright with nothing to fear. Good fortune.
I feel younger, so much younger, and I appear to have a husband against my will.

Zhao,
And we have a son.

Mei
He is ours,

Zhao
He is ours

Mei.
Our only son.
So strong, fat and healthy.
But where did we get all this food?

Zhao
We sow the fields for China like good workers.
Together we have infinite grain.

Mei
How can this be?

Zhao
I have given up my wealth to build our nation.
With blind faith we will succeed.
It’s the Great Leap Forward.

(enter Child)
Child
I am all grown up.

Zhao
He is growing too fast for his clothes.

Mei
How can this be?

Zhao
We sow the fields for China.

Child and Zhao
We sow the fields for China.

Mei, Child, and Zhao
We sow the fields for China.

Zhao
We have too much food.

Child+ Zhao
We sow the fields for China

Child
We have so much wealth.

Child+ Zhao + Mei
We sow the fields for China.
Good Fortune.

(Exit Zhao and Child, enter Long)

Mei
But how could you have left me?

Long
Dear Mei,
Why such sorrow?
You must give up the past
And understand the bright future is here.

**Mei**
I am poor at heart.
Though I have all I desire.
Except love.
You promised you would come back to me.

(*Exit Long and Mei*)
(*Enter Performer*)

**Performer**
Abandon the past
Seek a brighter future.
Although the sky be dark
See the smog of progress
We become proud bolts in a great machine.
Our children strong, hard workers all.
Abandon all bourgeois thought.
Alone we are weak, but together we can move the moon
if we believe in Mao

(*Exit Performer*)
(*Enter Mao and Chorus entourage*)

**Chorus**
Mao, Mao, Mao.

**Mao**
Promises, promises.
I deliver with no end.
I am a god, but for how long?
My energy stretched thing.
Promises promises,
I deliver with no end.
I am the sun but I need more.
I must become the moon.

I must become the moon
I can become the moon.
I will become the moon.

Promises, promises.
I deliver with no end.
I can see the bright future
With me at the head.

**Mao and Chorus**
Promises, promises.
I deliver with no end.
It may take all I can give, but I have all China.

**Chorus**
Mao, Mao, Mao, .

**Mao**
I must become the moon.
I can become the moon.
I will become the moon.
*(Enter Mei)*

**Mei**
You promised you would come back to me.

*(Enter Performer)*

**Performer**
We can change the world. The
Past is forgotten.
We look forward

*(Enter Long’s Spirit. He has sacrificed himself for the revolution. Performer looks on.)*

**Long**
Mei

**Mei**
You live?
Long
I fought for the revolution.

(Enter Child, gesticulating and moving his mouth, but no sounds come out. Mei is in a trance.)

Mei
You must see our child.

Long
I fought for the revolution.

Mei
He is beautiful.

Long
I fought for the revolution.

Mei
His mouth moves. But he does not speak.

Long
I fought for the revolution.

(Enter Zhao, motioning to Mei in silence. He grabs her, she motions to Long, but to no use. She is lost to them.)

Mei
My husband does not see you.

Long
I fought for the revolution

Performer
Abandon the past.

Mei
This is not real.

Long
I fought for the revolution

Mei
No.

Performer
Abandon the past.

Chorus
(Ah’s).

Long
I fought for the revolution.

Performer
Abandon the past.

Mei
No.

Long
I fought for the revolution.

Performer
Abandon the past.

Mei
No

Performer
Abandon the past.

Long
I fought for the revolution.

Mei
No, no, no, no, no.

Long
I fought for the revolution.
(Enter Mao with the Chorus.)

**Chorus**
You are the sun.

**Mei**
He is gone.

**Chorus**
You are the moon.

**Mei**
I am alone.

**Chorus**
You bring good fortune.

**Mei**
I am alone.

**Mao**
I am brighter than the sun.
But it is not enough.

**Performer**
My art is meaningless
We learn nothing from the past.

**Chorus + Performer**
I give my spirit to China
We give ourselves to China.

**Mao**
You are true revolutionaries.
Your spirit enlivens me.
I must be the sun and moon for China.
The Great Leap Forward is just the beginning.
Chorus
Sacrifice our bourgeois desire,
We are free from greed.

Performer + Chorus
We are free from greed.

Chorus
We are free from greed.

Mao
I will become the Sun and the Moon.
But I need more
If I am can become the stars.
I am the sun, the moon. the heavens and the earth.
But only if you give yourselves to China.

Chorus
Great revolution
Surpass all other nations

Mao
But only if you give yourselves to china.

Chorus
The combined output of our communes shall produce enough steel
For more cannonballs than there are enemies.

Zhao
She does not care for me.
I gave myself to her.
She does not care for me.
She rambles in her sleep for another man.
She is selfish.
I gave my-self to China.

Mei
I gave myself for China.
Chorus
Great revolution, surpass all other nations.  
The combined output of our communes shall produce enough steel  
For more cannonballs than there are enemies.  
A new world order.

Mei  
I gave myself to China.

Chorus  
A great revolution, surpass all other nations.  
The combined output of our communes shall produce enough steel  
For more cannonballs than there are enemies  
A new world order.

Mei  
I gave myself to China.

Chorus  
A new world order.

Mei  
Only pain.

Zhao  
Only pain.  
I gave her everything she could want.  
I gave her all she could ever desire.  
I have nothing left to give.  
I give myself to China.

Child  
Where has mother gone?

Zhao  
I am alone.  
She has left to the revolution so that Mao can become the Moon.

Child  
I am alone.
Zhao
And see how her flower has grown.

Child
And look, the Sun and the Moon,
The Heavens and the Earth
They are all beautiful.

Zhao
They are beautiful.

Zhao and Child
It is Mao.

Child
Where has father gone?

Mei
I gave myself to China.

Zhao
I am alone. She has left us.
She has left for the revolution.

Mei
I gave myself to China.

Child
Mother gone.

Zhao
She has left for the revolution.

Child
I’m alone.

Mei
I lost myself to China.
Choir and Zhao
Mao

Mei
I lost my love

Choir and Zhao
Mao

Choir, Zhao, and Mei
Mao
Alan Luis Phillip Rodi

Mao: The Musical
Mao: The Musical

q = 80

Piano

Flute

Guzheng

Erhu

Violin II

Violoncello

Upright Bass

pizz.

Alan Rodi
What has transpired? My
flowers will not grow
There is no sun.
The future is unclear.
disease, drought, disease,

Andante
q = 120

ordered

On-ly pain
We fight a mongst our selves and live with out har mo-ny

Arco

mf
There is nothing I can give her. I have no food to
Is there any hope? Will she notice me? I love her.

But all the wealth in the world will not let her see how

Pianist: q = 60

Adagio

Pianist: q = 60

Ritardando

Pizz
ban don the past. Seek a brighter future.
Although the sky be dark
See the smog of progress
We become proud bolts
In a great machine
Our children strong
Piano

Performer

Flute

Guzheng

Erhu

Violin II

Violoncello

Upright Bass

Banghu

Bells

Small cymbals

Small gong

Big gong
one cup of flour?

The chickens are dead, the cows are un-fed, the wheat is all dry, there is no hope.

Ah -
We can move the moon if we believe yes we can move the moon if ease and drought dis order and fear What has transpired Where is the hope Dis ease and drought dis ease and drought dis order and fear What has transpired Where is the hope Dis ease and drought dis order and fear What has transpired Where is the hope Dis ease and drought dis order and fear Where is the hope Dis ease and drought dis order and fear What has transpired Where is the hope
we believe yes we can move the moon if we believe yes we can move the

disease and drought, disease and fear

What has transpired? Where is the hope? Disease and drought, disease and fear

Ah
We believe we can move the moon if we believe yes we can move the moon if we believe.

What has transpired? Where is the hope? Disease and drought, disorder and fear. What has transpired?

Ah -
Where is the hope? Disease and drought, dis or-der and fear Why is it we live? There is no hope.

Ah

Dis-ease and drought, dis-or-der and fear. The earth cries, and so do I
I live alone.

Why such sadness?
Why such fear?

Why such doubt?
Why such worry?

We must carry...
There is hope.
There is love.
There is hope.
There is love.
Dear Mei,
Why such sorrow? Wa-t-er- ing the soil with your tears, why such pain? Mar-ry me instead and I'll always stay with you.
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Piano

Mei

Zhou

Flute

Guzheng

Erhu

Violin II

Violoncello

Upright Bass

I will not marry you.

Leave this poor scum alone. Stay with me. You may have all you have ever desired.

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Piano

Mei

Zhou

Flute

Guzheng

Erhu

Violin II

Violoncello

Upright Bass

Your

Come now. You cannot live like this. Dear Mei, Don't end up like him.
There can be brighter days. The future is brighter with me. What hope is there in a life like his? Disease, drought, disorder and death.
Good news.
Good fortune.
Good news.

News from the east.

News from the west.
Piano
Soprano
Alto
Tenor
Bass
Flute
Guzheng
Erhu
Violin II
Violoncello
Upright Bass

News from the east
News from the west
News from the south.

North Good news. Good for tune.

News from the south.

Good news. Good for tune. Good news.
A child is born in a far off land. Mao.

Mao.

Mao.

Mao. He leaves the womb and he does not cry but be...
230

Piano

Soprano

gins to sing. Mao.

Alto

Mao.

Tenor

Mao.

Bass

Mao.

Flute

Mao.

Guzheng

Mao.

Erhu

Mao.

Violin II

Mao.

Violoncello

Mao.

Upright Bass

Mao.

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Piano

Soprano


Alto

Mao.

Flute

Mao.

Guzheng

Mao.

Erhu

Mao.

Violin II

Mao.

Violoncello

Mao.

Upright Bass

Mao.
A child grows strong more than any man. Mao.

He

Mao.
Mao. works the farm and he does the work of ten oxen. Mao.
Piano

Soprano

Alto

Tenor

Bass

Flute

Guzheng

Erhu

Violin II

Violoncello

Upright Bass


Good news. Good for tune. Good news.

Good news. Good for tune. Good news.

Good news. Good for tune. Good news.

Good news. Good for tune. Good news.

Good news. Good for tune. Good news.
He goes to school and he studies for thirty hours a day. Mao.

He says he will liberate us all from misfortune.
One by one our cities will fall under his glory.

Mao.
Good news. Good fortune. Good news.

Great for tune. Mei, have you heard what they say?

I will find brighter days. Dear Mei,

I have always had good for tune and you too may share my wealth.
There may be good news far off, but we are still here poor and helpless.

I have heard what they say? I believe

But how can we survive? I am uncertain. But not alone.

We can find great wealth in our hearts. We must try. I can try. We can
How can one man alone bring such ban down the past. Seek a bright future.

He brings revolution Mao Mao Mao Mao Mao

Mao Mao Mao Mao Mao

Mao Mao Mao Mao Mao

Mao Mao Mao Mao Mao

Mao Mao Mao Mao Mao
I believe brighter times are ahead.

Mao
The sun rises over China

A new China is born
We fight for the revolution.

Mao
Mao

fear what this could bring.

Mao
A new China is born
We fight for the revolution.

Mao
Mao
Mao
Cast a way your old feu-da list thought. Our back-ward ways are no more. We must mid-ern-ize A
Who is he?
Who is he?
new China is born.
Mao He brings revolution
Mao Change our old ways.
Mao Good news, good fortune, good news
Who is he? Who is he? Who is he?
Mao Mao A new China is born. We fight for the revolution. Mao.
Good news, good fortune, good news Good news, good fortune, good news
He is a scholar - The little red book. He is the never setting sun.

He is a scholar - He has a book. His writings are like the sun. No, he is brighter than the

He will liberate our village one by one. He brings revolution a

sun. He will liberate our village one by one. Good news, good fortune, good
What sort of life? How will we do this?

A new way of life A cultural revolution, We leap forward.

Good news, good fortune, good news We leap forward.

Good news, good fortune, good news
I will protect you. I will fight for this new China. I will fight for you.

Not now, you mustn't. It is too soon. Don't leave me alone.

There are hopeful days.
Don't leave me. Don't times a head. and I will be a part of it. I believe he will bring great things. Goodbye.

don't do this. It's too soon, don't you see? Don't say this. Stay with me. Stay with me. I must. It's fate. I will fight for the revolution.
You promise me you will return.

I promise you I will fight for the revolution.

I will fight for the revolution.

And our child.

I will fight for the revolution.

Yes I will fight for the revolution.
And our child. And our fight for the revolution.
I will fight for the revolution. And our child?
And our child.
He is coming to greet us. He brings great things.
What does he bring?  Good for tune?
Good for tune.  Good for tune.  Good for tune.
Good for tune.  Good for tune.  Good for tune.
Good for tune.  Good for tune.  Good for tune.
Good for tune.  Good for tune.  Good for tune.
Good for tune.  Good for tune.  Good for tune.
What does he bring?  Good for tune?
Good for tune.  Good for tune.  Good for tune.
Good for tune.  Good for tune.  Good for tune.
Good for tune.  Good for tune.  Good for tune.
Good for tune.  Good for tune.  Good for tune.
Good for tune.  Good for tune.  Good for tune.
Good for tune.  Good for tune.  Good for tune.
I broke my leg while working in the fields and can no longer walk or support my family.
red books. And to mor-row you will walk a-gain.

ah ah (ah...)
ah ah (ah...)
ah ah ah (ah...)
ah ah ah (ah...)

Pizz.
Ah-Mao Zhu Xi

my child fell sick with a fever

and now she is blind.

She cannot see.
Ah Mao Xi

Portrait beside her crib and she will see the light from me.

Ah Mao Xi

Mao Xi

Ah Mao Xi

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Ah Mao Xi

Mao Xi
egg and to-mor-row it will hatch in to an os-trich and it will lay one egg a day large enough to feed ten fam-i lies.

Read him my teach-ings every night and he will soon hear the truth.

friend has been deaf since birth

Ah-Mao Zhu Xi
Star - va-tion is deemed il-le-gal.

He va-tion deemed il-le-gal.
He saved forty-nine kits from a burning tree.

touched my dog and it became an ox.

For-ty nine
He single-handedly lifted a grain silo that fell on my grandmother. Grandmother
kit-tens.

Meno mosso
A tempo

Piano

Soprano

Alto

Tenor

Bass

Flute

Guzheng

Erhu

Violin II

Violoncello

Upright Bass

Great Revo - lution

The combined out - put of our com munes shall pro - duce e-nough steel for more

Mao

Mao

Mao

Sur-pass all oth - er na - tions

Mao

Mao

Mao

Mao
can-non balls than there are en-e-mies. A Great Rev-o-lu-tion The com-bined out put of our com-munes

Mao Mao Mao

Mao Mao Mao

Sur-pass all oth-er na-tions Mao Mao Mao

Slide between notes
shall produce more cannon balls than there are enemies. A great leap forward.
Great leap forward (Mao Mao Mao (Mao...))

Ah-Mao Zhu Xi

Mao Zhu Xi

Ah-Mao Zhu Xi

Mao Zhu Xi
told this portrait of Mao will bring good fortune. Already my flower grows under its glow. See the

leaves are green, the petals are large and brimming with hope. Thanks are clear the future is bright with nothing to fear. Good
And I feel younger
So much younger
And I appear to have a hus band
Against my will.
And we have a
He is ours.
How can this be?
I have given up my wealth to build our nation. With blind faith we will succeed.

It's the Great Leap Forward.
I'm all grown up.
How can this be?
He is growing too fast for his clothes—
We sow the fields for China—
We sow the fields for China—
Piano

Mei

Zhao

Tenor

Flute

Guzheng

Erhu

Violin II

Violoncello

Upright Bass

sow the fields for China
We have too much food.
We sow the fields for China.
We have so much wealth.

sow the fields for China
Good for tune
But

sow the fields for China
Good for tune
Dear Mei,

how could you have left me?

- You must

how could you have left me?
I am poor at heart. Though I have all I desire. Except give up the past and understand the bright future is here.

Love. You promised you would come back to me.
Seek a brighter future

Although the sky be dark

See the smog of progress

We become proud bolts

In a great machine
Our children strong
Hard workers all
A-ban-don all bourgeois thought

A-lone we are weak
But to-geth er
We can move the moon if we be-lieve in Mao.
Violin II
Soprano
Alto
Tenor
Bass
Flute
Guzheng
Erhu
Violin II
Violoncello
Upright Bass
I can become the moon
I will become the moon

We can change the

Piano
Mao
Soprano
Alto
Tenor
Bass
Flute
Guzheng
Erhu
Violin II
Violoncello
Upright Bass
It is all the world.

Promises promises I deliver with no end. I can see the end.

It may take all the time.

It may take all the time.
Piano

Mao

Soprano

Alto

Tenor

Bass

Flute

Guzheng

Erhu

Violin II

Violoncello

Upright Bass

I can give, but I have all China.

he can give, but he has all China.

he can give, but he has all China.

he can give, but he has all China.

he can give, but he has all China.
I must be come the moon
I can be come the
I will come the moon. You promised you would
You must see our child.
I fought for the revolution.
You live.
He is beautiful.

I fought for the revolution. I fought for the revolution. I fought for the revolution.

His mouth moves but he does not speak. My husband does not see you.
A ban-don the past.
I fought for the rev-o-lu-tion.
This is not real.
Ah Ah Ah Ah Ah
Ah Ah Ah Ah Ah
Ah Ah Ah Ah Ah
Ah Ah Ah Ah Ah
Ah Ah Ah Ah Ah
Ah Ah Ah Ah Ah
Ah Ah Ah Ah Ah
Ah Ah Ah Ah Ah
Ah Ah Ah Ah Ah
Chorus

I fought for the revolution.
I fought for the revolution.
I fought for the revolution.
You are the sun. You are the moon.
I am a lone -
You bring good for-tune.

I am brighter than the sun. But it is not enough.
My art is meaningful.

less We learn nothing from the past.
give my spirit to China

We give ourselves to

give my spirit to China

We give ourselves to

give my spirit to China

We give ourselves to

give my spirit to China

We give ourselves to
Piano

Soprano

China We give ourselves to China

Alto

China We give ourselves to China

Tenor

China We give ourselves to China

Bass

China We give ourselves to China

Flute

Guzheng

Erhu

Violin II

Violoncello

Upright Bass

Big gong

Piano

Mao

You are true reverie

Flute

Guzheng

Erhu

Violin II

Violoncello

Upright Bass
I must be the sun and moon for China the Great Leap Forward is just the beginning.

I must be the sun and moon for China the Great Leap Forward is just the beginning.
We are free from greed.

Sacrifice our bourgeois desire We are free from greed.

Ah, ah, ah, (ah...)

We are free from greed.

Piano

Performers

Soprano

Flute

Guzheng

Erhu

Violin II

Violoncello

Upright Bass

Tenor

Bass
I will become the sun and the moon. But I need more if I can become the stars. I am the
sun the moon the heavens and the earth. But only if you give yourselves to

China. But only if you give yourselves to

The combined output of our communes shall produce enough steel for more

surpass all other nations
I gave my-self to her. She does not care for me. She rambles in her sleep for another man.

She is selfish. I gave my-self to China.
Allegro

q = 120

Piano

Mao

Soprano

Great Revo-lu-tion

Tenor

Mao

Sur-pass all oth-er na-tions

Mao

Bass

Mao

Mao

Flute

Mao

Guzheng

Erhu

Violin II

Violoncello

Upright Bass

The combined output of our communes shall produce enough steel for more
combined output of our communes shall produce enough steel for more cannon balls than there are empty...
I gave my self to China.
new world or der.

new world or der.

Andante

On ly
Piano

Mu

Zhao

On-ly pain. I gave her ev-ry thing she could want. I gave her all she could ev-er de-sire. I have
give her all she could ev-er desire.

Flute

Guzheng

Erhu

Violin II

Violoncello

Upright Bass

Tenor

Where has moth-er gone?

Flute

Guzheng

Erhu

Violin II

Violoncello

Upright Bass
She has left for the revolution so that Mao can become the moon. And see how her flow has grown.

I am alone.

They are beautiful.

And look the sun and the moon. The heavens and the earth. They are beautiful.
Piano

Mei

Zhao

Tenor

Flute

Guzheng

Erhu

Violin II

Violoncello

Upright Bass

It is Mao

It is Mao

Where has father

I gave myself to

I am alone.

She has left for the revolution.

She has gone?

Mother
I lost myself to China. I left for the revolution. She has left Mao. I'm alone. Mao.
Piano

Flute

Guzheng

Erhu

Violin II

Violoncello

Upright Bass