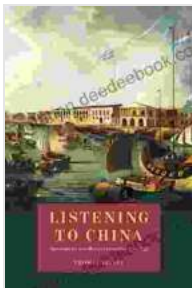


Sound and the Sino-Western Encounter, 1770-1839: New Material Histories of Music

The encounter between China and the West during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was a complex and multifaceted process that had a profound impact on both cultures. Sound played a significant role in this encounter, as it was used to negotiate cultural differences, forge diplomatic alliances, and shape perceptions of the world.

This article explores the relationship between sound and the Sino-Western encounter by drawing on a wide range of sources, including music, travel accounts, and diplomatic correspondence. It examines how sound was used to create a sense of wonder and awe, to communicate across cultural barriers, and to shape political and social relations.



Listening to China: Sound and the Sino-Western Encounter, 1770-1839 (New Material Histories of Music)

by Thomas Irvine

★★★★★ 5 out of 5

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The Sound of Wonder

One of the most striking features of the Sino-Western encounter was the sense of wonder and awe that each side felt towards the other's music. This was due in part to the fact that the two cultures had very different musical traditions. Chinese music was based on a pentatonic scale and used a wide range of percussion instruments, while Western music was based on a diatonic scale and used a variety of string and wind instruments.

The first Europeans to hear Chinese music were often amazed by its strangeness and beauty. They described it as "melodious," "harmonious," and "agreeable." However, they also found it to be difficult to understand, as it did not conform to their own musical expectations.

Similarly, the first Chinese to hear Western music were often equally amazed. They described it as "strange," "barbaric," and "noisy." However, they also found it to be exciting and exotic. They were particularly impressed by the use of harmony and counterpoint, which were new to them.

The Sound of Communication

In addition to creating a sense of wonder and awe, sound was also used to communicate across cultural barriers. This was particularly important in the context of diplomacy, as it allowed diplomats to convey their messages in a way that could be understood by both sides.

One of the most famous examples of this is the use of music in the Macartney Embassy of 1793. This embassy was sent by King George III of England to the court of the Qianlong Emperor of China in an attempt to

establish diplomatic relations. The embassy included a band of musicians who played a variety of Western music for the Chinese court. This music was greatly appreciated by the Chinese, and it helped to create a positive atmosphere for the negotiations.

Music was also used to communicate across cultural barriers in the context of trade. Chinese merchants often hired Western musicians to play for their customers, as this helped to attract attention and create a festive atmosphere. Western music was also popular in Chinese theaters, where it was used to accompany plays and operas.

The Sound of Power

In addition to creating a sense of wonder and awe and facilitating communication, sound was also used to shape political and social relations. This was particularly true in the context of colonialism, as Western powers used music to assert their dominance over their Chinese subjects.

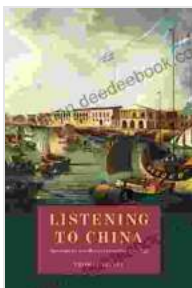
One of the most obvious examples of this is the use of military music in the Opium Wars. The British and French armies used their bands to intimidate the Chinese and to demonstrate their superior military might. This music was often loud and aggressive, and it helped to create a sense of fear and anxiety among the Chinese population.

Music was also used to assert Western dominance in the context of religion. Christian missionaries often used music to spread their message and to convert Chinese converts. This music was often based on Western hymns and chorales, and it helped to create a sense of community among Chinese Christians.

The relationship between sound and the Sino-Western encounter was complex and multifaceted. Sound was used to create a sense of wonder and awe, to communicate across cultural barriers, and to shape political and social relations. This article has explored some of the ways in which sound was used in this encounter, and it has shown how sound played a significant role in shaping the course of history.

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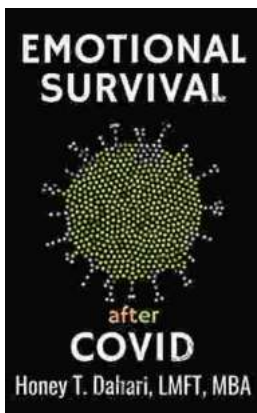
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