

“The Greatest Cultural Asset East of Suez”: The History and Politics of the Shanghai Municipal Orchestra and Public Band, 1881-1946

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As William Kirby has noted, China’s foreign relations in the twentieth century took place “at home and abroad”, through conventional diplomatic relationships, and through the internal relationship with the treaty port establishment.¹ China’s cultural relations also fit this pattern. Recent studies have moved away from an emphasis on examining the economic and political impact on China of “abroad at home” and have turned to follow pioneers such as Jerome Ch'en in looking at the social and cultural history of colonialism and of China’s internationalism before 1949.² The potential for exchange, and for transmission of ideas and

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¹ William C. Kirby, “The Internationalisation of China: Foreign Relations at Home and abroad in the Republican Era”, *The China Quarterly* no. 150 (1997), pp.433-58.

² Jerome Ch'en, *China and the West: Society and Culture, 1815-1937* (London: Hutchinson, 1979).

goods/things, has been the focus of a number of works which are helping to flesh out a deeper understanding of the nature and problems of the Sino-foreign encounter, and Sino-foreign engagement.

In this paper I would like to explore the potential and limitations for interchange and exchange of one aspect of Shanghai's foreign presence: music. For if ever there was mutual incomprehension between China and Europe, it lay in mutually unintelligible musical traditions and practices. Through this topic we can explore too the reality behind the paternalistic beliefs which underpinned foreign control in Shanghai. If the International Settlement was a "Model Settlement" — a model of municipal administration and achievement³ — then how much of a model did foreign life provide in other areas? We can also explore here another facet of the contradiction on which Shanghai's development was based. International Settlement politics were dominated by a (mostly) British oligarchy, and served the interests until the late 1930s of British settlers (who called themselves Shanghailanders).⁴ The musical activities sponsored by the SMC were firmly believed, by these settlers, to belong to them. But Shanghai was from the start a collaborative enterprise, between different local Chinese groups, individuals, and networks, and different and changing groups of non-Chinese, and Chinese outsiders, and the achievements of the settler oligarchy were appropriated by others for their own use. Music provides a clear example: historians in China

³ See, for example, the discussion in Mark Elvin, "The Administration of Shanghai, 1905-1914" in Mark Elvin and G. William Skinner, eds., *The Chinese City Between Two Worlds* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), pp.246-50.

⁴ Robert Bickers, "Shanghailanders: The Formation and Identity of the British Settler Community in Shanghai, 1842-1937", *Past and Present*, No. 159 (1998), pp.161-211.

today have clearly linked today's Shanghai Philharmonic Orchestra with its predecessor in the International Settlement.⁵

In this paper I will sketch out the full history of the Shanghai Municipal Orchestra, examining the tensions that erupted over it, and also within it, during the first six decades of its existence. I shall then examine its role in the transmission of European classical music to China. This narrative illuminates the ambiguities of SMC's position in the International Settlement, but also helps us think clearly about the nature of the Shanghai compromise, and in some ways about the nature of the International Settlement polity.

The relationship between the spread of Western music and imperial expansion has received some attention in the literature, but the analysis can be overly simplistic, and also infused with a nostalgia for indigenous musical traditions apparently destroyed in the process.⁶ It is clear that the introduction of the Western conservatory tradition, new instruments, and concepts such as fixed composition, individual authorship, and the orchestra, created new forms and practices in Chinese music and innovative responses. Chinese musicians appropriated this tradition for their own purposes, and also readily accepted Western attitudes towards traditional Chinese music, although traditional music survived in an

⁵ Xu Buceng, "Youtai yinyuejia zai Shanghai (shang)" (Jewish musicians in Shanghai, part 1), *Yinyue yishu* 1991: 3-4, p.1.

⁶ "Our instruments, symphonies, and songbooks entice first the elites and then whole populations into emulating our civilization" noted Richard Kraus towards the end of an otherwise sophisticated and nuanced analysis: Richard Curt Kraus, *Pianos and Politics in China: middle-class ambitions and the struggle over Western music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp.193-5.

un-revised form in rural China.⁷ As regards the assimilation of European classical music itself, we have in the East Asian case the somewhat contrasting examples of China and Japan. Meiji reforms in Japan pointedly encouraged the adoption of European classical music as part of educational and military reform. European classical music was seen as having a practical use.⁸ By contrast, in China—apart from choral singing in schools—European classical music was otherwise spread through more indirect channels: outside of treaty port life the main channels were missions, military reform, the cinema, and funerals. The long-running China missionary debate over the indigenisation of hymns and carols has been analysed by Vernon Charter and Jean DeBernadi. Hymn singing was an integral part of Christian practice and the mission establishment spent much time and effort trying to transmit Western hymns unrefracted, before turning to create the truly indigenous hymns in the 1936 *Union Hymnal*.⁹ A clear, but unintended product of missionary

⁷ See, for example, John Hazedel Levis, *Foundations of Chinese Musical Art* (Peiping: Henri Vetch, 1936), p.198; Chao Mei-pa, "The trend of modern Chinese music", *T'ien Hsia Monthly* 4 (March, 1937), pp.269-86; Han Kuo-huang, "The Modern Chinese Orchestra", *Asian Music* 11:1 (1979), pp.1-43; Jonathan P. Stock, *Musical Creativity in Twentieth Century China: Abing, his music, and its changing meanings* (Rochester NY: University of Rochester Press, 1996).

⁸ Ury Eppstein, *The Beginnings of Western Music in Meiji Era Japan* (Lampeter: Edward Mellen Press, 1994); Judith Ann Herd, "Change and continuity in contemporary Japanese music: a search for a national identity", Brown University Ph.D. thesis, 1987; William P. Malm, "The Modern Music of Meiji Japan", in Donald H. Shively, ed., *Tradition and Modernisation in Japanese Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp.257-300. A full survey of Chinese developments can be found in Liu Jingzhi, *Zhongguo xinyinyue shi lun* (History of New Chinese Music) (Taipei: Yaowen, 1998), vol. 1, pp.26-96.

⁹ Vernon Charter and Jean DeBernadi, "Towards a Chinese Christian Hymnology: processes of Musical and Cultural Synthesis", *Asian Music* 29:2 (1998), pp.83-113.

efforts was the growth in popularity of choral singing, especially amongst young educated Chinese, and amongst Chinese students, and this was increasingly a secular activity. It was also appropriated as a political activity by National Salvationists and by the CCP.¹⁰ Martial music was clearly integral to new Western-style military discipline, to marching and to parades. Bugle-blowing, for example, served to aid the co-ordinated movement of large bodies of men. Li Hongzhang appointed a French expert, Antoine Bigel, to standardise and develop the bugle's use in 1884.¹¹ The development of a brass band presence at funerals from Beijing to Canton, in white military style uniforms, also pointedly indicates the potential for co-option and assimilation of foreign forms into Chinese practice.¹²

The military brass band and the Christian hymn book were hardly considered to represent the acme of the European musical tradition. To

¹⁰ Alexander Tcherepnine, "Music in Modern China", *The Musical Quarterly*, 21:4 (1935), p.396; Wen-hsin Yeh, *The Alienated Academy: Culture and Politics in Republican China, 1919-1937* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp.70-2; John Israel, *Lianda: A Chinese University in War and Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp.261-2; Hung Chang-Tai, "The politics of songs: Myths and symbols in the Chinese communist war music, 1937-1949", *Modern Asian Studies* 30:4 (1996), pp.901-929.

¹¹ Liu, *Zhongguo xinyinyue shilun*, vol. 1, pp.27-34, Isabel K. F. Wong, "Geming gequ: Songs for the education of the masses", in Bonnie S. McDougall, ed., *Popular Chinese Literature and Performing Arts in the People's Republic of China 1949-1979* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p.115; *North China Herald* [hereafter *NCH*], 30 August 1918, p.563.

¹² James L. Watson, "Funeral specialists in Cantonese society: Pollution, Performance, and Social Hierarchy", in James L. Watson and Evelyn Rawski S. (eds.), *Death Ritual in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp.123-4; Mrs J. G. Cormack, *Chinese Birthday, Wedding, Funeral, and other Customs* 3rd edition (Peking: China Booksellers, 1927), p.96.

look at the transmission of the skills, music and performance norms of that tradition we must look at the treaty ports, and we must look most closely at Shanghai.¹³ Shanghai settler culture was often, and rightly, accused of philistinism, but this paper explores the weird way in which—mostly despite itself—the settler oligarchy that ruled the International Settlement aided the development of Chinese interest in European classical music, and the ambiguities and limits of this input.

1. The Men from Manila, 1881-1899

The history of the Shanghai Municipal Orchestra (*Shanghai gongbuju yuedui*) or the Shanghai Municipal Symphony Orchestra—and even its name—have been the subject of some confusion. Existing accounts usually place it as having come into existence in 1919.¹⁴ In fact, municipal support of music dates back to 1881, and the formation of the Shanghai Public Band (*Shanghai gonggong yuedui*), although a public band, was formed in 1878-9.

In its early years, the tedium and spiritual discomfort of life in the nascent International Settlement was intermittently relieved by theatrical or musical entertainment.¹⁵ This was often homespun, but visiting

¹³ For examinations of the impact and appropriation of other musical forms see, for example, Andrew F. Jones, "Popular Music and Colonial Modernity in China, 1900-1937" (University of California, Berkeley, Ph.D. thesis, 1997), and the work in progress on cabaret culture of Andrew Field (Columbia University).

¹⁴ Barbara Mittler, *Dangerous tunes: the politics of Chinese music in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the People's Republic of China since 1949* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1997), p.27; Kraus, *Pianos and Politics in China*, pp.4-5.

¹⁵ Cultural activities in a number of European and Asian communities in China are covered in essays in Robert Bickers and Christian Henriot, eds., *New Frontiers: Imperialism's new*

military units sometimes brought bands, and impresarios began to organise tours of entertainers, singers and musicians. Amateurs in Shanghai provided an extra resource to accompany solo visitors.¹⁶ It is not to be expected that early traders were much interested in cultural life in the settlement, although the place of music and music performance in European bourgeois life was increasingly prominent as the century progressed.¹⁷ Moreover, wherever Europeans marked out their colonial space, they built bunds, racecourses, churches, and public gardens, and in those gardens they built bandstands. Filling the bandstand was less simple. The SMC made a half-hearted attempt with a Police Band, recruited (as was the force generally) from “the likeliest men that turn up”. But the seaman whose “highest musical accomplishment may consist of fingering the notes of a cheap concertina on the forecastle head” hardly suited the preening ambitions of a community which saw itself as the most “musically inclined” east of Cape Town. As early as 1872 there

Communities in East Asia 1842-1953 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

¹⁶ Early cultural life in the International Settlement is documented in copious detail in J. H. Haan, *The Sino-western Miscellany: Being Historical notes about foreign life in China. Vol.1, Thalia and Terpsichore on the Yangtze [sic]: Foreign Theatre and Music in Shanghai, 1850-1865. A survey and calendar of performances* 2nd edition (Amsterdam: s.n., 1993). See also Chen-zen Hung, “Travelling opera troupes in Shanghai, 1842-1949” (The Catholic University of America, Ph.D., thesis, 1997).

¹⁷ Music also served as a marker of status: James H. Johnson, *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), pp.228-36; Richard Sennet, *The Fall of Public Man* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), pp.206-207; David Blackbourn, “The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie: Reappraising German History in the Nineteenth Century”, in David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The peculiarities of German history: bourgeois society and politics in nineteenth-century Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

were calls for a proper band of trained musicians working under a professional bandmaster.¹⁸

“The history of Band experiences in Shanghai”, noted the Band Committee in 1884, was “an epitome of disappointed expectations”.¹⁹ In 1875 musical life centred around the Philharmonic Society (inaugurated in 1864) and the Amateur Wind Instrument Society, which performed open air concerts in the summer.²⁰ In 1878-79 their instruments were handed over to a Public Band funded by the (private) Shanghai Recreation Fund. A local figure, Jean Rémusat, was appointed to lead it, and sailed down to Hong Kong, and then more successfully to Manila in search of Filipino musicians. The “great public want” which underpinned the band’s creation was not reflected in ticket sales, however, and control over the musicians themselves also proved difficult.²¹ As a result of the Ratepayers’ meeting on 18 February 1881, management of the Public Band was transferred to the Municipal Council, acting through the Town Band Committee, which held its first meeting on 7 March that year.²²

¹⁸ *The Shanghai Evening Courier*, 23 July 1872, p.681.

¹⁹ Shanghai Municipal Council [hereafter SMC], *Annual Report 1884* [hereafter *AR date*], p.188.

²⁰ H. Lang, *Shanghai Considered Socially* 2nd edition (Shanghai: American Presbyterian Mission Press, 1875), p.51.

²¹ *History of the Shanghai Recreation Fund from 1860 to 1882* (Shanghai: Printed at the Celestial Empire Office, 1892), pp.127-8, 137-8, 152-3, 158; Shanghai Municipal Archives [hereafter SMA], Western language publications collection, W-1-997, Shanghai Municipal Orchestra, *Souvenir Programme of Farewell Concert, Lyceum Theatre, Sunday May 31, 1942*, pp.3-4.

²² SMA, U-1-128, Town Band Committee, Minute Book No.1, 1881-1899. The surviving minute books of the committees which managed the band and orchestra were consulted for this paper, although unfortunately as there was no committee between 1900 and 1908, no corresponding minutes were produced for that period.

The committee was composed of two members of the SMC, two from the Conseil Municipal Français (which contributed to the financing of the band), and two or three musically-inclined ratepayers. The musicians were all dismissed, and a Spanish musician, Melchior Vela, was appointed to lead a reconstituted ensemble. Vela's first task was to sail south to Manila where he recruited 19 men. Although one was arrested before boarding ship, two youths had come with their families to Shanghai, and as one played the flute and the other the triangle, they were both impressed into the band.²³ The new musicians were also an unruly group; but now they were subject to the same quasi-military discipline as the Municipal Police force, and were also initially accommodated in police station barracks. Even as late as 1899 they were fined for breaking regulations, and held collectively responsible for absconders.²⁴

Vela's first task was to teach the men how to play their instruments.²⁵ The Filipinos were felt to need both the sensitive handling that Vela gave them, but also the backbone-stiffening and confidence-boosting presence of a European or two in their midst, and from 1883 onwards there was always one European in the ensemble.²⁶ Vela was also involved in the ordering from Europe of sheet music, instruments and uniforms. The turnover in personnel was always high, as men absconded, or died, and as new personnel were recruited from the musicians' families, or from Manila. The end of Spanish rule there in

²³ *Ibid.*, 27 August 1881.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 25 February 1899.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 22 March 1883, 17 April 1884.

²⁶ SMC, *AR 1884*, p.188.

1898 saw the disbanding of colonial military bands in the territory, and agents were sent south to recruit 22 men in early 1899.²⁷

The most likely reason for the recruitment of Filipinos was that Spanish rule had fostered the development of a tradition of Filipino involvement in the colonial administration's military and civil bands and musical life. Moreover, as Catholics, Filipinos would be familiar with European classical music. Colonialism was felt to have already acculturated the Filipino, who was treated as a semi-Westerner in settlement life in Shanghai. Until 1903 recruitment of the men was organised through the good offices of such haphazard agents as the Spanish consul in Shanghai (who also mediated disputes between the band and the SMC), and the manager of the Manila branch of the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank.²⁸ A professional agency was retained from 1903 onwards, and occasionally the conductor of the time, or a trusted musician, was sent down to Manila to interview candidates secured through the agents. This was a competitive market, and such men were often in demand elsewhere, while the SMO sometimes battled to recruit against a bad reputation for treatment of the men and low salaries. After 1909 the SMO competed with cinemas in Shanghai for suitable men, and military band recruitment accompanying the formation of the Philippine National Guard in 1918 was a problem.²⁹ Expectations about

²⁷ SMA, U-1-128, Town Band Committee, Minute Book No.1, 5 June 1883, 26 June 1886, 12 January 1888, 3 January 1899.

²⁸ SMA, U-1-128, Town Band Committee, Minute Book No.1, 16 April 1881, 21 February 1899, 2 January 1900.

²⁹ SMC, *AR 1903*, p. 130; *AR 1908*, p. 102; *AR 1911*, p. 225; SMC, *AR 1909*, p. 284, *AR 1918*, p. 67b.

the ability of the Filipino musician were moderate, and moulded largely by racial considerations of ability and temperament. Stature, for example, was also felt to militate against any ability to “march and play simultaneously with any degree of smartness”.³⁰

Vela oversaw the creation of a brass band and, from 1883 onwards, of a small stringed orchestra. The band gave its first performances in 1882, and by 1885 had a repertoire—increased monthly as new music was received from London or bought in Shanghai—of 25 Overtures, 78 Selections, 72 marches, 82 Waltzes, and 28 Polkas, as well as Quadrilles and Galops.³¹ It played in the Public Garden on the Bund, and in the French Concession garden, at the race course, at regattas, and at the cricket, athletic and country clubs.³² Private work, supporting visiting troupes or performing at balls produced a steady stream of work, and encouraged the development of the string band, which in 1895 had a repertoire of 464 pieces and played at over 100 engagements that year.³³ A crisis was reached in 1899, however, in relations with the personnel. Vela—by now “Commandeur”—resigned that year as the musicians challenged his authority over them, and the SMC formally assumed direct control and recruited a new Bandmaster, Melchior A. Valenza, from London.³⁴

³⁰ SMA, U-1-129, Band Committee minutes 1908-1918, 20 June 1917.

³¹ SMC, *AR 1882*, p.102; SMA, *AR 1885*, p.190.

³² SMC, *AR 1887*, p.206

³³ SMC, *AR 1895*, p.187.

³⁴ SMA, U-1-128, Town Band Committee, Minute Book No.1, 17 March 1899; SMC, *AR 1900*, p.140.

Obviously, the story of the band in the nineteenth century could be characterised as the story of the development of a European affectation — of questionable quality — or of what was solely a component of European social life. The Public Band belonged to the Shanghailanders. There were no Chinese personnel either, apart from Chinese servants employed to help move instruments in the band cart. Although the bandsmen were Asians, they were not Chinese. In Beijing, the Inspector-General of the Imperial Chinese Maritime Customs, Sir Robert Hart, employed Chinese in his customs band, which entertained at his private and public functions from 1888 until he left for Britain in 1908. (By 1903 the trained personnel were being poached by the Empress Dowager and others for use in their own bands).³⁵ The Shanghai Public Band was expressly non-Chinese. The audience was also mostly non-Chinese, although Chinese residents of Shanghai would have been able to hear the band perform at parades of the Shanghai Volunteer Corps, or at special private functions — and they could hire the band themselves.

There was no attempt made to accommodate or to seek a Chinese audience. In 1906 the Band committee noted that:

Amongst the many intellectual and refined pleasures open to the public in the home countries, such as high class dramatic art, opera, art

³⁵ Han Kuo-huang, “Zhongguo diyi ge Xiyang guanxian yuedui – Beijing Hade yuedui” (The first Chinese brass band – Hart’s Chinese Band), *Yinyue Yanjiu*, 1990:2, pp.43-53; Sir Robert Hart to J. D. Campbell, 18 October 1903, in J. K. Fairbank, K. F. Bruner and E. M. Matheson, eds., *The I.G. in Peking: Letters of Robert Hart, Chinese Maritime Customs 1868-1907* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press/Harvard University Press, 1975) vol.2, p.1375. After Hart left, his successor Sir Robert Bredon sponsored the band until 1916, when it was maintained by a private Union Philharmonique. In 1919 it relocated to Shanghai for financial reasons: see *NCH*, 16 August 1919, p.242; 30 August 1919, p.563.

galleries, collections, and good orchestral music, only the last named is at present within the reach of our Settlement. It therefore seems in the true interest of the Shanghai Community that a special effort should be made to produce something really good in this respect which may atone for the lack of nearly all the other enjoyments of the same kind.³⁶

The points worth noting here are that the definition of the “Shanghai Community”, in this as in other areas,³⁷ excluded Chinese residents of the settlement. There was little scope for any incidental transmission of European classical music to a Chinese audience, save for the Chinese servants of European families looking after European children in the Public Garden [see illustration 1], or ceremonial attendance by local Chinese officials. For example, Shanghai Daotai Shen Bingcheng attended a concert of the Wind Instrument society in July 1872, at which the music was reported to be “more effective than last time”, though that seems unlikely to have eased cross-cultural understanding.³⁸ In one sense, the range of the activities of the SMC remained exclusive of Chinese, and so did the foreign community’s perception of itself. If there was no incorporation of Chinese into public municipal life, then there was little scope either for extension of public cultural activities to include Chinese residents.

³⁶ SMC, *AR 1906*, p.199.

³⁷ Such as access to the public gardens, see Robert Bickers and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, “Shanghai’s ‘Chinese and Dogs Not Admitted’ Sign: History, Legend and Contemporary Symbol”, *The China Quarterly* No. 142, (June 1995), pp.444-66.

³⁸ *The Shanghai Evening Courier*, 10 July 1872.



Illustration 1: The band plays in the park, undated (late nineteenth or early twentieth century). Source: Shanghai Municipal Archives.

2. Art Makes an Appearance, 1906-1919

Valenza's years as Bandmaster were not happy. In a 1906 report, carried out while he was on furlough, it was concluded that "the music selected is rather trivial, the rendering indifferent, and the intonation often painfully at fault". The Band, it concluded, was "invariably doing harm rather than adding to the success of performances".³⁹ The Filipinos were felt inherently to lack the ability to perform solo, and to perform with precision. Valenza resigned, and the decision was taken to recruit a new conductor and eight European players "to act as leaders of the different sections in the orchestra and to perform as soloists". Rudolf Buck (1866-1952) was recruited through the former German Consul-General in Shanghai, and arrived in the city in December 1906.

³⁹ SMC, *AR 1906*, p.200.

Weekly dances at the Town Hall saw attendance of anything between 600 and 1,000 people in 1909, but the Band quickly found itself losing much of its lucrative dance market to new, mostly Filipino musicians, whose presence in Shanghai was spurred by the introduction of the cinema—and the concomitant need for musical accompanists.⁴⁰ Although the development of “art” music, as Buck described it, was pointedly part of the remit of the reorganised band, popular music performances and private engagements brought in more revenue. The programme certainly became much more ambitious. Whereas before the bandmaster listed the numbers of the types of dance music the band performed, Buck listed the symphonies and other works that received their first public airing in Shanghai—and possibly in China. Special evenings devoted to specific composers or periods in musical history were arranged, including Beethoven, Haydn, Elgar, Wagner, Tchaikovsky, the Romantic movement and so on.⁴¹ The paraphernalia of the artistic performance also reached Shanghai; from 1908 onwards printed programmes “containing historical and analytical notes” began to accompany recitals for the first time.⁴²

Band life was not without internal conflict. The German musicians campaigned against the police-like uniform that they were by contract required to wear. They attempted to maintain pay differentials with the municipal tax collectors, for example, when that body of men received an

⁴⁰ SMC, *AR 1909*, p.282; SMC, *AR 1911*, p.225.

⁴¹ SMC, *AR 1909*, p.283. Lists of works performed can be found, for example, in SMC, *AR 1909*, p.283, and SMC, *AR 1913*, p.113B.

⁴² SMC, *AR 1908*, p.102.

award that gave them higher rates.⁴³ The Germans also resented being made to play at outside events, such as at the race club on race days, and in general performing at engagements which they felt were the province of the less professional Filipinos. They also resented being led, in the absence of the conductor, by a Portuguese, C. de Castro.⁴⁴ In short, the European musicians resented their treatment as servants of the Shanghailanders community, and objected to being placed on par with the Filipino musicians.⁴⁵ To Rudolf Buck—who later became a Professor of music at Tübingen university⁴⁶—and to his German colleagues, this was a double insult. As musicians, and as Europeans, they found their professional and racial dignity compromised. This was exacerbated by the fact that the division of musical labour certainly was raced, with the council charging more for supplying European musicians, and considering that certain types of engagement were best performed by the Filipinos.⁴⁷

Dignity also arose with the tricky question of Chinese funerals. The bandmaster accepted private engagements for the band to play in funeral processions. Although this was a necessary revenue-raising area, there were complaints that such engagements were “detrimental to the

⁴³ SMC, *AR 1908*, p.103; SMA, U-1-129, Band Committee minutes 1908-1918, 11 June 1914.

⁴⁴ SMA, U-1-129, Band Committee minutes 1908-1918, 2 June 1908, 16 November 1909.

⁴⁵ For an exploration of the ambiguous position in the colonial order of other servants of empire in Shanghai, see Robert Bickers, “Who were the Shanghai Municipal Police and why were they there?: The British recruits of 1919”, in Bickers and Henriot, eds, *New Frontiers*, pp.170-91.

⁴⁶ Hugo Riemanns, *Musik Lexicon* 11th edition (Berlin: Max Hesses verlag, 1929), p.246.

⁴⁷ SMC, *AR 1908*, p.103; SMC, *AR 1911*, p.226.

prestige” of the Public Band. Quantity, not quality, was at a premium on such occasions, and as there were numerous Chinese bands “capable of producing more or less music” now competing for this market, the Conductor-in-Charge requested that he be allowed to refuse future funeral engagements. This request was rejected by the committee, which pointed out that “the relatives of influential Chinese will pay almost anything to get the municipal Band” for such occasions.⁴⁸ Grieving relatives felt that the dignity of the departed was enhanced by the band’s presence, but the musicians themselves felt it an undignified use of their talents. Interestingly, also, if Shanghainese had little chance to see the orchestra perform “art” in the Town Hall, they certainly got the opportunity to hear it perform noise in the city’s streets. If European classical music was not actually yet approachable, it could still be used to mark status and prestige.⁴⁹

The band was also the site of intra-European rivalry.⁵⁰ The German musicians refused to play “God Save the King” at the Masonic Ball in 1908, outraging the committee. At the outbreak of the First World War, five of the Germans left Shanghai to fight. One man was killed in the defence of Qingdao, the other four spent the war years as prisoners in

⁴⁸ SMA, U-1-130, Orchestra and Band Committee minute book No. 1, 1919-1935, 26 June 1919.

⁴⁹ Kraus, *Pianos and Politics*, pp.25-6. It was also used in avante-garde reformed opera, as Li Hsiao-t’i has shown: for his staging of the play “Bominghan” in 1911 Feng Zihe hired the SMO to perform on stage as part of the opera (Li Hsiao-t’i, “Opera, society and politics: Chinese intellectuals and Popular Culture, 1901-1937” (Harvard University Ph.D. thesis, 1996), p.224).

⁵⁰ For more on such tensions see Kathryn Brennan Meyer, “Splitting Apart: The Shanghai Treaty Port in Transition 1914–1921,” (Temple University Ph.D. thesis, 1985).

Japan. Buck and his remaining compatriots found themselves enjoined to stay in the background at performances, but, despite the growing Germanophobia of the Shanghai Anglo-American community, they were still considered vital to the musical health of the band.⁵¹ The (German) devil certainly did not have all the best tunes, but nobody else in Shanghai played any tunes quite so well.

The end of the war was the end of Buck's orchestra. The quality of the performances fell so low during this period that by 1919 the SMC instead hired the "Moscow Trio" to play the Sunday concerts, and the first serious move was made to scale down the ambitious programme of the years 1908-14.⁵² "Musicians", noted the committee, were "notoriously intractable and contumacious". A "good Manila band" would suit Shanghailanders tastes and Filipinos would prove easier to discipline than the "polyglot cosmopolitan crowd" in service in late 1917, among whom could be counted four Germans, three Italians, one Romanian, a Dutchman, an American, a Russian, an Austrian and a Portuguese.⁵³ In the end, all was saved from this exasperated philistinism. By April 1919 the renamed Orchestra and Band Committee confirmed that its policy was to build up the SMO to "the same degree of proficiency as before the war".⁵⁴

⁵¹ SMA, U-1-129, Band Committee minutes 1908-1918, 8 June 1908, 12 January 1915, 20 June 1917; SMC, *AR 1914*, p.124b.

⁵² SMC, *AR 1919*, p.231a.

⁵³ SMA, U-1-129, Band Committee minutes 1908-1918, 29 October 1917.

⁵⁴ SMA, U-1-130, Orchestra and Band Committee minute book No. 1, 1919-1935, 22 April 1919.

3. The Triumph of Art, 1919-1935

Under Maestro Mario Paci (1878-1946), the Municipal Orchestra and Band (renamed as such in 1922) firmly planted itself in the cultural life of Shanghai's Chinese and foreign communities. This position was contested by both Chinese and foreign opinion, which united in its condemnation of the costs involved (which were not helped by Paci's inveterate profligacy—he also administered the whole operation), and, in 1935, the SMO was thoroughly reorganised. But by that date it had a steady Chinese audience (averaging one fifth), and had performed Chinese-written works, played with Chinese soloists and Chinese students from the National Conservatory of Music. Like the SMC and its services generally, the community the SMO served had broadened genuinely to include the Chinese residents of the International Settlement.

Paci was appointed on 1 September 1919, with the remit of rebuilding a symphony orchestra and brass band comprising 36 musicians, 17 of them Europeans. Concerts commenced in November 1919, but the debut concert of the new symphony orchestra had to wait until 6 November 1921.⁵⁵ The popularity of the orchestra grew and grew thereafter. Some concerts attracted 1,500 foreign listeners in 1921, and a record 3,500 heard the orchestra in Hongkew (Hongkou) park in 1922 [see Illustration 2].⁵⁶ Over the next decade Paci oversaw the development of the orchestra, a string quartet (1920), a Jazz band (1920)

⁵⁵ SMA, U-1-130, Orchestra and Band Committee minute book No. 1, 1919-1935, 27 October 1919; SMC, *AR 1919*, 231a; SMC, *AR 1921*, p.261a.

⁵⁶ SMC, *AR 1921*, p.262a; *AR 1922*, p.341a.

(renamed the Dance Orchestra in 1934), a Shanghai Volunteer Corps band (1923), and the brass band.⁵⁷ (The sharp division that was drawn between the orchestra and the brass band, despite the overlap of personnel, enabled Paci to wriggle out of his contractual obligations to conduct band performances and to enforce the council's uniform regulations.) A greater and greater proportion of the personnel were Europeans, and Russian names began to accumulate in the personnel lists after 1920. By 1926, the composition of the orchestra was almost entirely European.⁵⁸ Paci was profligate, and difficult, but led the orchestra into new media (radio broadcasts of concerts began in 1926, and gramophone recordings were made in 1929⁵⁹). Paci also worked to find new audiences through special concerts for children, after 1927 for example, and through giving lectures in (European) schools.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ SMC, *AR 1920*, pp.249a-250a; SMA, U-1-130, Orchestra and Band Committee minute book No. 1, 1919-1935, 25 October 1935; SMC, *AR 1923*, pp.361, 363.

⁵⁸ SMC, *AR 1920*, pp.250a; SMC, *AR 1926*, p.349.

⁵⁹ SMA, U-1-130, Orchestra and Band Committee minute book No. 1, 1919-1935, 30 November 1926, 9 March 1931, 13 April 1934, 30 May 1932; SMC, *AR 1929*, p.295.

⁶⁰ SMA, U-1-130, Orchestra and Band Committee minute book No. 1, 1919-1935, 4 September 1923, 31 January 1927.

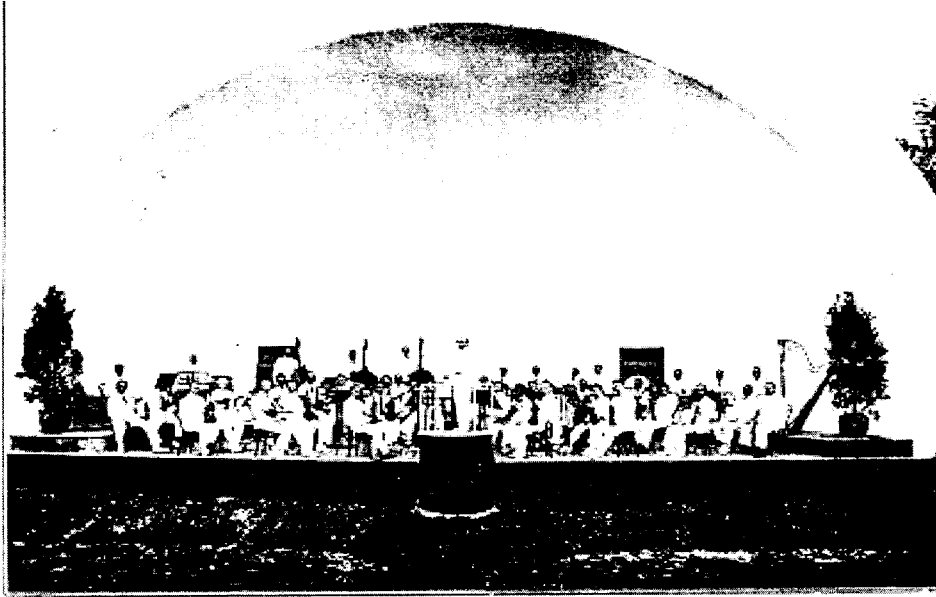


Illustration 2: The SMO in Hongkou park, 1922. Source: SMC, *Annual Report*, 1922, opp. p. 341a.

Where once the orchestra had served, and sought to gain revenue from, visiting acrobatic or theatrical troupes, in the 1920s and 1930s it started to serve as an attraction in its own right for visiting soloists. Without a full symphony orchestra it seems unlikely that such musicians as pianists Benno Moiseiwitsch (1890-1963) and Ignaz Friedman (1882-1948), or violinist Efren Zimbalist (1889-1985), would have come to perform in Shanghai. These visits were mostly arranged by the impresario Avray Strok, but part of the attraction was obviously the availability of the SMO, and much incremental good was done to the local reputation of the orchestra as a result.⁶¹ The status of the SMO personnel itself increased generally. Paci saw himself as an artist, and his

⁶¹ On Strok and the musicians he brought to Shanghai, see Han, "Shanghai gongbuju yuedui yanjiu", pp.161-5.

musicians as artists too—excepting the Filipinos. He was not a servant of the SMC, but of Shanghai's cultural world, and therefore need not wear a municipal uniform. After trips to Italy in 1931 and 1938, Paci made much of invitations he received to conduct in Rome, Milan and Turin, where he was “spreading the Shanghai gospel”.⁶²

The most important theme in the orchestra's history for the purposes of this paper is its developing interaction with Chinese audiences and musicians. From 1928 onwards Chinese attendance at performances became increasingly noticed in annual reports of the bandmaster. Advertisements were being placed in the Chinese press at least as early as February 1928, and the admission of Chinese into the International Settlement parks that year certainly brought in a whole new audience for the open-air performances given by the orchestra and band. Fully three quarters of the audience there in 1928 was Chinese, and Chinese interest was still reported as being high in 1930.⁶³ By 1931, some 20 percent of the attendance at indoor performances was Chinese, and the percentage rose steadily thereafter. The fact that the figures were recorded suggests the importance of stressing the SMO's service to Chinese residents. By 1933 it was being argued on the Orchestra and Band Committee that Chinese ratepayers themselves expected the SMC to continue funding the orchestra because of its cultural value in the city. An interpreter was provided at the children's concerts from 1934 onwards. A Chinese

⁶² *NCH*, 6 October 1931, p.14; 22 December 1931, p.410; 5 October 1938, p.14.

⁶³ *SMA*, U-1-130, Orchestra and Band Committee minute book No. 1, 1919-1935, 20 February 1928; *SMC, AR 1928*, p.317; *SMC, AR 1930*, p.322. Wen-hsin Yeh's claim that “few Chinese were to be found among the audiences of serious concerts” is inaccurate: Yeh, *Alienated Academy*, p.72.

member sat on the committee after 1928, and the composer Huang Zi (Tzu Huang) joined it in 1931.⁶⁴

The orchestra also developed a more active relationship with Chinese musicians and students. Xu Buceng has claimed that the National Conservatory of Music (*Guoli yinyueyuan*, after 1929 *Guoli yinyue zhuanke xuexiao*), founded in Shanghai in 1927, was located in the city precisely because of the presence of the SMO.⁶⁵ Certainly the relationship between the orchestra and the Conservatory was intimate, although never official or institutionalised (although a Conservatory delegate seems always to have sat on the committee after 1931). Musicians from the orchestra headed its departments and taught its students. Special ticket concessions were given to students at the Conservatory, and there were concerts held in cooperation with the city's Chinese Choral Society, and the first concert with a Chinese soloist, Sitson Ma (Ma Sicong), in 1929.⁶⁶ Nineteen-thirty saw the first performance of a Chinese symphonic work, Huang Zi's "In Memoriam" ("Huaijiu") Concert Overture.⁶⁷ A Chinese music evening on 21 May 1933 attracted 1,800 patrons—the highest audience that year.⁶⁸ From

⁶⁴ SMC, *AR 1931*, p.308; SMC, *AR 1932*, p.309; SMA, U-1-130, Orchestra and Band Committee minute book No. 1, 1919-1935, 13 April 1931, 29 June 1933, 25 October 1934.

⁶⁵ Xu Buceng, "Jews and the Musical Life of Shanghai", in Jonathan Goldstein, ed., *The Jews of China, vol.1, Historical and Comparative Perspectives* (Armonk: NY: M. E. Sharpe 1999), p.231; see also Xu Buceng, "Youtai yinyuejia zai Shanghai", p.4, and Liu, *Zhongguo xinyinyue shi lun*, pp.112-117.

⁶⁶ SMA, U-1-130, Orchestra and Band Committee minute book No. 1, 1919-1935, 1 October 1928; SMC, *AR 1929*, p.297; SMC, *AR 1930*, p.321. Chinese soloists are listed in Han, "Shanghai gongbujue yinyuedui yanjiu", p.183.

⁶⁷ SMC, *AR 1930*, p.323.

⁶⁸ SMC, *AR 1933*, p.319.

1935 onwards Chinese music students began to perform more often in the SMO.⁶⁹

My concern here is with examining the role of the SMO in facilitating and providing for the increasing Chinese interest in European classical music, but it is worth examining the factors that seem to have caused this increase. The broader background lies in the contradictory and problematic process of transmission of Western goods and practices. Virgil Ho has argued that there was an undoubted craze for things Western even at the height of anti-imperialist activism in the 1920s.⁷⁰ Wen-hsin Yeh has also shown how far, for example, national goods campaigns encouraged the uptake of Chinese “Western” goods such as cigarettes. The adoption of such Western goods was in fact encouraged by the boycotts against Western or Japanese firms.⁷¹ Similarly, much of the momentum for the growth in familiarity with and liking for European classical music came in the form of nationalist songs. The specific roots of the growing popular interest seem to lie in the patriotic song movement of the early twentieth century and in the 1904 education reforms, which instigated singing classes in schools and the schoolsongs movement (*xuetang yuege*).⁷² In the patriotic song movement new

⁶⁹ SMC, *AR 1935*, p.260.

⁷⁰ Virgil Kit-yiu Ho, “The Limits of popular hatred: popular attitudes towards the West in Republican Canton”, *East Asian History* no. 2 (1991), pp.87-104.

⁷¹ Wen-hsin Yeh, “Shanghai Modernity: Commerce and Culture in a Republican City”, *The China Quarterly* no. 150 (1997), pp.375-94.

⁷² Nancy Hao-ming Chao, “Twentieth century Chinese vocal music with particular reference to its development and national characteristics from the May Fourth Movement (1919) to 1945” (University of California, Los Angeles, Ph.D. thesis, 1995), pp.18-28; Liu, *Zhongguo xinyinuo shi lun*, pp.82-96; Timothy L. Brace, “Modernization and Music in Contemporary China: Crisis, Identity and the Politics of Style” (University of Texas,

Chinese texts were added to Western tunes. Choral singing thus became a familiar feature of the activist's repertoire, but it also became a mainstream student pastime and increasingly spread beyond college campuses. The silent cinema (with its piano accompaniment)—and later on the talkies—were also supplemented by the phonograph and then the radio, and all served to familiarise Chinese audiences with European classical music.⁷³ The SMO and the National Conservatory of Music seem also to have served to consolidate and expand this nascent interest, not least because of the special concerts they could put on in collaboration with choral groups and visiting musicians.

The growing interaction with the Chinese audience, and with Chinese musicians, was partly a result of growing Chinese interest, but it also resulted from changes in the boundaries between foreign and Chinese Shanghai. Before 1930, the Orchestra performed indoor concerts in the old "Town Hall", the former administrative headquarters of the Shanghai Municipal Council.⁷⁴ The building was sold to developers in 1929, and the SMO lost its home. It moved out of this base with connotations of exclusive foreign privilege and into a commercial and public space—the Grand Theatre (1930-34), and then the Lyceum (1934 onwards). At the Town Hall, the SMO appeared to be no more than a cultural adjunct to a council which saw itself as exclusively serving the

Austin, Ph.D. thesis, 1992), pp.206-277.

⁷³ There is little written on the topic, but see Sue Tuohy, "Metropolitan Sounds: Music in Chinese Films in the 1930s", in Yingjin Zhang, ed., *Cinema and Urban Culture in Shanghai, 1922-1943* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), pp.200-221.

⁷⁴ Much detail on performance location can be found in Han, "Shanghai gongbuju yinyuedui yanjiu", pp.171-77.

foreign community. Out in Shanghai's entertainment world, the orchestra became more and more a cultural asset for the city generally. With the entry of Chinese into the public recreation spaces of the International Settlement after 1928, the SMO had also found itself forced into a more integrated Shanghai.⁷⁵ The public gardens were still exclusive—the very poor were kept out through the introduction of an entrance fee but effectively this symbol of racist exclusion was reformed in 1928. The shifting physical location of the orchestra, and its audience, indicates its shifting location in the Shanghai cultural sphere.

This service to the wider community drew sharp criticism from some ratepayers, who attacked the SMO almost annually at the ratepayers' meetings, and also—more implicitly—from the potential audience which effectively boycotted Paci's art. The SMO was attacked as a highbrow waste of money which served “non-resident” or “non-ratepayer” tastes—both phrases effectively meant the Chinese and non-British Europeans. Paci “stubbornly refuses to consider the popular taste”, thundered “Ratepayer” in a letter to the *North China Herald* in 1930. This taste had been better pandered to by the numerous military bands which had accompanied the British Shanghai Defence Force in 1927-29.⁷⁶ The SMO's public defenders cited to its educational value, its

⁷⁵ This is not to say that there were not attempts to maintain European exclusivity. From 1929 onwards the orchestra began to give orchestral performances in the Shanghai Race Club enclosure. In 1930-32 they were given weekly. The likely reason is that the Race Club, as a members-only organisation could still—and did—restrict Chinese access. These popular performances seem most obviously to have pandered to a (European) public desire to retain some exclusionist access to the SMO: SMC, *AR 1929*, p. 296; *AR 1930*, p.322.

⁷⁶ *NCH*, 4 November 1930, p.160.

role in attracting visits from world famous musicians and in facilitating the activities of Chinese (and Russian) choral societies, and its symbolic role as a representation of communal ideas and harmony. Chinese voices echoed these points.⁷⁷ At a half of one per cent of the annual budget, it was felt by many to be a cheap and useful exercise in public relations. The clash between “Ratepayer” and his ilk, and supporters of the SMO, was a clash over the character of the International Settlement polity.⁷⁸ SMC reform on all fronts attempted to evade the inevitability of retrocession to Chinese government authority by moving to include Chinese residents in the International Settlement polity and “community” through extending more SMC activities towards the Chinese (in education, for example), and through recruiting more of them to more senior positions in the administration. Die-hard settlers wished to maintain an exclusively British dominated vision of community. Ratepayer resistance to abolition of the SMO in the later 1930s increasingly reflected a need for stability and perceived quality of life in increasingly threatening times, but also the victory of this newer and more inclusive vision of community.

The orchestra was also attacked by the British consulate general, which felt that, like the parks issue, it was a political weak spot. An orchestra was not an essential service, and was “rather in the nature of a luxury”. After the May Thirtieth debacle the Shanghai Municipal Council could ill afford expensive luxuries that left it open to attack. It was also

⁷⁷ *NCH*, 23 December 1930, p.411.

⁷⁸ See the debates in 1935, 1938 and 1940: *SMC, AR 1935*, pp.17-22; *AR 1938*, pp.13-19; *AR 1940*, pp.17-21.

attacked by the (Chinese) Shanghai General Chamber of Commerce “in justice to the Chinese ratepayers” when economic measures were needed.⁷⁹ The SMO was never politicised as internationally as the parks issue, or the activities generally of the SMC however, and muddled through attacks at one ratepayers’ meeting after another through the 1930s.

4. The Last Years, 1935-1942

Money, not politics, became the biggest threat. The financial crisis caused the SMO to be abolished and reconstituted under a stricter regime after May 1935.⁸⁰ Paci was re-appointed, despite the fact that his artistic missionary work had undoubtedly lost audiences who preferred a more popular repertoire. Paci’s dignity was certainly ruffled by demands for a more accessible programme, but the committee gave him little choice in the matter and vetted his programmes.⁸¹ Chinese involvement in the orchestra itself continued to grow in this period. Starting in 1938 Chinese musicians were engaged on a temporary basis, and by 1940 four were on the staff of the SMO.⁸² Performances by Chinese soloists also became more frequent—six performed in 1937, including pianist Li Weining,

⁷⁹ SMA, U-1-130, Orchestra and Band Committee minute book No. 1, 1919-1935, 12 January 1926; 16 January 1929.

⁸⁰ By June 1935 costs of \$300,000 were far outstripping income of \$25,000: SMA, U-1-130, Orchestra and Band Committee minute book No. 1, 1919-1935, 26 June 1935. For a survey of finances see Han, “Shanghai gongbujia yinyuedui yanjiu”, pp.188-91.

⁸¹ SMA, U-1-130, Orchestra and Band Committee minute book No. 1, 1919-1935, 10 May 1934.

⁸² They are named in Xu Buceng, “Youtai yinyuejia zai Shanghai (shang)”, p.4.

who replaced Huang Zi on the band committee after the latter's death in 1939.⁸³ The SMO performed for the first time outside Shanghai at Nanjing, at the opening of the concert hall there in 1937. On both April nights some 2,400 patrons attended.⁸⁴



Illustration 3: the SMO c.1939, with no Chinese musicians in evidence. Source: V. D. Jiganoff, *Russians in Shanghai* (Shanghai, c.1939).

War, and the rising cost of living in Shanghai, badly affected the orchestra. The SMO benefited from the competitive cultural diplomacy of the French, British and Italians in the years before the European war, but in fact only survived because of the strong support of the Japanese

⁸³ SMC, *AR 1937*, p.256; SMC, *AR 1938*, p.270, SMC, *AR 1940*; SMA, U-1-131, Band Committee minutes 1936-41, 27 January 1939, 9 July 1939.

⁸⁴ SMC, *AR 1937*, p.255.

community after 1935. Financial stringency kept the budget down, and by 1940 the musicians complained about their inability to live on the salaries being paid. Of 44 musicians on the strength that year, only a handful had permanent private engagements alongside their municipal work. For most, the SMO was the sole source of their earnings, and the influx of Jewish refugee musicians must have made the private tuition market much more competitive.⁸⁵ The Japanese military takeover of the International Settlement on 8 December 1941 was the end of the line for the SMO. The financial crisis afflicting the International Settlement administration called for stringent economic measures, and ratepayer control had been replaced by government through commission in the Shanghai Provisional Council agreement of early Spring 1941. On 1 May 1942 the dissolution of the orchestra was formally announced. On 31 May 1942 Paci conducted the SMO's farewell concert, complete with a historical touch probably lost on most of his audience. He played Mozart's "Coronation concerto", the first piece he had played with the fledgling SMO of 1919 (see Illustration 4).⁸⁶ He resigned the conductorship of the orchestra, handing over the baton to his deputy director Arrigo Foa (1900-81), who had been concert master since 1921.

⁸⁵ SMA, U-1-131, Band Committee minutes 1936-41, 17 January 1937, 28 June 1940; SMC, *AR 1938*, p.270; *AR 1939*, p.278.

⁸⁶ SMC, Municipal Gazette, 1 May 1942, p.65; SMA W-1-997, SMO, Souvenir Programme of Farewell Concert.



Illustration 4: Maestro Paci in action, as featured on the cover of the programme for the farewell concert of the SMO. Source: SMA W-1-997.

This was by no means the last of the SMO, or of Paci. He guest conducted for the Shanghai Philharmonic Society in January 1943,⁸⁷ and musical life in Shanghai continued under the difficult circumstances of the occupation. The vibrancy of Jewish refugee life has received some attention.⁸⁸ The SMP's brass band survived the transition to Chinese control and, for example, performed at "National Recovery Day" celebrations in August 1944 (and was still available for private hire).⁸⁹ Echoing an earlier colonial era, a Filipino brass band played for Japanese sailors courtesy of the Musicians' Association in May 1943.⁹⁰ Under the

⁸⁷ *The Shanghai Sunday Times*, 10 January 1943, p.7.

⁸⁸ A partial sketch of the personalities involved is to be found in *Almanach Shanghai 1946-47* (Shanghai: Shanghai Echo Publishing Co, 1946), pp.65-8; and for a memoir of refugee musical life see Otto Joachim, "Memoirs I", National Library of Canada, Music Division, The Otto Joachim Fonds, MUS 270/A,5.

⁸⁹ *Shanghai Times*, 2 August 1944, p.2; *ibid.*, 14 October 1943, p.6. This was, most likely, the old band of the Shanghai Russian Regiment, which merged with the SMP in January 1941.

⁹⁰ *Shanghai Times*, 20 May 1943, p.3.

auspices of the Shanghai Philharmonic Society however, the SMO survived and Paci conducted it (together with a hundred voice chorus) at the “Festive Opening” of the Lyceum Theatre on 18 November 1945, leading off a programme of Dvorak and Grieg with the allied national anthems and Chang Hao’s “Victory of Democracy”.⁹¹ Paci died in August 1946; Foa conducted the orchestra until he left Shanghai for Hong Kong in 1952, where he became conductor of the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra.⁹²

Conclusion: the Functions of the Shanghai Municipal Orchestra

Clearly the SMO was the institutional root of Shanghai’s present-day orchestra. Orchestra committee chairman A. Howard claimed in 1923 that “the cultivation of Symphony Orchestral music was an education which no civilised community can afford to neglect”. Mario Paci himself claimed a missionary role for the orchestra. In 1931 he wrote that it had succeeded in establishing “an appreciation of music in its most cultured expression among the Chinese”.⁹³ Such self-serving claims (and the implicit judgement of Chinese music) can be approached with caution, but the direct and indirect impact of the SMO on the development of European classical music in Shanghai—and in China—

⁹¹ The programme for the concert can be found in the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, Archives, C. L. Boynton papers, Box 6.

⁹² Fu Lei, “Fu Cong de cheng chang”, *Xin Guancha* 1957:8, pp.26-7; Xu, “Jews and the Musical Life of Shanghai”, p.231.

⁹³ SMA, U-1-130, Orchestra and Band Committee minute book No. 1, 1919-1935, 9 March 1923; SMC, *AR 1931*, p.308.

was undoubtedly profound. China's musical development obviously stems from the talent and work of Chinese musicians, but the importance of the SMO can still not be over-stressed.⁹⁴ Richard Kraus has ably analysed the ambiguous and contradictory stance of the communist regime towards European classical music. International prize winners like Fou Ts'ung (Fu Cong, b.1934)—who, by gaining third prize at the 1955 Chopin International Piano Competition,⁹⁵ became China's first international music prize winner—brought prestige to the regime and to “New China”. Fou was reported to have thanked the nurturing of the Chinese Communist Party and its contribution to his success.⁹⁶ Through the Shanghai connection, the roots of much of the early international music success enjoyed by Chinese musicians can be seen partly to lie in affectations of the settler British and the Shanghai Municipal Council.

The SMO provided a conduit for the transmission of Western ideas, personnel, and music into China. As a result, it also provided a focus in the city of Shanghai for activities connected with the development of European classical music. Ying Xianneng claimed in 1937 that “to be able to play or sing with this orchestra is the pinnacle of success for the aspiring musicians of the younger generation” in Shanghai. The performances might not always be financial successes, he continued, but they provided opportunities not available anywhere else in China, either for listening, watching or performing.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Xu, “Youtai yinyuejia zai Shanghai (shang)”, p.1. See also Han Kuo-huang's measured conclusion in his “Shanghai gongbuju yinyuedui yanjiu”, pp.192-93.

⁹⁵ Kraus, *Pianos and Politics*, pp.80-81.

⁹⁶ Kraus, *Pianos and Politics*, p.85.

⁹⁷ Benjamin Z. N. Ing (Ying Xianneng), “Shanghai Musical Notes”, *T'ien Hsia Monthly* 4:1

The SMO brought to China figures such as Buck, Paci and Arrigo Foa who would not otherwise have come to reside in the country. A corps of trained European musicians were permanently based in the city from 1906 onwards. Later, the orchestra provided steady employment in Shanghai for refugee musicians such as Russians after the October revolution, or central European Jews in the later 1930s, ten of whom secured positions in the orchestra [including violinist/composer Otto Joachim (b.1910) and his brother, cellist Walter Joachim (b.1912), composer Walter Fraenkel (1897-1983) and violinist Alfred Wittenberg (1880-1953)].⁹⁸ Shanghai's international status made it a haven for refugees in the later 1930s; Shanghai's cultural life allowed many of these refugees to continue practising. These men could perform three different functions in Shanghai: as members of the orchestra, as private music teachers, or as tutors at the National Conservatory of Music.

The institutional link is important. The National Conservatory of Music (*Guoli yinyueyuan*) was founded in Shanghai in 1927. It recruited its teachers and study directors from the SMO. In 1929 Boris Zakharov was head of the piano section, and Arrigo Foa, the long-serving concertmaster, was head of the violin section.⁹⁹ In turn, some of the refugee musicians, such as Fraenkel and Walter Joachim, also taught there. Returned students apart, modern China's core cadre of Western

(1937), p.55.

⁹⁸ See Xu, "Jews and the Musical Life of Shanghai", and Harriet P. Rosenson, "Jewish Musicians in Shanghai: Bridging Two Cultures", in Goldstein, ed., *The Jews of China*, vol. 1, pp.239-50.

⁹⁹ A. Schimmelpenninck and F. Kouwenhoven, "The Shanghai Conservatory of Music: History and Foreign Students' Experiences", *Chime* no.6 (1993), p.64; Xu, "Jews and the Musical Life of Shanghai", p.231.

musicians trained at the Conservatory. Private tuition also left its mark on the Chinese musical world. Paci himself tutored Fou Ts'ung from 1943 until his death in 1946.¹⁰⁰ Arrigo Foa taught Dai Cuilan, later head of the Conservatory, Walter Joachim tutored Situ Zhiwen, and Fraenkel taught composition to Ding Shande, Sang Tong and Qu Xixian. The provision of institutional music teaching, complemented by private tuition, proved a powerful stimulus to the development of new forms of music, and the training of new musicians.¹⁰¹ Fou Ts'ung has also pointed out how the cosmopolitanism of the community of musicians itself meant that Shanghai students were exposed to a wide range of styles and training techniques. Paci himself brought an old-style classical schooling to his tuition.¹⁰²

The SMO served as a conduit for the dissemination of classic and new works of European music. Physically, Paci, Buck and others brought sheet music to China, while the SMO performed a great number of pieces, many of them given a debut performance in China. Paci's dedication to art also ensured that modern works were also being performed "sometimes in advance of his Western colleagues", as Alexander Tcherepnine claimed in his 1935 survey, "Music in Modern China".¹⁰³ Ratepayer complaints and SMC moves to control his programme back up this claim. The SMO also served as the forum where several pieces by

¹⁰⁰ Kraus, *Pianos and Politics*, pp.80-81.

¹⁰¹ The institutional link was also important for Hong Kong. Arrigo Foa took over the conductorship of the postwar SMO in 1946, and moved to Hong Kong in 1952 where he became conductor of the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra: Xu, "Jews and the Musical Life of Shanghai", pp.230-31.

¹⁰² Telephone interview with Fou Ts'ung, 9 August 2000.

¹⁰³ Tcherepnine, "Music in Modern China", p.395.

the Russian composer Aaron Avshalomov (1894-1956), which explored Chinese musical themes and forms, were first performed.¹⁰⁴ Aspiring Chinese musicians and singers were also given the opportunity to listen to concerts, and to perform in them. Nowhere else in China was it possible for young choral singers to have the opportunity to take part in performances of works on the scale that was made possible in Shanghai because of the SMO. Although effectively unquantifiable, an even larger audience was reached through SMO radio broadcasts. A larger audience of radio listeners were able to hear European classical music, live and uninterrupted.

The SMO has had a bad press. It is common to see it portrayed retrospectively as an instrument of racism, qualitatively worse in its impact because music is somehow felt to be above politics. We know that race tensions certainly existed within the SMO at different stages in its history. There is also no reason to suppose that contemporary European attitudes to race prevalent in society were not shared by the musicians, and some Chinese accounts have described racism towards Chinese musicians by orchestra members.¹⁰⁵ The SMO had a bad contemporary press, or rather, its existence was long the source of caustic comment from abroad. While the musicians fiddled and their oligarchic employers listened, Chinese labour sweated.¹⁰⁶ Visitors fresh to Shanghai often remarked with pleasant surprise about the band playing on summer afternoons in the parks of the International Settlement. Hostile visitors

¹⁰⁴ Xu, "Jews and the Musical Life of Shanghai", pp.235-6.

¹⁰⁵ Kraus, *Pianos and politics*, pp.5, 48; Schimmelpenninck and Kouwenhoven, "The Shanghai Conservatory of Music", p.66.

¹⁰⁶ SMC, *Municipal Gazette*, 19 April 1928, 159c.

drew sharp contrasts between SMC spending on welfare, and spending on the SMO and band. Retrospective comment, not least in writings on the history of European classical music in China, has also worked with a picture of a Europeans-only orchestra playing purely for European audiences, and excluding Chinese. The picture is hardly accurate.

But then neither was the contemporary defence of the SMO as the “the Greatest Cultural Asset East of Suez”,¹⁰⁷ which rather missed the functional point of the orchestra. The Shanghai British defended the SMO because it represented for them a symbol of their community’s wholesomeness, and its maturity as a settlement with a developed cultural life. It also brought them good cheer in bad times. In other areas, the foreign community in Shanghai was far less developed: there were no artists or writers of note working in China.¹⁰⁸ The SMO was more than the centrepiece of the Shanghai Municipal Council’s cultural activity: it was its sole cultural activity. “East of Suez”, however, was a phrase redolent of the view from the metropolitan centre, and of Britain abroad. It located Shanghailanders and their achievements — and identity — within greater Britain and the empire world.¹⁰⁹ But the SMO was not simply an asset of the Shanghai British. The role of the SMC was contested. British residents were resentful at the hijacking of “their” cultural asset by “obscure” programming pandering to Chinese students or European audiences. The SMC supported some of the charges, and also contested the costs involved. Buck and Paci contested their apparent

¹⁰⁷ SMC, Annual Report 1938, p.16.

¹⁰⁸ In English, the treaty port legacy has left two fine writers, but neither Mervyn Peake or J. G. Ballard lived in China as adults.

¹⁰⁹ For more on this theme see Bickers, “Shanghailanders”.

role as cultural servants of the settler polity. The orchestra itself was the site of conflicts, not least over the inclusion of Chinese musicians and Chinese (Western) music.

Writings on the SMO highlight many of the tensions inherent in the literature generally on the International Settlement, and on Shanghai's years as an interface between colonialism and China. The stark binary opposition between colonialism and resistance which underpins nationalist narratives of Chinese history is being replaced both in China and in the West by more nuanced and sophisticated analysis. In the Shanghai case, the foreign impact is increasingly being written back into accounts of the city's history. Shanghai's development was based on not only the full collaboration between Chinese and the foreign, but the intertwining of Chinese and foreign interests. As I have argued elsewhere, it is never easy effectively to distinguish between the Chinese and the foreign in the Shanghai case.¹¹⁰ What is clear is that the treaties of the mid-nineteenth century, reinforced through local land regulations, mapped out the treaty port world. But instead of the foreign bridgeheads and bastions so integral to analysis, the treaties gave rise to a grey world of opportunity which was seized by empire's multinational citizens (in Shanghai the definition of "British" officially included British Indians, Eurasians, dominions' nationals, Chinese from Hong Kong and the Straits and also Baghdadi Jews). The Shanghai Public Band began as an affected trophy of the arriviste settler elite — the most musical community east of Cape Town as they styled themselves. It grew to

¹¹⁰ Robert Bickers, "Revisiting The Model Settlement, Shanghai 1842-1943", paper prepared for the panel "New Narratives of Imperial Practice", 1998 Association of Asian Studies Meeting Washington DC, 27 March 1998.

become intimately central to the continuing tradition of European classical music in China. Colonialism's energies were designed to serve political and commercial interests; but colonialism's opportunities were seized by a far wider range of actors—or in this case musicians.

How then can we assess the potential of the International Settlement for cultural exchange? First: the story is mostly one-sided. Although some caveats might be added to Richard Kraus's judgement that "China imported Western music while Westerners mocked China's",¹¹¹ overall we know that most foreign residents in China—including musicians—failed to understand or show any interest in Chinese music. Not only that, but Chinese interest in European classical music was often rooted in a sense that it was superior and more advanced.¹¹² Ordinary treaty port residents loathed the Chinese music that they heard. The orchestral performance was a fundamental part of European bourgeois culture as it developed through the nineteenth century, and music itself was always used as a marker of cultural "maturity" and of communal integrity. Chinese music seemed discordant, while Chinese musical performances and audience behaviour seemed bizarre.

So this was hardly a true exchange. The potential for transmission also varied. The brass band was readily appropriated for use in funerals, or as a facet of military reform. Choral singing was readily adopted as recreation and as a political agitprop form. "Art" music's transmission in

¹¹¹ Kraus, *Pianos and Politics*, p.35.

¹¹² Two contemporary statements dealing with this point can be found in: John Hazedel Levis, *Foundations of Chinese Musical Art* (Peiping: Henri Vetch, 1936), p. 202; Chao Mei-pa, "The trend of modern Chinese music", *T'ien Hsia Monthly* 4 (March, 1937), pp.269-86.

Shanghai relied mostly on shifts in the underlying politics of the International Settlement, and of the foreign position in China. After surviving the May Thirtieth incident and movement and the Nationalist revolution, the settler oligarchy running the settlement found itself threatened by its former diplomatic supporters, who set out to dismantle the treaty edifice.¹¹³ Their solution was to try to bring Chinese residents of the International Settlement into the settlement polity by extending the definition of community to include them. Music played its role in this process, but also benefited immensely from the shifting boundaries between Chinese and foreigner in the settlement.

Regardless of the politics, Maestro Paci was following his own trajectory, making his mark and carving out his own career. War and political change mapped out and remapped the treaty port world after 1842. But this story clearly shows us two things which suggest the ways in which we must revise our thoughts about the Sino-foreign encounter. First: colonial structures in China opened up opportunities not conceived of by the treaty planners, and these were opportunities for individuals and for groups well beyond those covered in the treaties. The Anglo-Chinese wars were not fought to give Mario Paci his opportunity to carve out a living in Shanghai spreading the gospel of European classical music with his orchestra of Russian and Jewish refugees and Filipinos. Second, the SMO also belongs, surely, as much to the history of international migration as to empire, to patterns that partly occur because of, but also despite, the actions and advances of empire. The

¹¹³ This is the essential theme of Robert Bickers *Britain in China: Community, culture and colonialism, 1900-49* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

story of the Shanghai Municipal Orchestra is a story of the contradictions and tensions of empire in China, and also of its possibilities.