

Ear-Pleasing or Not: Listening to *Qin* Music in Shanghai during the Interwar Period

Joys H. Y. Cheung

Abstract

The *qin*, or *guqin*, a Chinese zither known for its long history since antiquity, was part of the modern field of “music” emerging in Shanghai during the interwar period (1918-1937). Shanghai was a cosmopolitan of both strong colonial presence and vibrant Chinese adaptations. Whereas the first national conservatory of music specializing in the training of Western classical music was established there in 1927, numerous private musical societies specializing in the performance of different kinds of Chinese music were also founded and leading members actively published journals and magazines. Being proactive in defending native music in the colonial and cosmopolitan contexts, they often addressed musical and national values through comparisons of Chinese and Western music.

Jinyu Qin Society (Shanghai branch est. 1936) was an active defender of Chinese music and one of the most visionary organizations amongst modern *qin* societies. Its publication, *Jinyu qinkan*, recorded how its members asserted the modern values as well as the traditional heritage of *qin* music. Among them, three essayists responded to critics of *qin* music by subtly engaging the ear. In a proactive fashion, they denied the pleasure of the ear in claiming the modern value of *qin* listening.

This article examines how the Jinyu essayists engaged with the aural negation. Compared with pre-modern negation on ear-pleasing music recorded in classics and the *qin* lore, Jinyu essayists’ can be interpreted as a modern expansion of aurality. It comes as a result of competition among different musical styles and is related to unprecedented stimulation in music listening. In the new concert setting, *qin* music was performed with no or with low-quality sound amplification systems and was juxtaposed to other types of music performance. The aural experience at these modern events reinforced the ear-displeasing impression of the *qin* for listeners who had not acquired appreciation of the instrument; and they in turn influenced the supporters of *qin* music to concede its sonic inferiority. Paradoxically, it is through the sensual negation that the *qin* defenders reaffirmed the classical value and artistic heritage of the *qin*.

Keywords: Aurality, Chinese modernity, *qin* listening, *qin* and interwar audio technology, interwar Shanghai, Jinyu Qin Society

琴音不媚耳： 兩戰期間上海的音樂和聽琴

張海欣

摘 要

歷史悠長的琴，是兩戰時期（1918-1937）在上海所興起的現代「音樂」場域的一部份。強盛的殖民力量和蓬勃的中國適應創造力同時在此存在。第一所專門教育西洋古典音樂的國立音樂學院於 1927 年成立，而很多以演奏本土音樂為宗旨的私辦音樂會也在此活動。後者的領袖們也活躍出版刊物，積極地為本土音樂生存而辯護立論。

今虞琴社的上海部於 1936 年成立，為一「捍衛者」組織，在現代琴社中最具前瞻性。其刊物《今虞琴刊》重要地記錄了成員如何論辯琴的現代價值，同時又維持承傳下來的固有實踐。其中三位撰文者幽微地表現了一種嶄新的聆聽投注，有以近乎挑釁的看法，以否定耳朵的樂趣來定義琴。

此文審視此種聽覺否定。與從前琴人對悅耳的否定以實踐古雅理念作比較，《今虞》把否定成為琴知識的結構部份，展示一種聽覺的現代擴展。此固然與「音樂」場域的競爭關係有關，但也受到前所未有的聆聽環境刺激。在新興的音樂會場合中，琴在沒有或粗糙的擴音支援下，與其他種類的樂聲以比鄰式被緊接聆聽。這種聆聽經驗為反對琴的主張提供了感官的基礎，直接或間接的影響琴的捍衛者，承認琴聲的遜弱不悅耳。弔詭的是，琴者正是通過否定悅耳，誘發自古以來深度聽琴的論述：否定自己，以肯定固有的自己。

關鍵詞：聽覺與中國現代性、聽琴、古琴與兩戰期間音響、古琴與兩戰期間上海、今虞琴社

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