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Queer Sinophone Ear: Countering Dual Colonialities in a Performative Theory of Listening

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Abstract This article sheds light on the intertwined nature of Sino- and Eurocolonialities, advocating for a nuanced, intersectional approach that has so far eluded Sinophone studies. Dual colonialities constitute a framework necessary for approaching complex cases such as Chinese minority musical modernism that is subject to both colonialities, objections to Chinese appropriations of Western music that may be Eurocolonial or anti-nativist (de-Sinocolonial), and minority, queer or human rights voices that disalign with Sinocoloniality. The three-part argument of the article commences with an analysis of how the author's own voice and accent in both English and Standard Chinese has been variously privileged and derogated in multiple countries, with dual colonialities shaping his bilingual experience. Thereafter, the article turns to an autoethnography of how the author as a youth constructed a closeted gay inner world in homophobic Singapore by queering U.S./U.K. boy bands, exhibiting Eurocoloniality in a bid to survive a hostile environment. The final part of the article advances an argument for de-Eurocoloniality that involves the dismantling of musical hierarchies and the possible (as opposed to mandated), democratically chosen "return" to the music of one's ethnic heritage while resisting nativism in a de-Sinocolonial stance. Dual colonialities provide a framework that highlights their quotidian conjunction and thus theoretical necessity in analysis, critically accommodating the disambiguation of phenomena with multiple resonances, and giving attention to not just hegemonic forces but decolonial listening, anti-nativism, and marginalized peoples within China.

Decolonization has risen to become one of the focal points of the music disciplines. Aside from the notable Dialogues held by the International Council for Traditional Music and Dance (ICTMD),[1] and articles dedicated to the topic in the *Journal of Music History Pedagogy*,[2] conference panels and papers regularly incorporate decolonial discussion. Because of the intensified attention on the implications of the term, there is a need for its extended parsing before even embarking on the topic of this article on what decolonial listening might mean in relation to the contested "Chinese" context. Unless otherwise specified, "Chinese" and "PRC" in the following refers to China excluding Hong Kong and Taiwan.[3]

Of note is that much of decolonial research falls not under "decolonization" but what Walter Mignolo calls "decoloniality" (Mignolo 2011:xxv), which is not void of politics but has a significant epistemic dimension that aims to alter university academic knowledge production. Decoloniality recognizes that Euro-American epistemologies are hegemonic and Indigenous knowledges in particular, often with deep ecological significance, have become an important resistive resource (Thornton and Bhagwat 2021). However, along with the epistemic broadening of what may be regarded as properly decolonial projects, there has been a wide variety of other counterhegemonic projects which bear the term "decolonial" but have vague relations to it. For example, student-centered or anti-oppression (racism, classicism, sexism, homophobia etc.) pedagogy is important (e.g., Fujino et. al. 2018), but how appropriate is it to call this "decolonial"? Is everything a legacy of colonialism, and therefore all resistance decolonial? The watering down of the term into what Tuck and Yang calls decolonization as "metaphor" led to North American efforts to restrict its use—in some cases, to only contexts of settler colonialism (Tuck and Yang 2012:3).

In response, writers have pointed out that the analysis of oppression and resistance requires more finesse. In particular, using the counterexample of slavery, Garba and Sorentino argued that oppression operates through a combination of ideas, ideology, and discourse, on the one hand, and material actions impacting the physical world (enslaved bodies), on the other, citing Hortense Spillers' inversion of the schoolyard chant: "sticks and stones might break our bones, but words will most certainly kill us" (Garba and

Sorentino 2020:13). The implication is that return of land alone is insufficient, for colonialism is also an epistemology by which some are regarded as less human than others.

Decoloniality of varied Chinese contexts arrives in the thicket of the idealist-materialist debate via the concept of the "Sinophone." Ordinarily meaning "Chinese-speaking" and therefore referring to China as well as Chinese communities elsewhere, the key architect of Sinophone studies Shu-mei Shih reconceptualized "Sinophone" as referring to Chinese communities *outside* of China, in order to emphasize the transculturation of non-PRC Chinese cultures, and delink from PRC imperialism, seen in the occupation of Tibet and Xinjiang since the Qing dynasty (Shih 2011:709). In Shih's later work, ethnic minorities using Standard Chinese also came to be included in Sinophone studies (ibid.:11). Throughout, Shih maintains a resistive stance towards China, which for her, warrants the separation of dominant mainland Chinese literature and culture studies from "Sinophone" studies. Although not part of the decolonial conversation from the start, Sinophone studies has a family resemblance to decolonial theory in its effort to counter China's hegemony and internal colonization.[4]

The key difference between Shih's work and the majority of decolonial theorists is that she focuses on China as opposed to Euro-America as an imperial power. Focusing on China's semi-colonization by European powers and the Japanese in the years prior to 1945, Shih argues, leads to the portrayal of China as "victim" (the colonized)—distracting from its own status as empire (ibid.:709). Shih therefore focuses only on what I could call *Sino*coloniality, rather than *Euro*coloniality, which is regarded as an "excuse." Congruent with Shih's view, Kuan-Hsing Chen believes that over-emphasizing the tension between East Asia and the U.S. leads to a continuation of Cold War dynamics without leading away from U.S. priorities (even in the resisting thereof), therefore paradoxically reinforcing U.S. dominance. This is because "with the former colonizer as the central concern, the nativist's own subjectivity is defined and conditioned by the nonnative" (Chen 2010:94). Indeed, PRC nativist-nationalist resistance to the U.S. might be instrumentalized to create support for a "strong China" policy that features internal colonization and imperialism (asserting control over Taiwan).

Shih and Chen's views have great value for their respective fields of literature and cultural studies. Shih's work led to the flourishing of Sinophone studies (mostly excluding China), while Chen's advocacy of "inter-Asia" as framework, whereby Asians regard other Asians as their reference points—thereby departing from Euro-American-led dynamics, has given rise to productive research, including in music, as seen in, e.g., the Inter-Asia Popular Music Studies Group (of the International Association for the Study of Popular Music).

Nevertheless, there are certain remaining contradictions in the PRC soundscape that require further attention and which cannot be fully addressed by the Sinophone or inter-Asia frameworks. In Chinese conservatories, Western art music is prioritized over traditional Chinese music in China, as seen in the larger number of students of Western music than of Chinese music performance in conservatories,[5] exhibiting Eurocolonial influence. Crucially, Euro- and Sinocolonialisms are intertwined rather than bifurcated. An example is the case of Nuoso (Yi) composer Zhang Zhao who writes music syncretizing folk tunes of the Nuoso and the Ho (Hani) minorities with a modernist post-tonal language. On the one hand, his music is often inappropriately analyzed in a Sinocolonial way using Chinese pentatonic theory when the minority modes do not even use the same pitches.[6] On the other hand, his adoption of modernism is Eurocolonial, reflecting the prestige of that Euro-American-originating style in Chinese conservatories.

Already at this preliminary level of analysis, there may be criticism of the "dual" Sino- and Eurocolonial approach. In addition to Shih's critique of Eurocolonialism as dissembling from Sinocolonialism, there will be those who reject the notion that the prevalence of Western art music indicates Eurocolonialism, perhaps unable to reconcile with their own Euro-American identity.[7] Furthermore, as I will elucidate through conference observations below, those who experienced the Cultural Revolution first hand may be justifiably wary of projects that seem to revert to the CCP brand of nativist anti-Westernism that resulted in physical and psychological harm for musicians (e.g., Chiang Wen-yeh, He Luting), many of whom were forced into exile (such as Ma Sicong). Because critiques of Eurocolonialism in music bear a family resemblance to the violent anti-Westernism of the Cultural Rev-

olution, the community of PRC musicologists in the field of Western art music research are justifiably skeptical of the CCP brand of hermeneutics that derives political meanings out of music, e.g. the interpretation of Ma Sicong's music as "Rightist," Western, bourgeois, capitalist, elitist, and hence counter-revolutionary.

Readers may be surprised to learn that there are those in China who resist nativist projects. Contemporary attempts to innovate a local Sinicized hermeneutics in China has faced massive resistance, as seen with Songrong Ye's proposal of using Chinese ancient poetry and philosophy to interpret Western art music (Ye 2013). Some of the most enthusiastic supporters of Ye's proposal are CCP loyalists such as the head of research at Shanghai Conservatory Dandan Wang, who mentioned Beethoven's piano sonatas, Xi Jinping, and the Chinese cosmological notion of *tian ren he yi*—that is, unity of man and heaven—in the same breath, without skipping a beat, in her paper "The Ecological Perspective of *Tian ren he yi* in Western Music," presented at the 2024 "Sounding China in Western Music" conference.[8] To be clear, the problem in Wang's paper is one of instrumentalizing the broadly relational studies of Chinese and Western culture by equating "Chinese" to the CCP—the exact formula used by the Xi administration to arouse populist Chinese nationalism in the service of increasing support for the party.

Wang's problematic paper did not escape the notice of Chinese scholars who were present at the conference. During his own presentation "Approaches to Integrating, Getting Proximal to, and Precisely Capturing 'China' in Western Music," the renowned specialist in Western music aesthetics Zhongen Han publicly critiqued Wang's paper for not involving "sound," and made a remark on "bizarre" papers in the conference. I suggested during my talk "Global Musicology and Epistemic Transculturation" that those who have experienced the Cultural Revolution (like Han) may be less inclined towards nativist approaches that are often expressions of top-down CCP ideological control.

Wariness of the kind of CCP appropriation evidenced above may mean that relational research involving Chinese and Western musics—for example, comparative studies—may never gain scholarly legitimacy in China.[9] Unfortunately, for some scholars, *all* research somehow involving the subject of

China comes to be associated with the CCP nationalist agenda, even if, for example, an ethnomusicologist is investigating rural music culture from a perspective that has questionable links to party ideology. The crux of the problem for this article is that the calculated and possibly cynical instrumentalization of Chinese nationalism by the CCP makes it nearly impossible to distinguish between state-sponsored anti-Westernism, versus scholarly epistemic initiatives that are *de-Eurocolonial*.

The foregoing discussion is intended to highlight the unexpected shared skepticism of China's nationalist stance by both Taiwanese intellectuals like Shih and some PRC musicologists, which is just one of the many complexities that require consideration of *both* Sino- and Eurocolonialism and the resistance thereof. A fundamental ambiguity arises regarding the interpretation of the intercultural encounter in musicology: Might the resistance to Ye instantiate anti-*Sino*colonialism (resisting the nativist inflation of Chinese culture's influence over Western music) or pro-*Euro*colonialism (defending the study of "pure" Western art music, which, it is worth recalling, is valued over traditional Chinese music by music students), or both? This question is unanswerable within Shih's Sinocolonial-only framework because it occludes Eurocoloniality by design.

Towards decolonial listening

As argued in the foregoing, consideration of Sino- and Eurocolonialism as intersecting is necessary in the Chinese context, as seen with the cases of Zhang Zhao and Songrong Ye. Decoloniality must proceed in an intersectional manner, including in music studies at large, but the latter has thus far focused mainly on de-Eurocolonialism, without recognizing other colonialisms.

Decolonial discussions in music studies specifically (as opposed to the interdisciplinary conversations discussed in the previous section) have focused mostly on research and pedagogy, neglecting listening, which is explored via autoethnography in the subsequent sections of this article. The important 2021 ICTMD decolonial dialogues mainly focused on research, including collaborative research partnership with non-Euro-American researchers (pan-

els 1, 2, 4, 11, 12, 15, and 17), emphasis on Indigenous knowledges over Euro-American "theories" (panels 1, 4, 5, 9, 13, 14, and 15), rethinking Euro-American journals that function as gatekeepers (panel 7), lessening the burden placed on BIPOC researchers for decolonial leadership etc. (panel 17).[10] Attention has also been paid to pedagogy (e.g., Western art music-oriented curricula; panel 9) and performance (e.g., Western-originating prioritizing of notation; panel 20). Perhaps surprisingly, relatively little attention has been paid to specifically music performance in the context of decolonial political protests, e.g. Taboo's hip hop song Stand Up / Stand N Rock, linked to the Indigenous Standing Rock protests. This is a reflection of the conception of decoloniality as a primarily epistemic project—cohering with Mignolo's conception of decolonial theory—that is deeply entwined with music higher education faculty's generation and transmission of knowledge in both research and teaching.

Beyond the ICTMD dialogues, there have been a number of initiatives that cohere with the aim of decoloniality but have borne other labels, namely global music history (in musicology; e.g., Strohm 2018; Strohm 2019), "world" music theory (e.g., Tenzer and Roeder 2011), and anti-racist music theory (Ewell 2020). These strands of research share the common ethos of de-*Euro*colonialism, decolonizing Euro-American universities, faculty, research, and knowledge by recourse to a variety of local and Indigenous partners and perspectives.

Chinese music has notably been largely absent from the broadly de-Eurocolonial efforts, except for the work of Shzr Ee Tan (2021), who proceeds from the Sinophone positionality of Singapore (outside of China), and her intersectional positionality as a female Chinese ethnomusicologist in the U.K., encompassing the multiple marginalizations stemming from the latter. Some aspects of what might be called de-Sinocolonialism can be discerned in her work, specifically the recognition of "Chinese" and "East Asian" privilege, referring (in the case of the former) originally to Chinese as settler colonizers in Singapore (where Tan is from), but extending more generally to the perception that East Asians in the global North are relatively less marginalized compared with other BIPOCs.[11] A de-Eurocolonial impetus is observed in her collaborative work on Euro-American stereotypes of East

Asian music students.[12] As with other decolonial projects, Tan's initiatives have tended to be reflexive, drawing critically on her own experience and positionality to elucidate broader issues affecting research, teaching, and performance in music higher education.

The limited nature of the decolonial discussion on China-related and Sinophone issues leaves much to be parsed, including the fundamental distinction between de-Euro- and de-Sinocolonialism as analytics. Of the speakers at the 2024 "East Asian Voices in Global Music Stories" symposium Tan convened, many had links to South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, and one of the few based in China, Mei Xiao, was perceived to be limited in what she could express given CCP ideological policing. The non-PRC symposium participants, who constituted the majority, made statements that largely resonated with the de-Sinocolonial approach of Shih and Chen. Discussions reflected the view that any aspect of China, cultural or otherwise, is Sinocolonial, for which Chinese decolonization—whether aimed at Euro-Americans or the Japanese—serves as distraction. De-Eurocolonialism was largely severed from de-Sinocolonialism in a manner that cohered with most of East Asia's wariness about China, standing in contrast with the intersection of Sino- and Eurocolonialism that shapes daily experiences in the country. But do all PRC *Putonghua* utterances express Sinocolonialism, including those from incarcerated human rights lawyers and the oppressed queer community?

As one of the few China-based speakers at the symposium, I felt that complex cases like Zhang Zhao and Songrong Ye were not taken into consideration. Like others, I speak from my own positionality, as a Chinese Singaporean who worked in China for 9 years. As I happened to be in the final month of my stay in China at the time of the symposium, I felt free to critique Sinocoloniality alongside Eurocoloniality, pointing to, for instance, adoption of only the perspective of the Han Chinese in nationalist discourse, without considering minorities. However, keeping European and Japanese semi-colonization of China in mind, I also articulated the validity of Chinese nationalism that is intertwined with decolonization *in the years leading up to* 1945, in order to counter the notion that de-Eurocolonialism is merely a distraction from Sinocolonialism—there is a difference between historical actors'

nationalism in the heat of battle, and cynical appropriation thereof by contemporary politicians.

The above reveals the need to consider de-Sinocoloniality in conjunction with de-Eurocoloniality within broader decolonial discussions, and within them, to focus on listening in particular. In the focus on listening, this article may seem to cover similar ground as much of the decolonial work involving music research, teaching, and performance. After all, listening is involved in all these contexts. However, listening is in many ways more significant as a ubiquitous activity that involves far more people than research, teaching, or performance. Yet listening practices have not been given much dedicated consideration in decolonial discussions.

Listening is surely one of the most important pieces of the decolonial puzzle if the aim were to alter musical values as opposed to legislating what music is allowed to be heard or loved. The Cultural Revolution serves a reminder of the danger of the anti-democratic policing of subjectivity. In order to prevent decoloniality from acquiring the nativist, dictatorial approach of policing allowed music by the metric of one's ethnicity (not allowed to listen to the other's music), the "return" of music can only be in the sense of an *expanded* personal listening "playlist" that now includes previously neglected sounds, whether the music of PRC minorities, or traditional Chinese music that has decreasing number of students in China in the face of Western art music's Eurocolonial prestige. Another modality of "return" comprises revaluation of musics as equal, displacing the hierarchical view with Western art music at the apex.

From a philosophical viewpoint, the iterative quality of repeated listening is critical, allowing for values to change over time from Sino- and Eurocolonial to decolonial. What is lacking in the literature on listening is consideration of an iterative, future-oriented conception of the fundamental nature of (repeated) listening, opening up the possibility of the accretion of new significance and meanings to music, as opposed to repetition of historical ones. The notion of listening as open-ended is congruent with Dylan Robinson's work on decolonial practices that "enervate extractivist desire and *divert* hungry listening" (Robinson 2020:236). Central to the possibility of decolo-

nial practice is the concept of a future that "diverts" from past colonialism. The refusal of extraction, making certain spaces at least temporarily unavailable to people outside the Indigenous community, is necessary for the community to organize without external observation and influence.[13] This strategy is as necessary as the conventional politics of inclusion and representation.

Robinson's highlighting of "hungry" listening alongside performance demonstrates that listening is a crucial part of decoloniality, aiming at the "bureaucratic, cultural, linguistic and psychological divesting of colonial power" (Smith 1999:25) (whereas postcolonial studies have often focused on the realm of cultural (re-)interpretation of literature and film). The following sections elaborate on what colonial and decolonial listening comprise in China's context, drawing in the final two sections on queer theory and my own intersectional queer Chinese identity to articulate the musical re-valuation involved in decolonizing the ear. I begin with an analysis of the mishearing of voice, language, and accent to demonstrate the workings of the colonial ear. This colonial legacy is countered with an iterative reconceptualization of listening as repeated performative acts that contain transformative potential, leading ultimately beyond identitarian frameworks that constrain musickers and fit poorly with practice.

Mishearing Singdarin and Singlish

As a Chinese Singaporean who speaks Chinese and English, I have found my voice caught in both Sino- and Eurocolonialism when *heard* by others. In this section, I utilize autoethnography and self-reflection to parse the topics of voice, language, and accent—and the hearing and mishearing thereof—in Sino- and Eurocolonial contexts, in order to theorize decolonial listening.

The live and recorded, singing and speaking "voice" in music, film, and everyday use has been a subject of investigation in a range of music studies from the literary-philosophical (e.g., Barthes 1977) to psychoanalytical (Dolar 2006) and ethnographic (e.g., Labov 1972, Feld et. al. 2004). "Voice" is used not just literally but concurrently as a metaphor for agency, as in "having a voice," and is often associated with the speaker or singer's identity (Weidman

2014). Of note is that voice and listening are both featured in sound studies, linked by (what I would emphasize is) a *relational logic*: Voices have to be heard to have impact (more on this shortly).

Whereas voice is cast as self-expression, listening is often presented as empathetic, making space for minorities or precarious others to be heard (e.g., Jarman-Ivens 2011), and as palliative, as in listening to music to relax (e.g., Kassabian 2013, Jarman 2013). In addition, listening has been socially and historically contextualized (e.g., Johnson 1996, Novak 2008). With attention focused on envoicing or listening to the marginalized, relatively little attention has been paid to either the colonial voice or colonial listening. This section concretizes one sense of coloniality through (what I call) the racial *mis*hearing of voice, language, and accent, providing a concrete point of resistance for the theorization of decolonial listening in the final section.

The first point to be made is that as with all listening, colonial listening involves making sense of what is heard, from others' music to their voices and languages, exemplifying Stuart Hall's fundamental insight that identity is construed relationally in tandem with an other (Hall 1990). Whereas voices could be conceived as symbols of the speaker or singer's identity, giving the impression of direct identity expression, listening is critical to voice in that any identity expressed has to be received by the ear. Listening is thus as critical as voices in the making of not just identities but the entire social sphere. "Mishearing" occurs through colonial ears prejudiced against colloquial languages and the marginalized, resulting in the misrecognition of others, demonstrating that voices are not simplify sounded but are *co-constructed* by ears.

Having lived in Singapore for 27 years, my voice has been co-constructed by Sino- and Eurocolonial ears in China and the U.K. respectively when I moved to those countries later in life. Chinese in Singapore is sometimes known as "Singdarin," a regional variant of China's Putonghua that is inflected with the vocabulary and pronunciation of Cantonese, Hokkien, Malay, and English. In parallel, the Singaporean variant of English is known as "Singlish," which is similarly influenced by multiple other locally-used languages. Both deviate from the grammar of their parent languages, whereas what is called Stan-

dard Singaporean Chinese and Standard Singaporean English (used in news broadcasts) do not; there is some variation in pronunciation and vocabulary—though to a lesser extent than Singdarin and Singlish, which are colloquial variants.

In contemporary Singapore, all students are taught using the English language. However, students are divided into so-called "English-educated" students who speak primarily English at home and are usually from a small handful of Christian missionary high schools, versus the rest of the "Chinese-educated" students, who speak primarily Chinese at home with their parents.[14] English speakers with a "Chinese" or "Singlish" accent are deemed to be of lower social status than speakers of Standard Singaporean English. Prejudice against local singers stems from their language use (Mattar 2009).

During my high school years in Singapore, I didn't pay that much attention to my voice, though I was aware of the English- versus Chinese-educated divide. It was when I moved to the U.K. for college that I suddenly became very self-aware of my different English accent, and gradually picked up bits and pieces of Received Pronunciation, though of course, I was never able to sound fully native. It was during this time that I developed the consciousness of being a racial minority. Racialized by Eurocolonial strangers who yelled out "Chinese!" or "Japanese!" in London to me, I became self-conscious about my Asian identity. In Chinese-majority Singapore, I had—in settler Sinocolonial fashion—thought of "Chineseness" primarily in terms of different levels of English fluency of English- versus Chinese-educated *Chinese* people. Throughout six years of high school, I only had one Malay classmate. Today, I realize that I, as a Chinese Singaporean, have the Chinese "privilege" of assuming the Chinese viewpoint be the default (Tan 2021).

My positionality is further complicated by language ideology in China that regards *Putonghua* as standard. As with my spoken English, I was not self-conscious of my spoken Chinese until I moved in 2015–2024 to a country regarded as the linguistic standard bearer. Earlier, I discussed how *Putonghua* is symbolically invested with a Sinocolonial, nationalist, essentialist Chinese identity (recall Shih). There was an incident when a student disparaged my Chinese accent, which may seem to be isolated but is linked

to the large volume of social media posts by PRC Chinese who make fun of Singapore's "broken" Chinese.[15] If this seems to be relatively "harmless," consider that while China may not seek to colonize Singapore, it has in the past expected the latter to acquiesce to Chinese geopolitical priorities,[16] adopting a stance similar to U.S.-imperialism in the Americas.

Crucially, my positionality as Chinese speaker vis-à-vis Sinocolonialism is complicated by my having been situated on both sides of the power asymmetry between majority and minority (Chinese majority in Singapore; non-PRC Chinese in China). My positionality as English speaker vis-à-vis Euro-colonialism is similarly ambiguous, comprising being a minority in the U.K. and U.S. (where I completed my doctoral studies), but receiving the privileges of being perceived as speaking (relatively) good English in China. The faculty of the conservatory where I taught at the time comprises PRC as well as a significant proportion of international faculty (including some from South Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong) with Euro-American doctoral degrees, who are fluent in English. On the one hand, my Chinese was deemed inferior, a judgement that was accompanied by a certain degree of social ostracization by the PRC faculty. On the hand, I was hired by the dean at the time, Hekun Wu, precisely because I had completed my studies in the U.S., spoke relatively fluent English, and was able to internationalize the curriculum by, for example, supporting students to present at U.S. conferences. Because of this complexity of *dual* Sino/Euro-colonialisms, and ambiguous positionality within each, not to mention their intersection, I find it unintuitive to separate the two, as in Shih's framework.

While the language variants I speak—Standard Singaporean Chinese and Standard Singaporean English (with more fluency in the latter)—adhere more closely to the grammar of *Putonghua* and British English, respectively, than colloquial variants (Singdarin and Singlish), I was still misheard in China and the U.K. because my *accent* is different. Mishearing of "deviant" voices and accents by prejudiced colonial ears result in misrecognition of speakers as socially inferior, and, I argue, translate into dismissal of their *epistemic* voice, as detailed below.

If one were to consider insider status as a measure of epistemic authority, I might reference having lived in Singapore for 27 years, and China for 9 years—this is compared with the cumulative 2 or more years of fieldwork experience in the case of most Euro-American scholars. Yet when I or others based in Asian geographies present our work on Sinophone soundscapes in Euro-American conferences, the response has often been dismissive. The following is an anonymized summary of my conference experiences and observations over a decade. Sometimes, those who respond to our papers cite a single published piece of research, without an awareness that what is published in English and other European languages represents only a small fraction of what is happening in a particular soundscape. Based on these publications, each of which discusses a particular time period, say, the inter-war years, a responder might make extrapolations to form a composite, sometimes heavily misconstrued mindmap about the soundscape, ahistorically juxtaposing bits and pieces of knowledge about different eras. Another time, the Asian presenter's entire framework was called into question. In dinner conversation, some responders assume that Asian scholars are just expressing personal prejudices instead of presenting research. As for why Asian scholars are treated as if they come from a land where knowledge is outdated and frozen in time, there is a familiar term for this—*orientalism* (Said 1978). *Epistemic* orientalism directed at Asian and other global scholars, who are holders of local knowledge, results in the re-colonization of global geographies through Euro-American epistemologies.

Ironically, it is with the most "advanced" global *theory* emanating from Euro-America that global *scholar*s, often in former colonies, are *re*-colonized. Frequently, it is the case that the methodological tenets in question crafted by Euro-American scholars are a much better fit for Euro-American contexts than for material global practices with different histories and formations of racism, classicism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and ableism. Deviation from the latest counterhegemonic rules set by Euro-American scholars may be taken to mean that global scholars are uninformed, but these rules often reflect their origination. For instance, the emphasis on global interconnection in Euro-American scholars' writings in global music history has led to studies on exchange between Euro-America and the world, thus keeping the former in circulation (e.g., Matsumoto 2020). My point is not that intercon-

nection is irrelevant, but that it cannot be promoted as a universal principle, which appears to be the case from recent conference interactions. In discussions, I have previously pointed out to peers that China in the first millennium BCE, for instance, existed before the rise of extensive regional trade and of East Asia itself as an entity (Zhang 2010), but requires study regardless of whether it was "global" (interconnected). The self-congratulatory tendency of the 10-year-old global music history movement in Euro-America blithely ignores a century's worth of historical musicological research from East Asia, in East Asian languages, and requires immediate rectification.[17] Against Eurocolonial knowledge, epistemic de-Eurocolonialism is needed to counter the distortions introduced that are especially grave in the case of global studies.

My personal experiences discussed above reveal that voice, language, accent, and race are intertwined with both the spoken and epistemic voice. Against coloniality, decoloniality involves the undoing of mishearing, comprising a long-term adjustment from prejudice towards intercultural bonding and equitable interaction. The epistemic issues in particular are especially complicated, but a first step would be to actually consult—and respect—global scholars, learn global languages, and read up on global research in those languages.[18] My proposal for decoloniality below is anchored in the spoken voice, but has implications about the nature of colonial legacies that, I argue, can be transformed. I elaborate on the theoretical and political implications when linguistic utterances are conceived as musical performances.

Linguists know that languages are complex and always evolving, but this understanding is not borne out in Shih's conception of *Putonghua* as essentially Sinocolonial. Rather than being static entities, languages are the sum total of quotidian practices. Languages are performative, just as music exists in performance. The noted performance turn in both musicology and ethnomusicology—that convinced Nicholas Cook of the coming convergence between them—may offer a useful framework for rethinking language (Cook 2008). Music performance is iterative, which explains why there can be multiple manuscripts and editions for a work, rendering the notion of the original or authentic version moot (Taruskin 1994). Literary works are also iter-

ative, as captured in Roland Barthes famous notion of "text" comprising a multitude of individual readings (Barthes 1986). This iterativity acquires political significance in the hands of Judith Butler, for whom gender itself is a sum total of quotidian performance, for example, dressing as conventionally male or female (Butler 1993a, 1999). Gender performativity means that rather than being innate and static, the next iteration of gender performance could change, thus resisting binary genders in spite of their general ossification.[19]

From a performative angle, different iterations of *language*, too, contain subversive potential. For example, Singlish has been intentionally used to counter official criticism of the colloquial language from former Singaporean prime ministers Lee Hsien Loong and Goh Chok Tong.[20] *Putonghua* undergoes variation when spoken by those such as myself who have only moderate fluency and different pronunciation. While my immediate experience was of Sinocolonial discrimination, my iteration of *Putonghua* opens up the theoretical possibility of expressing a resistive, non-PRC, Sinophone identity. In clearly demarcating *Putonghua* in China from communities elsewhere, Shih's "Sinophone" concept is intended to envoice non-PRC Chinese communities, making space for "Sinophone" studies versus "Chinese literature" from China. However, this bifurcated model of language does not account for the iterative, quotidian use of language by which variations emerge relationally in the first place. In contrast, a performative conception of language allows for ambiguous positionality on either side of power asymmetry in my successive utterances—my spoken Chinese is privileged in Singapore but discriminated against in China; my spoken English is privileged in China but discriminated against in the U.K. and U.S. The performativity of language makes it possible for the same language and speaker to be either embraced or rejected in different contexts, exhibiting iterative variability.

While speakers of supposedly low-prestige language variants may be misheard, iterative performativity makes decoloniality possible. Iterative variability allows, as mentioned, Singlish to be framed as resistance against the Standard Singaporean English promoted by Singaporean leaders. There are major musicological implications arising from the notion of resistive language performativity. Historical musicology has traditionally emphasized the historical meanings of works, encompassing not just music in its original

context, but, for example, the role of the Western art music canon in reinforcing cultural imperialism globally.[21] The key dilemma can be framed as: Does one allow for the persistence of oppressive meanings *alongside* the emergence of resistive ones? Can Beethoven—the epitome of the dead white man—be reheard as ecological progressivism, as in the Beethoven Pastoral Project?[22] Can modern stagings of Wagner counter his anti-Semitism? Can one recognize the decoloniality inherent in black South African composer John Knox Bokwe's "Plea for Africa," a work in the colonial genre of the Christian hymn (Olwage 2006:22)? These are key questions for de-Eurocolonial projects. Perhaps scholars have avoided them so far due to the treacherous methodological ground they venture into, as opposed to the safer terrain of global traditional musics (largely avoiding Western art music influences on global composers) and increased collaboration with global researchers and musicians, that current decolonial dialogue is focused on.

Autoethnography of a gay Chinese teen

In this section, I turn from the analysis of how listening co-constructs voice by imputing social identity and epistemic authority based on language and accent, to listening from a *queer* Chinese positionality, landing specifically *musical* arguments that are relevant for those thinking through readings from comparative literature, including Shih's, without necessarily accepting them at face value. At stake is an interdisciplinary, dialogic approach that disambiguates between Sinocolonial and Eurocolonial impact, and emphasizes the necessity of dual colonialisms as analytics in theorizing decolonial listening. I place queer theory and queer musicology in conversation with Sinophone theory. Earlier, the importance of listening was recognized in the notion that ears co-construct voices, languages, and accents. This section will elaborate on an intersectional theory of listening.

Listening has featured prominently in queer musicology in part because of queer theory's emphasis on affect. Theorization of queer listening may proceed in an introspective, quasi-autoethnographic manner that veers into what social scientists may regard as subjective in the derogatory sense. Anchored in continental philosophy, queer theory—on which queer musicology relies—has often retained an experimental edge that favors bold theo-

rization based on modalities of experience that may not be captured fully in traditional quantitative or even qualitative data. While deeply personal experiences of gender and sexuality seem to be well suited for an autoethnographic approach, they can be of such a degree of intimacy as to fall outside the conventional thick description of specific social settings in conventional autoethnography (such as in educational autoethnography).[23] Autoethnography of listening, especially to an audio recording at home, lacks visible or physically present interlocutors, just as gender and sexuality—perhaps as instinctively known as consciousness—do not require other persons and social interaction to be felt, necessarily. The solipsistic nature of listening lends itself well to imaginative and highly personal description and theorization that lean towards art, arts criticism, and aesthetics—domains with well-known queer presence.

The variety of queer musicology dedicated to personal listening, as opposed to groups of listeners or listening to at least a specific composer or work, comprises some of the most innovative scholarship in musicology. Fred Everett Maus has argued that the development of rational, systematic music theory may be provoked by the anxiety-inducing decentering of a sense of self in deep music listening, when ego is suspended and one seemingly loses oneself in sound and emotion (Maus 1993). Central to his theory is an analytic of power—the music theorist imposes masculine-coded rationality on feminine-coded listening. Power is also central to Suzanne Cusick's theory of "lesbian" listening, framed in equitable, relational, and interactive terms that are perhaps less possible for certain repertoires with an incessant drive (Beethoven comes to mind for Cusick; Cusick 1994:75). Instead, Cusick prefers "musics which invite extremely heightened, sensual, cognitive attention, musics which *invite* and allow me to participate or not as I choose, musics with which I experience a continuous circulation of power even when I let the music be 'on top'" (ibid.:76).

Building on that perhaps idiosyncratic strand of queer musicology, I shall develop for it an analytic of colonial power that was understandably absent from Maus and Cusick's writings, since neither of them can be said to have experienced colonization or its epistemic legacy. Like Cusick, I intuit an affinity between personal musical experience and sexuality (Cusick 1994:71),

with both defined in terms of *desire and pleasure*—that is, by *erotics* that pertains to both musical and sexual experience in spite of the obvious difference of sensorial media. The following account follows my biographical timeline, beginning with my gay awakening and listening as a teenage oriented towards U.S./U.K. as sources of gay "world-making" through literature and music (see Taylor 2012), followed by a belated reconciling with colonialism and decolonization.[24]

As an adolescent growing up in the 1990s in homophobic Singapore where I was born, there were few openly gay figures I could think off—a rare exception who proves my larger point is a local composer named Dick Lee. My knowledge of gays was sourced instead from a gay novel, set in Singapore (*Peculiar Chris* by Johann S. Lee), which my then boyfriend had given to me, and from the "Gender Studies" section of the Borders bookstore in downtown Singapore, where I discovered gay American writers and poets such as Edmund White, David Leavitt, Paul Monette, Allen Ginsberg, and Thom Gunn—these remain my favorite authors of all time.

My sexuality—like with other gay people—was not communicated to outsiders. The infamous 377A law was in effect, prohibiting specifically male same-sex penetrative activity. Gays were lured by undercover policemen into sexual activity, and were jailed, caned, and publicly shamed, e.g., in the Fort Road Incident of 1993. Gays were thought to be mentally ill (though—why would gays be punished for their preposterously presumed "disability"?).[25] Other than exploratory fumbling with like-minded fellows, my sexuality at that time was primarily expressed in secretive, personal relations with literature (and music). I kept a secret stash of gay novels, and wrapped those with explicit covers. It was at that time, in my teens, that I concocted the plan to one day leave for the cities inhabited by the gay characters of novels I read. I saw myself in the insecure Philip (Leavitt's *The Lost Language of the Cranes*), and yearned to actually meet other gay people who I imagined to be similar to those I had come to know through intimate autobiographies (Monette, *Becoming a Man*; White, *A Boy's Own Story*). I eventually secured a scholarship to study music in the U.K., becoming part of the cosmopolitan gay brain drain from Singapore, and barring periods when I was

obliged to return (e.g., four years of high school teaching mandated by the scholarship), I have chosen never to live in Singapore again.

At that time, I was unaware that Elton John and Benjamin Britten were gay, or that Madonna and Kylie Minogue have a gay following. I enjoyed listening to the crooning of (mostly straight) U.S./U.K. boy bands, often attracted in the first instance to the visuals of their album covers and music videos, and to Western classical composers, presented with an unspoken assumption of heterosexuality, sometimes with references to wives and female lovers, absence of which was unremarked upon—sexuality was never explicitly discussed. In my near complete unawareness of any openly gay composers or performers (barring Dick Lee), what I practiced was (what I call) *gay listening*, a practice of listening specific to my gay inhabiting of the world. Specifically referring to my teens, what I mean by gay listening in that period of my life are practices that reflect how I, as a gay person, adjusted to a homophobic Singapore. Thus gay listening extends beyond desire and pleasure to listening in the closet, especially the building of an inner world—that is the closet itself—for self-protection.

There is a distinction between gay *listening* as opposed to gay *music-making*. *Any* gay person can listen, but not every gay musician-performer has the freedom to proclaim that they were "Born This Way" (Lady Gaga). Not in Singapore, where to this day gay teachers are barred from teaching in high schools. Not in China, where I lived for nine years after my doctoral studies, and where gay and lesbian pop singers such as Qiao Qiao are scrubbed completely from the Chinese internet. Gay PRC composers remain in the closet, invisibilized, and it would be unethical for a musicologist like me to expose their sexuality against their will.

The key thing to note is that gay listening is a form of queering, a way of making one's way through a heteronormative world by appropriating bits of it, in the process transforming and tailoring mainstream culture to become one's own (Muñoz 1999). Queering is what queers do for survival, being born usually into heterosexual unions. As a gay Chinese person, I felt alienated from my family as a child not because I was Chinese (we were all Chinese), but because I was gay and my parents were homophobic. Young queers are

more often than not stealing crumbs from the heteronormative dinner table to build secret worlds (Lee 2023:6). For so many queers, as we see now in shows like *Glee*, that secret world was *music*. *Musicality* itself is arguably queer (Brett 1994), an argument linked to the popular stereotyping of especially male musicians as gay. (I recall that at one point, the male singers of the Singapore Youth Choir were said to be 100% gay.)

The gay listening I am theorizing has two desirous and distal aspects. On the one hand, gay teenage boys like me took heterosexual-presenting male pop stars as objects of our gay desire (indeed, boy bands like Take That, for instance, performed at gay clubs).[26] On the other hand, beyond desire and pleasure, gay listening was also a self-protective practice of worldmaking, which is especially important for those without access to supportive gay communities. As a closeted gay teen, I had not found my voice. There was the heteronormative mountain of expected affective and discursive displays that I could not partake of, and gay desire I could not express—no girls, no dates, and no dances, and also no boys. But I used my ear to build an inner world in which I could find refuge from homophobia. It was music that I escaped to, in hours of piano playing and listening to recordings of piano concertos by Schumann, Chopin, Grieg, and Mozart. It was to the music room in senior high school that I would escape, to play the piano, even though I did not opt to study music then. Spending hours by myself playing and listening became a way of being true to myself, and was structurally framed—if in obverse—by my closeted sexuality. A Freudian might say that musical expression was the symptom of my repressed sexuality. I found in music an escape hatch leading to a world beyond the boundaries of my own suffocating context, not just in solipsistic playing and listening, but in ensembles such as the band and choir. The repertoire I encountered comprised Western art music, jazz, and popular music. I experienced Chinese and global musics only in the form of tonal band and choir arrangements that arguably retain Euro-American aesthetics.

At that time, I did not stop to ask myself why, even though I am Chinese, the books and music I engaged with were created mostly by white people. Most of the gay people I knew were characters from gay U.S. novels, and it was mostly U.S./U.K. male singers who were overtly sexualized in a way that cap-

tured teens' hormonal fascination. In terms of art music, the world I inhabited—which was in effect my closet—was shaped by my parents' decision to enroll me in piano lessons at age 7. In addition to the "pull" factors, there was also a "push" factor in that many Chinese Singaporeans rejected Chinese identity, associating it with China, which is seen negatively as authoritarian and backwards.[27] Singapore promoted "Singaporean" identity instead—for example, in mandated high school "national education."[28] Like many of my peers within what was by then a completely English-medium education in the 1990s (save mother tongue languages), I read English books and listened to English-language pop music, unaware of the effects of language ideology in a country where English is the official language of government and business, where the ability to speak English well is highly prized—by prime ministers no less, such that singers are judged not just musically but in terms of language variants and accents (Mattar 2009). Unaware that I had unknowingly succumbed to cultural Eurocolonialism, I became alienated from my Chinese identity. It was my experiences in China, discussed below, that would lead me down the path towards de-Eurocoloniality.

Intersectionally decolonial

In my teens, I listened to very little Chinese music of any kind, though I owned two CDs by pop singer Leehom Wang. I might say that I grew a Chinese ear only later in life, over the nine years spent in China, when I began to listen to popular and traditional Chinese music. I have developed an appreciation for particularly the 7-string zither *guqin* and *kunqu* opera. Over my time in China, the proportion of my listening time devoted to Western art music gradually lessened, even though I still have a greater understanding of it. I have listened mostly to Chinese popular music—specifically from PRC-period TV drama soundtracks—over the past few months.

While my listening shift appears to be moving away from Eurocolonial influence in a simplistic manner, there is a more complicated discussion to be had regarding the democratic consideration of individual listening preference. To be sure, certain musics were known to have been directly implicated in colonization, for instance, missionary music—ranging from Spanish polyphonic choral works imposed on the Nahuas to Christian hymns in

South Africa. However, those *Western*-originating musics have been retooled for *decolonial* resistance, such as in the hands of the aforementioned Bokwe. Furthermore, most music on playlists lacks such direct relationships to de/coloniality, which may encourage problematic identitarian approaches that equate decoloniality with musical adherence to ethnicity (Chinese person = Chinese music). Such an approach provokes "shudders" (Tan 2021) in its nativism, which is historically linked to authoritarian, violent enforcement and racialized xenophobia.

On a practical level, the untenability of the "authentic" ethnic approach can be easily illustrated with intersectional identities. Are gay Chinese people allowed to only ever listen to gay Chinese composers and musicians, in a logic that would result in massively reduced playlists for increasingly intersectional identities? This highly unmusical and anti-democratic approach has thankfully not been enforced (to my knowledge), but it does underline a key point discussed above, which is that musicality and musical preference are intimate, affective aspects of personhood that is proximal to gender, sexuality, and even consciousness itself. To attempt to legislate what one may listen to is in effect a kind of subjective jail.

Earlier, I suggested that ethical consideration would lead decoloniality to comprise interventions in the colonial valuation and stereotyping of global musics, rather than directly controlling the music allowed to be heard or loved. But the intersectional consideration of my identity and change in musical preference over time re-introduce the problem of ethnic "authenticity." Does my "return" to Chinese musical preference—or conversely, the return of Chinese music to me—count as decoloniality? The answer, I would argue, is both "no" and "maybe," corresponding to (what I could call) the "value" and "preference" frameworks for decoloniality. The values framework is focused on countering prejudice against global musics—and the overvaluation of Western art music—without dictating listening habits; there is no requirement of musical preference. The key issue to be tackled in the values framework is the hierarchical, generalizing valuation of wide swaths of musics from different cultures and genres. The "preference" framework builds on the values foundation but allows for the *possible* emergence of *partial* "return" of musical preference without mandating it, which would be

anti-democratic. Rather than "metaphoric," musical return in this sense is the product of years of effort in countering colonial values and knowledge. As an outcome of decoloniality leading to cultural reapproachement, musical return should be distinguished from nativist nationalism that disparages other groups and musics. A Chinese musical work may sound the same in the literal sense, but has different valences in different decolonial and nativist listenings.

In homophobic regimes that censor or invisibilize queers, queer Chinese ears are not always able to hear gay or queer Chinese musicians. Thus queer Chinese ears have developed ultra-sonic abilities in order to find new ways to territorialize inhospitable social spaces, but in ways that, in spite of the instinct for self-protection, may turn out to be (Euro)colonial. My teenage listening habits were Eurocolonial, even if they developed in that direction as a means of survival, reaching towards the gay Euro-American community of my imagination.

My personal path to de-Eurocoloniality involved living in China, where I, as a Sinophone subject, was exposed to Sinocoloniality, evincing intersectional complexity. From the earlier discussion, de-Sinocoloniality can be thought of in terms of resisting PRC *Putonghua* language ideology to make room for my speech and language positionality (Singdarin, lower language fluency, and the Sinophone in general). More fundamentally, the reader would understand that I am averse to the notion of China colonizing Singapore, being born and raised in the latter. But if de-Sinocoloniality suggests a return to Singadarin and syncretized forms of Chinese music in Singapore, recall that *preference* is merely possible rather than mandated. Given the principle of democratic aesthetic choice on the basis of non-hierarchical valuation, choices may be influenced by such factors as prior knowledge or curiosity. Choices may also be influenced by external factors, such as course assignments—in my case, I was asked to teach the course Chinese Music History, which led me towards *guqin* and *kunqu* music, genres of traditional Chinese music that are themselves endangered by Eurocoloniality. Confusingly, iterative performances of traditional Chinese music can also be Sinocolonial depending on the cultural or political intent—I recognize this possibility even though I do not personally subscribe to it.

While coloniality and decoloniality are shaping forces on ears, musical preference has to be free in order to prevent authoritarian aesthetic strictures. There is no predicting how musical preference will evolve, except that under decolonial conditions, some kind of return may be possible without being legislated. In contrast to the reductive logic of nativism (that limits preference to the listener's ethnicity), the additive logic of diversity is linked to democratic aesthetic choice—provided that choice is indeed the listeners'. Free ears are worldmakers that break out of identity siloes through increasingly diverse musical desires. Departing from that freedom, multicultural policy that *prescribes* diversity in artworks or presentation platforms (such as concerts) may ring false because it resonates with the nativist assumption that ethnicity equals preference, whereby each ethnic group is represented by "their" "preferred" music, costume etc. (see Robinson 2020). That said, the freedom to develop musical preferences in multiple directions is shaped by access, including institutional support for heritage and decolonial resources as well as economic privilege facilitating elites' Western art music exposure. Thus freedom is not the product of a heroic quest marking listening agency—it is rather a qualifying condition for the *possibility* of decolonial listening, shaped multiply by absence of aesthetic authoritarianism, and also complicating (often colonial) factors enabling and driving access.

In the face of the above complexity, one principle which remains true is as follows. Ears are not enslaved to the meaning intended by performers. Listening is iterative, such that new hearings can deviate from and simultaneously exist alongside hoary hierarchies and values. Decoloniality necessarily involves the meticulous unpacking of such complexities, in the service of disambiguating between aurally congruent phenomena (the same work) that may have different meaning in different performances.

My final point relates to the power of ears, building on the more speculative dimension of queer theory discussed above (Cusick and Maus), that connects erotics with power. As a gay Chinese musicologist, I am committed to redefining listening in terms of Chinese/Asian masculinity as well as gay masculinity (Lee 2023:16), both conventionally framed in terms of the lack thereof (Eng 2001; Bergling 2001). This is parallel to what earlier queer theorists did in appropriating the originally derogatory "queer." The stereotyp-

ically effeminate bottom is the presumed default position of gay Asians as featured in the white gay pornographic imaginary. Just like ears, bottoms are often misrecognized as passive, in contrast (in the case of ears) to agential speaking voices. But in BDSM, it is the bottom who is "in charge of the scenario, who controls the intensity of the sensations that may be visited upon them with permission" (Lee 2023:16). In parallel, ears, while seemingly "passive," actually have a lot of power. Ears are world-makers, determining how voices, languages, accents, and musics are heard. Ears break free of the stranglehold of identity boxes. Rather than narrowing music through intersection (whereby the "gay Chinese" playlist is the overlapping section of the "gay" and "Chinese" playlists), there can an additive logic, whereby one's playlists potentially *expands* with more identities—for me, that would be both "gay" *and* "Chinese" music. Rather than uncritical or coercive acceptance, this elective expansion takes the form of compassion, empathy, and support for the long journey towards decoloniality with its unpredictable and uneven results, without surrendering to anti-democratic strictures on musical choice.

This article has shed light on the intertwined nature of Sino- and Eurocoloniality, advocating for a nuanced, intersectional approach to decoloniality that has so far eluded Sinophone studies. A deeply personal yet profoundly political practice, listening allows for the navigation of dual colonialities and their ambiguities through musical values and preferences. Decoloniality, as argued here, must move beyond rigid binaries and recognize the transformative potential of listening as an iterative act that allows for new futures in spite of oppressive pasts. To decolonize in this context means embracing the complexity of identities and the dynamism of musical preferences, advancing an inclusive, compassionate framework that resists both reductive nativism and nationalism, on the one hand, and equally reductive counterhegemonic approaches that, for example, fail to account for multiple colonialities, on the other.

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Notes

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2. See, e.g., the special issue, “Decolonization,” *Journal of Music History Pedagogy* 10(1), 2020. https://www.ams-net.org/ojs/index.php/jmhp/issue/view/27. Accessed on December 29, 2024.

3. In this article, scholars’ names are written in “first name-last name” format following Euro-American convention in order to avoid confusion in citation, while composers’ names are written following the Chinese “last name-first name” format, by which they are most commonly known.

4. Shih is a noted decolonial thinker. See, e.g., Shih 2023 for her work in decolonizing U.S. comparative literature.

5. Personal observation based on nine years of teaching in China.

6. Min, Lingkang 2024. “Sinocentric Music Theory and the Misrecognition of Minority Modes: *Diannan Mountain Songs* by the Yi Minority Ethnic Composer Zhang Zhao,” Society for Ethnomusicology Southern Plains chapter 2023 virtual conference (April 8). See also Yang 2003:16.

7. Comment from Frank Kouwenhoven during my paper presentation, “Self-Alienation in Chinese Students of Western Music: Methodological and Decolonial Considerations,” Comparative Views on Musical Talent and its Promotion in Chinese and Western Worlds online conference, December 7–9, 2020 (Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts, School of Music and Geneva Haute école de musique).

8. At the “Sounding China in Western Music” conference at Shanghai Conservatory of Music (November 11–12, 2024), Dandan Wang in the paper “The Ecological Perspective of *Tian ren he yi* in Western Music” quoted Xi Jinping’s use of the ancient Chinese cosmological concept of unity or harmony between heaven and man (or humans and nature), before proceeding to identify ecological components in a Beethoven piano sonata (e.g., a voice part that symbolizes “earth”).

9. One may look to the discipline of comparative literature for workable relational research models that may be adjusted (Shih 2023), though music studies has struggled to reconcile with the racist frameworks of early comparative musicology (Levitz 2023:121).

10. Panels used the term “indigenous” (to be differentiated from the capitalized “Indigenous” as a proper noun that refers to peoples and lands conquered under settler colonization) to describe African communities (panels 18 and 24), Sikhs (panel 19), and communities in former-Soviet Central Asian states (panel 22).

11. Tan made this point in the “East Asian Voices in Global Music Stories” symposium she convened (Royal Holloway, August 7, 2024).

12. "Cultural Imperialism and the New 'Yellow Peril' in Western Classical Music" study day (Royal Holloway, June 10, 2019), convened by Shzr Ee Tan and Maiko Kawabata.

13. Robinson puts this principle into practice in his book by requesting non-Indigenous readers to skip over a section that is meant only for Indigenous peoples (Robinson 2020:25).

14. Although Singaporeans are known to speak English, the language officially became the medium of school instruction only in 1987 for all subjects, displacing mother tongues (Chinese, Malay, and Tamil). It was only in 2010 that more people in a particular census demographic in Singapore—namely, Chinese and Indians aged 5–14, as well as Indians aged 15–24—spoke primarily English rather than their mother tongue at home. 2010 Singapore Census (Department of Statistics), 11. https://www.singstat.gov.sg/-/media/files/publications/cop2010/census_2010_release1/cop2010sr1.pdf. Accessed on May 22, 2018.

15. An example of social media posts on the subject is "The Broken Chinese of Singapore. Let's Look for Mistakes Together!," https://www.163.com/dy/article/DMPHRKM20514BMQV.html. Accessed on December 31, 2024.

16. Objecting to Singapore's military exercises in Taiwan, China seized Singapore's returning military vehicles in Hong Kong in 2016. In addition, China has referred to Singapore as a "small country" when Singapore voiced its U.S.-aligned opinion on China's territorial dispute in the South China Sea. Chong, Ja Ian 2017. "Diverging Paths? Singapore-China Relations and the East Asian Maritime Domain," *National Bureau of Asian Research*, April 26. https://www.nbr.org/publication/diverging-paths-singapore-china-relations-and-the-east-asian-maritime-domain/. Accessed on January 4, 2025.

17. Personal communication with some East Asian practitioners of global music history who have completed their doctoral studies in the U.S. revealed that they could not recommend a single contemporary scholar from East Asia who works in their research area. I have anonymized this to protect the young scholars. Some of them have developed some acquaintance with East Asian scholars since my initial interaction with them, but it remains problematic that their dissertations engaged with historical sources but not contemporary scholarship from East Asia.

18. This critique was voiced in a recent keynote. Gavin S. K. Lee, "Global Musicology and Epistemic Transculturation: The Sinophone View," Musicological Society of Australia conference (November 29–December 2, University of Adelaide).

19. Prosser 1998 critiques Butler for ignoring the materiality of transgender bodies. Acknowledging the persistence of gender, Butler 1993b presents a more restrained view of performativity without disavowing it.

20. Goh, Ronald 2024. "The changing perceptions of Singlish in Singapore, from being targeted by politicians to celebrated at Taylor Swift's The Eras Tour," *Yahoo News*, April 2. https://sg.news.yahoo.com/changing-perceptions-of-singlish-in-singapore-being-targeted-by-politicians-to-celebrated-taylor-swift-the-eras-tour-100508459.html. Accessed on December 31, 2024.
The parodic 2024 Singapore production of *The Wizard of Oz* by playwright Alfian Sa'at, a well-known public intellectual and critic of Singapore's (effectively) one-party rule, featured a character (the Scarecrow) who spoke exclusively in Singlish. The overall anti-establishment tone of the musical could be discerned in the thinly veiled reference to Minister of Law Kasiviswanathan Shanmugam. Dorothy mentions a bald Member of Parliament in the Yishun district where Shanmugam serves, and other characters quip that they "shan't" (but dropping the "t"; c.f. *Shan*mugam) mention any politicians by name in case the musical is censored: "We *shan*('t), *shan*('t) we?" Shanmugam led the outrageous, publicly televised six-hour government interrogation of historian Ping-Tjin Thum in 2018 over the latter's argument that the ruling party's assertion of a violent communist insurrection in the 1960s was fabricated and used to incarcerate left-wing political opponents in Operation Coldstore. Thum, Ping-Tjin 2013. "'The Fundamental Issue is Anti-Colonialism, Not Merger': Singapore's 'Progressive Left,' Operation Coldstore, and the Creation of Malaysia," *National University of Singapore Asia Research Institute Working Paper Series* 2(11) November. https://ari.nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/wps13_211.pdf. Accessed on May 5, 2026.

21. Examples include the Spanish Conquests in South America when polyphony replaced the Indigenous

musics that were destroyed (Fosler-Lusier 2020:16), and Dutch colonization of Indonesia when slave orchestras performed European music (ibid.:24).

22. The ecological-themed Beethoven Pastoral Project was launched in 2017 by the city of Bonn, Germany, to celebrate nature on the occasion of the 250th anniversary of the composer's birth in 2020. Beethoven Pastoral Project. https://pastoralproject.org/. Accessed on December 31, 2024

23. Suzanne Cusick argued that "if music isn't sexuality, for most of us it is psychically right next door" (Cusick 1994:71).

24. On world-making, see Goodman 1978.

25. I have heard this opinion expressed from a good friend whom I was not out to, and my mother.

26. Hall, James 2023, "'It Wasn't Exactly Porn': The Eye-Popping True Story of Take That's 'Banned' Debut Video," *The Telegraph*, November 24. https://www.telegraph.co.uk/music/artists/take-that-do-what-u-like-robbie-williams-gary-barlow/?utm_source=chatgpt.com. Accessed on December 29, 2024.

27. Jacobs, Andrew 2012. "In Singapore, Vitriol Against Chinese Newcomers," *The New York Times* July 26. https://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/27/world/asia/in-singapore-vitriol-against-newcomers-from-mainland-china.html Accessed on March 11, 2019.
There have been reports of "nasty Sgporean [abbreviation of 'Singaporean'] thinking they above these [mainland Chinese] people." Rajah, Obbana 2018. "Video of Xenophobic Singaporean Man at Food Court Resurfaces, Sparks Tensions Among Netizens," *The Independent* June 21.
http://theindependent.sg/video-of-xenophobic-singaporean-man-at-foodcourt-resurfaces-sparks-tensions-between-netizens/. Accessed on March 11, 2019.

28. "National Education," Singapore Ministry of Education. https://www.moe.gov.sg/education-in-sg/our-programmes/national-education. Accessed on December 31, 2024.

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