

Chapter 5

Music and Ideology

AA

Power of Music

Ask students what can be learned using music. Common responses may include numbers and mathematics (through rhythm), English alphabet letters (“The Alphabet Song”), names of the states in the U.S., and names of musical instruments. More mature students may respond with something social or attitudinal. Remind students that music can be used as a tool to transmit just about any message. Discuss why music is so powerful as a tool to transmit information, including ideologies and propagandas. Possible responses may include the following: (a) Humans enjoy music; (b) Music creates more interest than plain language; (c) Any verbal message could become song lyrics; and (d) Music may have strong symbolic meanings.

C/U

Pages 118-119

Confucius and Plato

Based on the musical philosophy of Confucius described on pages 118-119, conduct a small research project to compare the musical philosophies of Confucius (551-479 b.c.) and Plato (427-347 b.c.). How are they alike? How are they distinguished? Also notice the time proximity of the two philosophers.

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Pages 126-127, CD track 37

Listening for Subtle Changes

Guqin is built for an individual and is played softly. It is important to listen for its subtle changes in tone color, pitch bending, and other string manipulations. Use a plucked string instrument with the ability to sustain a tone (e.g., the guitar or violin). Ask students to listen carefully for any subtle changes in tone, pitch, or any aspect of the sound. The room needs to be very quiet. The teacher plucks one of the strings (e.g., the guitar or violin) loudly and let it vibrate freely until it stops. Have students tell the teacher and the rest of the class what subtle changes they hear. Try the same listening exercise with these manipulations, one at a time:

- Glissando up a portion of a string.
- Glissando down a portion of a string.
- Glissando up and down rapidly within a narrow pitch range until the vibration stops.

- Bend a pitch by pressing a string upward or downward on the fingerboard until the vibration stops.
- Pluck a string on the fingerboard.
- Pluck a string inward, compare to plucking a string outward.
- Use a finger to hit a string on the fingerboard.
- Pick up a string with the thumb and the index finger, then release the string gently.
- Play harmonics on a string.

The teacher or students may come up with more ways to manipulate a string to make subtle differences in the tone quality. Then listen to CD track 37. Imagine how the strings of the *guqin* are being manipulated during the performance. Discuss.

S, C/U

Pages 132-140

Political Messages in Music

Within the nation where students reside, have students identify music in which political messages are found. Compare those to the musical genres described on pages 132-140. How is the music different in terms of (a) the musical genre and style, and (b) the lyrics? Is there similarity in the method of disseminating the political message? Following are some characteristics of “mass songs” in China:

- Simple melody and chordal accompaniment, or inspired by Chinese folk tunes
- Strophic form
- March-like character
- Upbeat and in a major key to impart good spirit
- Melody is easy to remember for unison singing in public political gatherings and rallies
- Content includes political ideology and achievements of the government and its leaders

What characteristics can students find in “political” music of their nation?

S, C/U

Page 136

Contrasting *Yangbanxi* and Traditional Operas

Based on the ideology during the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), use **Worksheet 5.1** to contrast the differences between *yangbanxi* and traditional operas. Point out to students that *yangbanxi* (“model opera”) was a new genre that emerged in China in the 1960s. Discuss the students’ work on the worksheet. Following is a table for the teacher’s reference:

<i>Yangbanxi</i> (“model opera”)	Traditional Opera
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revolutionary themes • Based on an interpretation of the communist ideology • Plots focused on the common people that the party valued (e.g., workers, peasants, soldiers, and female revolutionaries) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harmful to the society • Products of Chinese feudal society • Mostly about important historical figures and people drawn from the upper class • Feudalistic, class-based, and superstitious

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Pages 137-138, CD track 49

Instrument Identification in *Yangbanxi*

Listen to CD track 49. Ask students to list all musical instruments heard. Ask whether students would classify the instruments as Western or Chinese [Answer: Western]. Then ask students what makes this excerpt “Chinese.” Younger students may point to the singing and the language of the lyrics. More mature students should be able to point out more specific melodic styles (e.g., tonality and embellishment) and singing styles (e.g., voice production similar to traditional Chinese opera but mixing with *bel canto*). Point to the students that the eclectic nature of the music is reflective of the reform of the time.
