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"Folk Music in China,"

FOLK MUSIC IN CHINA
BY
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In the present article I wish to call the attention of musicians and others interested in Chinese folk-lore to the Folk Music of the Chinese. This is almost unknown to Europeans, notwithstanding the fact that the study of Chinese culture in general and art in particular is very advanced. There have been, however, several publications on Chinese music since those of the Reverend Father Amiot, as, for example, the recent publications of Soulie and Fischer, while the Chinese literature treating of Chinese music is really enormous, there being hundreds, possibly thousands, of works in existence. Lately Mr. Jasser, professional musician and composer of the Moskow Conservatory (the highest musical school), who lived for a short while in China, has prepared a very interesting publication on Chinese music, treating the subject from a purely musical standpoint. His predecessors seem to have been unable to do this, being sinologues rather than musicians. But all these studies written by Europeans, and, as far as I know, all Chinese treatises of this matter, deal with the 'official' music of the Chinese that is strictly regulated by the principles elaborated by Old China.

This classic Chinese music is already known, but the folk-music is not known at all. Meanwhile the folk-music is probably the basis of the classical composers' music, a source for their musical fantasy, much as the work of European classical composers like Beethoven and others, and especially of modern musicians, develops and beautifies the musical treasure of the people which is often quite national and typical of its ethnographical environment. This very simple and easily investigated subject appears to have escaped the attention of professional musicians and historians of music. However, the recent movement to collect and investigate folk-music as ethnographical material has already given fruitful results. Long before the war, a society was organized in Moscow by conservatory professors and ethnographers to collect folk-music material. In a comparatively short period this society collected a considerable number of popular songs, as well as very simple musical phrases, such as are cried by the street-hawkers and peddlars in Russia. Modern Russian composers such as Grechaninoff, Liadoff, Arensky and several others associated their names with this work. The publications of the society now number several volumes.

In the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography in Petrograd in 1911-12 a section of musical phonograms was also organized, which, according to the organizer's idea, was later to be developed into a special department for such studies. Since that time every investigator has had
1 "De la musique des Chinois tant anciens que modernes" in Memoires concernant l'histoire, les sciences, les moeurs, les usages, etc., des Chinois, par les missionnaires de Pé-kin. Vol. VI. Paris 1780.
2 G. Soulié 'La Musique en Chine.' Paris, 1911.
3 Beitrage zur Erforschung der Chinesischen Musik.' Leipzig, 1910.
with him a phonograph and rolls to collect original folk-music amongst the peoples of Siberia, and Asia in general. In the United States this movement has already created a literature and the study of the native music is now very far advanced.*

As regards the collecting of folk-music in this part of Asia, it is not so advanced, and we have only very incidental material, collected by a few investigators².

During expeditions with my husband, Dr. S. M. Shirokogoroff, into various parts of Eastern Siberia and Manchuria, I collected considerable musical material. The greater part of these are in phonograms and are now in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography of the Russian Academy of Science in Petrograd. A small part was taken down on the spot from ear, and is now at my disposal. This collection was completed during our visit to Peking in 1917-18.

I give below a series of Chinese street merchants' calls and songs, which are especially typical of the Chinese. The variations in this kind of musical manifestation is really wonderful, and it is to be assumed that the number of these short songs in China runs into several thousands.³ These songs here given are, of course, characteristic of the Northern Chinese. On the streets of Shanghai the songs of a different style are to be heard. I here give some examples of the Pekinese songs.

To show the variations that exist in these kinds of folk-music manifestations, I also give here some Chinese, Tungus and Manchu simple songs such as they sing not for artistic purposes but for their own amusement and distraction, or in their shamanist performances. It can be seen that the Manchu and Tungus songs are composed on other principles than are those of the Chinese.

These examples show how complicated is the question of the music of these peoples. They show such differences in the various groups that they are distinguishable one from the other without any minute analysis. It is beyond doubt, then, that this kind of folk-art is connected with other manifestations of folk-culture, folk-psychology and particularly esthetic development. Therefore the study of folk-music must be conducted in future hand in hand with our knowledge of languages, and, in China, of dialects. The geographical distribution of the songs and of the simpler pedlars' calls may also be of great interest, as they are the natural, almost unconscious, creative power of the people. Collections and studies of such songs may be useful to historians, but they are also useful to musicians, who doubtless, will discover some new themes and motives for their compositions.

The origin of these songs is also very interesting. In order to show an example of song origin, I give here a Tungus song which is based on a motive borrowed directly from nature.
The Tungus used to imitate the male deer when it cried in the beginning of Autumn challenging other males to fight. For this purpose,

* Publications of the Smithsonian Institutions.
2 For example, Prof. A. Rudneff.
3 In the Moskow region alone several hundreds of these songs have been collected.
they have a kind of instrument made of wood and birch-bark. The beasts hearing this imitation approach the hunter, who is thus able to kill them. It is very significant that the tiger of Manchuria is said also to
The accompanying birds’ songs are also borrowed as motives by the Tungus for their songs.
side with the collecting and studying of human musical manifestations.

As regards Chinese instrumental music, it belongs to classical music rather than to folk-music. As is well-known, the Chinese more than most other people are fond of theatrical performances. The Chinese theatre gives an essential part of its programme to historical drama, which is always accompanied by music, and it is only natural that ancient classic music has thus always been propagated amongst the Chinese. The number of Chinese musical instruments, according to the authorities already mentioned, is very large.

The very detailed works of Sorel and Amiot practically exhaust the technical side of this subject, but the collecting of specimens of the instruments of folk-music is also very important, though less accessible from the technical standpoint than the folk-songs.

Having as my principal purpose the turning of the public’s attention to Chinese folk-music, it is necessary for me to demonstrate the practical way in which the collections can he made.

The best way is, of course, the phonographic registration of musical manifestations, but it is not always possible, because the singers are very often too shy to perform in the presence of foreigners or for any special purpose. In such cases, it is necessary to take down the songs by ear. Such material must, of course, be very carefully corrected, because the European ear is not accustomed to the Chinese musical spirit and errors in registration are always possible. For phonographic registration very simple and cheap phonographs may be used. The phonograms (rolls) must be registered as soon as the performance is finished. The rapidity of the rotation of the roll during the performance must always be registered as well as the place, province, town, village and so forth, the performer’s sex, age, social position, and so on. Details registered by the collector never obstruct the further working out of the material, but the lack of necessary data may greatly depreciate the value of the collection. The same details must be added to every piece taken down by ear.

From my personal experiences I can say that collecting such material is not as difficult as it might seem in the beginning. The first pieces registered may be of little use as reliable material, and must be corrected later, but as soon as the collector becomes accustomed to distinguish the characteristic Chinese combinations, he can collect very reliable material. It would be very useful to secure the help of the Chinese themselves in this work, but there are very few educated Chinese who are interested in the folk-music of their country. However, colonies of Europeans are now so numerous in China, that this work can easily be done by the latter, who, living well away from the Chinese cultural centres, are in the best position to carry out the collecting of material.