

“Small Has No Inside, Big Has No Outside”: Montreal’s Chinese Diaspora Breaks Out/In Music

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Abstract: Through ethnographic fieldwork undertaken from 2003 to 2010, discussion with local musicians, and analysis of concert programs, recordings, live performances, rehearsals, press reviews, musicians’ websites and textual sources, the author examines the means by which the Chinese diasporic community in Montreal negotiates its cultural identity and exerts its agency through musical performance. The author also explores how the tangled relationships of regionally-diverse Chinese immigrants to their birthplaces and their chosen homeland are unravelled, reflecting simultaneous positions as “insiders” and “outsiders.”

A traditional Chinese aphorism advises that “small has no inside, big has no outside.” This observation crystallizes the relationship between macrocultures and microcultures in communities often considered socio-culturally distinct, wherein the specific boundaries of “insider” and “outsider” are not only difficult to discern, but also shift according to demographic and identity markers. Jean Lumb, a Chinese-Canadian dance teacher and member of the Order of Canada, voiced her feeling of exteriority as a member of the Chinese diaspora in an interview with Evelyn Huang, asking “What do I have to do to be accepted? I’m always looking in from the outside.... How does one become ‘in there’ instead of being ‘outside’?” (Huang 1992:34). While many scholars have contested accepted understandings of the relationship between insider and outsider communities and probed the liminal zone between emic and etic perspectives (see, for example, Wallen 1991; Divine 2007), the complex and tenuous position of microcultural communities – which exist within macrocultures that simultaneously define themselves as threatened microcultures against a larger mainstream – has been less well understood (Alpalhao 1980; Dorsinville 1983; Teitelbaum 1987; Wallen 1991).

Through analysis of such groups, it becomes clear that microcultures exist simultaneously within and outside of so-called mainstream society, reflecting boundaries that are permeable on multiple fronts. Nonetheless, in his discussion of muted group theory, intercultural communication theorist James W. Neuliep acknowledges that these loosely-framed microcultures hold a position of lesser socio-cultural agency as they “are forced to communicate within the (externally defined) dominant mode of expression [and hence become] ‘muted.’” (2009:87). Neuliep asserts that, within the hegemonic macroculture, “microcultural groups experience difficulty expressing themselves fluently within the dominant mode of expression...hence ‘micro-macro’ interaction is difficult. However, because the microcultural groups must communicate within the dominant mode, they must achieve some level of linguistic competence to survive” (2009:87). This linguistic model is reasonably relatable to musical communication between microcultural and macrocultural groups, wherein the microcultural group is positioned such that its ability to thrive and be heard in the broader community frequently depends on learning to break through the expected socio-cultural and aesthetic boundaries of the microcultural group and “speak” both from within and to the dominant aesthetic discourse.¹

The Francophone province of Quebec has been vigorously defended as a “distinct society” within the national boundaries of Canada. Quebec citizens’ desire to defend their cultural distinctiveness against the monolithic Anglophone cultural influences of bordering provinces and the nation as a whole has regularly led to attempts to separate from Anglophone Canada, spurred by a widespread desire to protect the uniqueness of the Québécois’ language, customs, law, religion and way of life. As a result of this pervasive protective instinct, the province is frequently accused of xenophobic cultural tendencies (see for instance Vachon and Langlais 1983; Teitelbaum 1987; Handler 1988; Antonius 2002; Waddell 2007). Given the ongoing volatility of its political and cultural existence, then, how does a visible minority community sustain and express itself within the borders of a predominantly Caucasian, Francophone, historically Roman Catholic cultural enclave intent on standing apart?

Through ethnographic fieldwork undertaken from 2003 to 2010, discussion with local musicians, and analysis of concert programs, recordings, live performances, rehearsals, press reviews, musicians’ websites and textual sources, this article examines the means by which the contemporary Chinese diasporic community of the city of Montreal negotiates its cultural identity and exerts its agency through musical performance within the so-called “distinct” Francophone society of Quebec. In so doing, the tangled relationships of regionally-diverse Chinese immigrants to their birthplaces and their chosen

homeland are unraveled, reflecting their simultaneous position as both “insiders” and “outsiders” in overlapping socio-political and artistic communities, and the dynamic cross-pollination of transculturation and reverse transculturation in their creative play. To that end, this analysis reveals the ways in which Québécois performers of Chinese music – both of Chinese and non-Chinese heritage – probe and pierce socially-constructed boundaries of “Otherness” by creating an adaptive and collaborative musical language of communication, and thereby seeks to engage recent reconsiderations of the hegemonic construct of hybridity in the sphere of cultural theory.²

I begin with the examination of relevant contextual frameworks, including notions of “distinct society” in Quebec, reactions to colonization and hegemonic patterning, as well as Chinese Otherness in Montreal. This is followed by a discussion of a performance venue and various performers of Chinese music in Montreal, leading to a focus on the musical worlds of three individuals: Liu Fang, Chih-Lin Chou, and Shen Qui.

Defending a Distinct Society

The term “*société distincte*” or “distinct society” was first popularized by Jean Lesage, the Premier of Quebec from 1960 to 1966. Lesage argued that the uniqueness of Quebec’s culture in Canada should be inscribed in an addendum to the Canadian Constitution Act of 1867 in order to defend certain exclusive cultural rights. During the 1960s, in a period of modernization that became known as the “Quiet Revolution,” Quebec citizens began to shift in self-identification from “French-Canadian” to “Québécois,” emphasizing a stronger sense of regional identification that blossomed at the expense of their attachment to Canada as a nation (see Carter 2000:50-52; Dickinson and Young 2008:305-344). In the context of a desire to gain control of its socio-economic and educational sectors, this movement may be read as an attempt at decolonization by a subjugated culture which itself acted as colonizer to Quebec’s indigenous peoples along with other European invaders.

The concept of Quebec as a “distinct society” percolated into widespread discussion from 1987 to 1990 without gaining much support outside the province. Following the failure to effect the incorporation of the concept into Canada’s Constitution, Quebec politicians again shifted strategies by publicly pronouncing the province of Quebec as a “nation.” This term, too, provokes alarm from the rest of Canada, which has countered that every province and territory of Canada is culturally unique. Quebec’s adoption of the term “nation,” with all of its inherent ethnic, political and cultural problematics,

raises the specter of separation and the possibility of independent political relations with other nations (Teitelbaum 1987; Handler 1988:30-51).³ Quebec presently rests in an uneasy and temporary truce with politicians both outside and within its own borders until the next opportunity arises to press for greater support and protection for its unique and internally dominant Francophone culture (Vachon and Langlais 1983; Millard 2008).

Multiple Colonizations and Xenophobic Responses

In “Breaking the Shell of Whiteness: Naming Whiteness in Quebec,” Amélie Waddell questioned Québécois undergraduate students in a middle-class suburb of Montreal about their perceptions of race as it related to their understanding of their cultural identity. Waddell’s study revealed the students’ common belief that “those who could be recognized as Québécois were those who had integrated into the white Catholic Québécois culture. Those who fell outside of that box were not considered “real” Québécois (2007:67).” This perception held despite the widespread secularization of Quebec since the 1960s (Dickinson and Young 2008:336-337). The Chinese diasporic community of Montreal, then, comprised of visual minorities who are eighty percent non-Catholics and culturally distinctive (Gouvernement du Québec 2005), is widely perceived as an “outsider” cultural group comprised of individuals who are not “real” Québécois, despite their widespread and sustained efforts to learn to speak from within the dominant discourse (see Ashcroft et al 1989:2-8).⁴

After fleeing political instability in the waning years of mainland China’s last empire and seeking better economic opportunities in British Columbia’s gold rush, mainland Chinese began settling in Montreal’s Chinatown in the 1890s, centering around a sixteen-block area known as “Chinatown” that still exists in the same location today (Lai 1988:15-16; 100).⁵ As it is outlined below, today’s Chinese community is considerably more diverse in both regional and national background than that of the first southern Chinese settlers, originating in Hong Kong, Taiwan, mainland China, and other regions. According to the Canadian census of 2001, 91.5% of the Chinese population of Quebec resides in the urban center of Montreal. The Chinese population in the Montreal metropolis region was 72,725 members strong as of the 2006 Canadian census, making them the fifth largest recognized ethnic minority group in the city, after the Black, Arab, South Asian and Latin American communities. In Canada, Montreal hosts the fourth largest Chinese community, after Toronto (486,330), Vancouver (381,535) and Richmond, B.C., (75,725)

(Statistics Canada 2009).⁶

However, the diasporic Chinese community of Montreal is unique in Canada as the only one that exists as a minority group ostensibly housed within the minority Francophone culture in Anglophone-dominant Canada. In essence, Montreal's Chinese diasporic community exists as a local microculture within a Francophone Québécois community that acts simultaneously as a macroculture and a microculture vis-à-vis the Chinese and broader Canadian communities respectively. Eighty-five percent of Montreal's Chinese population is comprised of first generation immigrants to Canada, with still-strong memories of their regionally diverse natal cultures forming the backdrop of their efforts to integrate and flourish in a new homeland vastly different from those from which they came. Strikingly, seventy-seven percent of the first generation population immigrated to Canada after 1980, and almost thirty percent of Montreal's Chinese population are newcomers to Canadian society, having immigrated to Canada after 1996 (Gouvernement du Québec 2005). The vast majority of this young Chinese diaspora self-identifies as having no religious affiliation (50%), but the largest religious affiliations in the remaining half of the population align equally with the dominant religion of Quebec, Roman Catholicism (20%) and Chinese Buddhism (20%).⁷ Further distinguishing the community from both the Québécois and Canadian cultures in which it is dually embedded is the fact that while those speaking French and English are also almost equally split at 16.1% and 16.6 % respectively, more than three quarters of the population cites a language other than French or English as their mother tongue making fluent linguistic communication a challenge for many (Gouvernement du Québec 2005).⁸ Montreal's Chinese are thus widely regarded as outsiders vis-à-vis the linguistic, religious, ethnic, and cultural norms of their broader communities, and as such, exist collectively on multiple levels as a microculture relative to and conceptually "within" the hegemonic macrocultures of both Quebec and Canada.⁹

Yet despite their microcultural outsider existence, the worry of cultural annihilation leads, for some Québécois, to a xenophobic fear of immigration. As one undergraduate student in Waddell's group discussion commented:

I find that if it continues like this, and...everyone can come and settle here, with their own [culture]...It is we who will lose, you know. More and more, they will come and [integrate] themselves, and us well...I think that [the birthrate] was going down, so whether you want it or not, at a given time...there will be many nationalities and we will be a small part. (Waddell 2007:80)

This provocative comment spurred a student discussion on the urgent need for the Caucasian Francophone Québécois majority to increase the birth-rate in order to maintain its position of cultural dominance within the province. Here, then, immigrants to Quebec, such as the Chinese diasporic community, are viewed not as the sidelined and colonized of the third world, but as the invading colonizers, with the power and agency to disrupt and subvert Quebec's distinct, but fragile, society.¹⁰ The presence of these newcomers is perceived by the majority of Caucasian Francophones as a threat to what they consider Quebec's cultural essence. As Anjali Prabhu argues in her comparison of the Marxist-oriented hybridity theories of Fanon and Glissant, "negotiating the reality and myth of victims and heroes" is crucial in attempting a grounded understanding of the agency of more and less powerful constituencies in any community (2007:13). Historical contingencies aside, although the aforementioned student perceives himself a relatively powerless member of an original indigenous culture under attack by an aggressive foreign colonizer – a perspective which conveniently ignores the displacement of Quebec's original indigenous people – we must be clear that colonization, on all fronts, is heterogeneous in its power relations and effects, and not simply unidirectional. The actual multivalency of transculturation and reverse transculturation, then, is reflected here in the students' fears of the impact of "outside" culture influence on those on the "inside." Such comments notwithstanding, significantly divergent perspectives on the threat of the perceptual Other – those positioned in opposition to a contrived and hegemonic norm of Self – exist within the so-called "mainstream" Québécois society itself.

Climbing the Wall of Otherness

As revealed in my extensive conversations with Chinese musicians in Montreal since 2003, members of the Chinese community are well aware of and highly sensitive to their position as minorities and outsiders living in a Francophone environment where the government's heavily-enforced language laws ensure the protection of linguistic privilege. As such, the Chinese community is active in reaching out to the broader community. The Festival de la culture chinoise de Montréal, for example, announces on its website that their members are all ethnic Chinese immigrants who speak French, and cite as their goals the desire to "provide a safe means for newly arrived Chinese to integrate more quickly into Québécois society," to "help the Chinese community to communicate more effectively with Quebec institutions (and vice versa)," to "enable the Quebec business community to reach the Chinese people here and in China,"

and to “bring together the different Chinese communities – who share a common ethnic origin but have a diverse cultural and linguistic heritage – to celebrate our identity as Chinese-Quebecers” [http://www.culturechinoisemtl.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=45&Itemid=1 (20 July 2009)]. This three-day summer festival, which began in 2006, was advertised as an annual family event taking place in the Chinese Community Cultural Centre of Montreal, offering music, dance, art, and film, and though it did not feature cultural interactions or fusions within single performances, it did take pains to juxtapose and showcase both Québécois artists such as photojournalist Jean-Francois Leblanc, and Chinese performers such as *dizi* (transverse bamboo flute) player and teacher Shuni Tsou. The musical performances were titled, not originally, “East Meets West,” in order to “signify the ties that bind Chinese and Québécois cultures” (Tousignant 2006).

The website for Montreal’s *Hour* arts weekly invited members to comment on the cultural festival, and received contrasting impressions. A young Chinese Canadian blogger named Liu proposed “a [somewhat ahistorical] toast...to all the first-generation, second-generation, and tenth-generation Chinese residing in our midst.” As an individual raised at least in part in Quebec, Liu notes the struggles she has faced in gaining acceptance in Quebec society, accepting her own multiethnic heritage, and coming to terms with Chinese cultural roots that she seems already to have exoticized:

As a Chinese-Canadian, the importance of connecting asian culture with western culture resonates with me. Many first-generation asian youth struggle with maintaining their parents’ traditions while blending in with the mainstream. As time progressed, I ultimately realized that these need not be mutually exclusive and I embrace my Chinese heritage as part of my exotic identity. Because even (though)at times I have been the victim of racial stereotypes and degrading slurs, it encourages me to see that society is also embracing this rich and ancient culture. My hopes are that Montrealers will move beyond modern politics to see the Orient as a region of beauty, mysticisms and early folklore, rather than merely two city blocks of dim sum restaurants and chintzy baubles. [<http://www.hour.ca/stage/stage.aspx?iIDArticle=10069> (7 August 2009)]

In response to this posting, a well-meaning attendee self-identifying as Hamid attempted to offer support for the Chinese minority community in Montreal. Titling her post “Kung Fu Fighting with the French,” Hamid per-

haps unintentionally nuanced the cultural tensions between the Francophone mainstream and Chinese minority. She attempts to offer her support for cultural diversity in Montreal, but unwittingly exoticizes the diverse population with almost cartoonish caricatures, much as Liu herself does by underscoring Oriental “mysticisms” and her own “exotic identity.” Emphasizing the impact of Chinese culture on western society, Hamid enthuses, “from David Bowie’s China Girl to Jackie Chan to spring rolls, what aspect of Chinese culture isn’t present in our everyday lives? We have our very own Chinatown, tons of Chinese restaurants all over the place, and a huge and fabulous Chinese population.” Nonetheless, somewhat wary of the Chinese nation’s past nonetheless, Hamid observes, “China as a country has come such a long way, and while it still has a bit of a dangerous reputation attached to it, no one can deny its rich culture and beauty” [<http://www.hour.ca/stage/stage.aspx?iDArticle=10069> (7 August 2009)]. Hamid reifies Chinese culture, echoing the widespread view that Chinese culture is homogeneous and static:

The people always seem so cheery and friendly, and I can honestly say that I haven’t met one Chinese person that wasn’t such a pleasure to meet. And most have a very healthy lifestyle as well. White rice, green tea, and a well-balanced diet help them maintain a great figure and a long life. In fact, the Chinese people are known to live the longest. This is also due to their very relaxed lifestyle, and meditation procedures. They are incredibly spiritual, and activities like Tai Chi and various martial arts like Kung Fu, help them stay very strong, both physically and mentally. [<http://www.hour.ca/stage/stage.aspx?iDArticle=10069> (7 August 2009)]

For Hamid, then, the arts festival acts as a site through which she can define and “know” the exotic Other. This process reflects the manifest Orientalism that Homi K. Bhabha laments when he asserts that “colonial power produces the colonized as a fixed reality which is at once an ‘other’ and yet entirely knowable and visible” (1986:156). While Hamid readily succumbs to such Orientalist exoticism, the Chinese-Canadian blogger engages in Orientalism as well, as a means of defending her ancestral culture. In their attempted praise, both Hamid and Liu resort to crude and overworn simplifications of Chinese culture which are largely quite misguided. Nonetheless, Hamid’s overall perception of the cultural festival remains very positive, and she concludes by commenting on the cultural exchange that takes place in the festival, her city and her province:

I'm glad to see Montreal representing the Chinese community with this festival, and they're taking us back to the basics, with some Chinese art and dance. It's also interesting how it's being intertwined with Quebec culture, to show us that we can be both. All cultures can very much co-exist with our hometowns.
 [<http://www.hour.ca/stage/stage.aspx?iDArticle=10069> (7 August 2009)]

Despite their intentions, Hamid and Liu's comments clearly engender many misconceptions which reify Chinese culture as unchanging, mystical and monolithic, and presuppose a state of homogeneous cultural fossilization. Once again, as Bhabha posits in his well-known discussion of the colonial subject, this microculture within a larger microculture "is constructed within an apparatus of power which contains, in both senses of the word, an 'other' knowledge – a knowledge that is arrested and fetishistic and circulates through colonial discourse as that limited form of otherness, that fixed form of difference, that I have called the stereotype" (1986:165).

An online posting about the festival by an author identifying as Patel praises the age of Chinese culture, noting the benefits of "setting foot into a new culture (for me), and learning about the past. I didn't know the Chinese invented gunpowder." Unlike Hamid, Patel does not note the impact of Chinese culture on Quebec, yet does recognize the reciprocal: "How East meets West is always a wonderful experience as you get to see how Québécois culture has mixed into the Chinese cultures, leading to lifestyles of today" [<http://www.hour.ca/stage/stage.aspx?iDArticle=10069> (15 July 2009)]. Here, the impact of Québécois culture on that of China is recognized, yet agency is not equally afforded to the diasporic Chinese community. Such simplifications of the heterogeneous activities and output of Quebec's Chinese community act to restrict both cultural and creative agency and to simplify and limit the individuation of identity reflected in the contemporary performances of Montreal's diasporic Chinese musicians.¹¹

Dismantling Perceptions of Homogeneity: Montreal's Chinese Music Community

Like the broader Chinese diaspora in Quebec, Montreal's Chinese musical community is quite regionally diverse, and as such is distinctive from other Chinese music communities in urban centers across Canada which are often divided by affiliation to a certain natal region.¹² Professional *pipa* (pear-shaped

plucked lute) player Liu Fang, for example, immigrated to Montreal from the southwestern border province of Yunnan, China, while professional *guzheng* (rectangular plucked zither) player Rao Shu-Hang immigrated to Canada from the province of Xinghai in the plateaus of northwestern China, where he studied at the Xinghai Conservatoire. *Guzheng* player Chih-Lin Chou, who studied music at Concordia University in Montreal, immigrated from Taiwan, as did opera and Chinese folk song singer Chih-Hui Kuo. Liegang Luo, an accomplished musician on the Yunnan province *hulusi* (gourd-based mouth organ) and the ancient Chinese *guqin* (ancient plucked table zither), also completed a Bachelor of Music at Concordia University and is pursuing a Master's degree in electro-acoustic music. A professional engineer by trade, Luo studied music in his city of birth, Hangzhou, on the central-eastern coast of China, before arriving in Montreal. *Erhu* (two-string bowed lute) player Shen Qi emigrated from the city of Nanjing on the central-eastern coast of China where she studied at the Nanjing Conservatory of Music. *Erhu* player Yang Li also originated in central-eastern China, in the metropolis of Shanghai. *Yangqin* (hammered trapezoidal dulcimer) player Ling Lin originated in Fujian province, on the southeastern coast of China, and learned her craft in her homeland through private study. The children's choir director of the Montreal Chinese Community and Cultural Centre, Pit-Ling Lau, immigrated to Montreal from Hong Kong, just south of mainland China, in order to study western piano performance at McGill University.

In their various homelands, individuals from these diverse regions are widely recognized as being culturally dissimilar, with their own unique languages, foods, customs and religious practices. Further, each region possesses its own distinctive musical style, mode and tuning system, which has been juxtaposed with a western-inflected pan-national conservatory tradition during the last eighty years. Nonetheless, in the Chinese diasporic community of Montreal, such regional differences pale in the shadow of the hegemonic Québécois culture, and these culturally-diverse musicians collaborate together and are presented publicly in joint performances: Shen Qi once busked on the streets of Montreal with Liu Fang; Liegang Luo performed together with Chih-Lin Chou; Yang Li played with *yangqin* player Ling Lin, and so forth. Chou states that ten years ago her *guzheng* students were almost entirely second-generation Chinese Canadians with Cantonese or Chaozhou roots. Underlining the notable shift in Chinese immigration patterns to Canada in the last decade, Chou states that her students are now ninety-nine percent mainland immigrants from diverse regions (personal communication, August 7, 2009). While occasionally regional Chinese cultural differences reportedly play out in internal politics in Montreal's Chinese music circles, particularly along lines

of language – French or English, Mandarin or Cantonese – musicians generally set aside the widespread “othering” of those from different regions that flourishes in their homelands, and even surmount tensions between mainland Chinese and Taiwanese communities, which have long been political adversaries. In Montreal, then, these culturally diverse diasporic groups, each of which are themselves “othered” by the mainstream Francophone community, elect to integrate and come together through joint musical performances, just as they seek to connect to Quebec society at large.

Reaching “Out,” Reaching “In”: Non-Chinese Performers in Montreal

Just as the Chinese music community of Montreal has frequently embraced western influence in their traditional ensembles and forms, several non-Chinese Montreal musicians have taken a sustained interest in performing Chinese music over many years. *Erhu*, *gaohu* (high-pitched two-stringed bowed lute) and *yehu* (coconut-shell two-stringed bowed lute) player Jeremy Moyer learned, while teaching English to blind children in Taiwan, traditional folk pieces which he performed regularly at festivals and solo recitals throughout Quebec and Ontario. Moyer presents many older traditional-style performances of Taiwanese and Cantonese folk music that he learned from elders of the Chinese communities in which he lived, as well as contemporary intercultural pieces in the stereotypical and somewhat exoticized “East meets West” festival format. Moyer later married a Chinese woman and moved to Shanghai, where he continues to perform *erhu* with elderly local musicians. Moyer also performs regularly with George Sapounidis, a well-known figure in mainland China of Greek descent, who sings folk songs in Mandarin with guitar accompaniment. Sapounidis’ musical aspirations were portrayed in a 2005 documentary called *Chairman George* made by fellow Montrealers George Cross and Mila Aung-Thwin. As a core member of the GZEM trio, Francophone Charles Dugas plays mixed Chinese and western percussion with Chin-Lin Chou and Yang Li, along with Anglophone Kevin Austin, a professor and electro-acoustic music specialist at Concordia University, and co-founder of the Chinese music Butterfly Peacock Phoenix Music and Fine Arts studio. Each of these “Caucasian” musicians, along with their Chinese teachers and collaborators, actively seeks to redraw, or at least blur, the socio-musical boundaries between insider and outsider.

Vietnamese musician Huu Bac Quach, who plays both the traditional *dan bau* (Vietnamese monochord) and the Chinese *erhu*, has also performed

Chinese traditional and contemporized repertoire extensively together with his former *erhu* teacher, Shen Qi, and other Chinese musicians at the Chinese Garden within the Montreal Botanical Gardens, such as *guzheng* player Rao Shuhang and Shen Qi in the Oriental Strings trio at Festival Accès Asie, and Chih-Lin Chou and Kevin Austin in Concordia University's Oriented Towards Sound concert series (personal communication, August 11 and 13, 2008). Quach explained that with the exception of his own instrument, the *dan bau*, the other major performance instruments of Vietnam almost all originated in China, and thus the two countries' artistic traditions are mutually comprehensible. With the Chinese instruments came the prevalent use of Chinese musical theory, the predominance of ornamented pentatonic scales, and strong stylistic influences that can still be heard in North Vietnamese music (Quach, personal communication, August 11, 2008; cf. Arana 1999; Nguyen and Shehan Campbell 2002). The close link between Vietnamese and Chinese musicians in Montreal, while unique among Canada's Chinese communities,¹³ thus seems a natural musical affinity on many levels. These artistic collaborations create a social and creative link between East-Asian diasporic groups in Montreal, and underline the sympathy of one ethnic minority group for another, as each attempts to carve their own space within the hegemonic Francophone culture of Quebec.¹⁴ Here again, cultural boundaries are blurred through contemporary diasporic musical performance.

Performances Venues as Sites for Boundary Breaching

A variety of venues are used by the Chinese community in the practice and public performance of Chinese instrumental and vocal music. For example, one of the most mainstream Chinese performance venues is the Chinese Garden, housed within the lush Montreal Botanical Gardens, where Chinese music is performed on an almost daily basis throughout the temperate months of the year. From 2008 to 2009, the Botanical Gardens hosted "The Sounds of Music" exhibit in its Tower of Condensing Clouds, in which the most common traditional Chinese instruments were displayed, named and briefly explained for visitors. The pavilion displayed a sample of the *jianpu* (simple notation) that is used as a written *lingua franca* for musical notation throughout modern China. In the background, the music of the ancient *guqin* (plucked table zither) was piped in, well-suited to the contemplative garden setting which replicates those of ancient China where the literati would typically retreat to paint watercolor landscapes, play the Chinese strategy game Go, read poetry and literature, or perform music for their own satisfaction and the entertain-

ment of a few close friends.

On a yearly basis, the garden hosts a well-attended, widely publicized and lucrative Lantern Festival, a major Montreal tourist draw that marks the traditional Chinese Mid-Autumn Festival, for which intricate silk lanterns created by master craftsmen are imported from Shanghai each year. In the fall of 2008, the colourful lanterns depicted an ancient ensemble of musicians performing *pipa*, *guqin*, the *kou* harp, large Chinese drums, and the ancient bell chime set excavated from the tomb of the Marquis Yi of Zeng, while in 2000, the Lantern Festival presented the painted face masks worn to identify the stock characters of Beijing opera. Live performers are regularly hired by the non-profit Society of the Chinese Garden of Montreal (established in 1991) to provide a soundscape to the festival. The Society of the Chinese Garden of Montreal also sponsored an Asia Music and Dance Festival at the gardens in the summer of 2009, which featured Chinese, Japanese, Indian, and other minority performers, again underlining the forged solidarity among Asian minorities within Québécois society that sets this community apart from other Canadian Chinese diasporic communities. These efforts help to fulfill the educative role of the gardens and allow an accessible means by which mainstream society can connect to some of the most lauded offerings of Chinese culture – particularly those from antiquity, which offer the appeal of perceived cultural “authenticity” and historical “purity,” and seem far removed from any contemporary micro or macropolitical cultural tensions in a province set on protecting its “own” cultural traditions.¹⁵ As Ashcroft et al. note, “the complication of time meeting space in literary theory and historiography, with its attendant clash of the ‘pure’ and the ‘hybrid,’ is well illustrated by the contradictions that have arisen in the Canadian situation” (1989:36): the Lantern Festival’s promotion of ancient China’s elite artistic culture as a representation of Chinese culture to an uniformed mainstream is a clear example of this blending of time and space. Here, the Chinese-Canadian Lantern Festival organizers seem complicit in self-Orientalism both as an act of cultural and economic commodification, and as a form of the collective nostalgia for an imagined past cultural purity popular both in diasporic Chinese communities and in mainland China itself.

Individual Musicians’ Negotiations of Insider/Outsider Status – Liu Fang:

Montreal’s Chinese musicians piece together employment through heterogeneous careers and sustain varied approaches to the Québécois and Canadian macrocultures in which they are situated, as evidenced by the three Chinese

musicians – Liu Fang, Chih-Lin Chou and Shen Qi – on whom I focus in the current section. The careers of each of these musicians reflect their ongoing negotiations of their own individual insider/outsider positioning through the embrace, and sometimes rejection, of music conceptually affiliated with their homelands and the West, including traditional Chinese pieces, classical and contemporary Euro-North American composition, western-influenced Chinese conservatory repertoire, mediated European harmonies and forms, electro-acoustic music, and jazz. Professional Chinese musicians hoping to support themselves solely through their musical performances typically spend a great deal of time on self-promotion and international tours. The fifty-member Hua Yun Artistic Troupe, founded in 2000, performs at public events such as the Multicultural Festival of Summer, the Festival Accès Asie, the Festival de la culture chinoise de Montréal, and their own Chinese New Year spectacle, and has brought together a large number of diverse professional musicians and dancers under its umbrella, including Chinese pop and opera singers, as well as instrumental performers on *guzheng*, *erhu*, *zhongruan* and *pipa*.

Pipa and *guzheng* player Liu Fang, who immigrated to Montreal from mainland China in 1996 at the age of twenty-two, is a featured artist of the troupe. A graduate of the prestigious Shanghai Conservatory of Music, she follows the normative career path of a Shanghai Conservatory alumna, focusing on international tours and often dramatic performances of modernized traditional Chinese repertoire that allow her to showcase her virtuosic technique for contemporary western and Chinese audiences (see Lau 2008:30-58). This focus on virtuosity, along with the form, dramatic dynamic contrasts, and harmonic and contrapuntal accompaniments found in many of Liu's repertoire, became a staple feature of the Chinese conservatory style beginning in the early twentieth century (see, for example, Chow-Morris 2004; Lau 2005; Witzleben 1995), which has won great favour with contemporary mainstream Chinese audiences who equate such western-influenced performances with cultural "modernization," and western audiences who largely believe the style to be traditional. Closely echoing China's Communist revolutionary leader, Mao Zedong, who ordered that "the old serve the new, and things foreign serve China" in his famous 1942 Talks at the Yanan Forum on Art and Literature on the socio-political role of the arts (cf. Freemantle 1972), Liu Fang's website banner proclaims "Welcome to Liu Fang's *pipa* and *guzheng* music world where the East meets with the West and the ancient traditions with the modernity!" [<http://www.philmultic.com/> (2 April 2010)]. In the Chinese conservatory-style in which Liu was trained, Chinese regional stylistic distinctions are also often glossed over, in order to echo the Chinese Communist government's historical promotion of a unified and harmonious Chinese culture through the blend-

ing-out of incompatible aesthetic elements. Conservatory-trained musicians, then, present themselves as pan-Chinese musicians with the ability and right to perform adaptations of culturally distinctive musical traditions once the domain of small microregional areas of China. Liu follows this trend by showcasing music from across China's many distinct cultural regions, but expands this cultural absorption further by adding compositions from far beyond China's borders to her repertoire as well.

Montreal's Chinese community has supported numerous tours by conservatory-trained performers, which provide not only direct funds to the performers, but also cultural capital back home, where tours of the West are widely viewed as signs of professional success and cited as proof of the West's respect for Chinese culture. Nonetheless, Liu Fang's husband, Wang Risheng, explains Liu's success in North America and lesser acclaim in her homeland, stating, "In the West, there are more concerts. In China, traditional music is not taken very seriously; it's treated more like entertainment."¹⁶ In addition to the traditional lack of respect and economic opportunities afforded to musicians in China, Liu "was not the favourite student at the Conservatory" where she studied, as she did not closely imitate her teacher as is traditionally demanded or demonstrate the extroverted dramatic gestures expected by the modern Chinese conservatories (Chan 2004).

Perhaps as a result, Liu switched teachers frequently, and experimented with many divergent musical styles. It is thus perhaps somewhat paradoxical that Liu, like Montreal's other professional Chinese musicians who are currently predominantly female string players in their late thirties, follows closely in the mould of the Chinese conservatory, which has elevated the status of select conservatory-trained professional musicians to superstardom in the mainland, and not only opened the gates of the trade to determined female performers, but held them in high regard as talented and cultivated beauties, particularly since the end of China's Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Despite the new possibilities that this career path affords in the mainland, Liu explains, "we would like to bring back to China fresh ideas about Chinese music, but not now. In the West, you have people who cannot live without music. In China, they only understand how to market fame. You have to make it big in the West" (Chan 2004). Here again, while simultaneously stereotyping both fame and fortune-obsessed Chinese and aesthetically sensitive North Americans, the perception of the West as "king-maker" in Chinese artists' careers comes to the fore. Yet Liu's career path has necessarily taken into account both the economic imperative of a homeland and adopted country that each favours the globally-dominant Euro-North American musical discourse, and her own individual creative impulse.

In North America and Europe, Liu's musical experimentation seems to have indeed helped her to "make it big" in the West, as she has performed in prestigious events and venues such as the Bath International Music Festival, the Théâtre de la Ville in Paris, France, the Philharmonic Hall of Liège, Belgium, the Festival Tres Cultura Murcia in Murcia, Spain, the Zacatecas International Cultural Festival in Mexico, and the WOMAD festival in the United Kingdom and Spain, to name only a few. In fact, with her busy touring schedule, Liu is in Montreal for only short periods each year. Nonetheless, in Canada, Liu has made a name for herself performing featured *pipa* and *guzheng* roles in Canadian composer R. Murray Schafer's mythical environmental opera *The Palace of the Cinnabar Phoenix*, working frequently in the contemporary music scene, and with her CD recording *Mei Hua* (Plum Blossom) with one of Montreal's most esteemed contemporary flautists, Lise Daoust. She has produced nine compact disc recordings on her own label, Philmultic, four of which are intercultural collaborations with non-Chinese musicians, including African *kora* player Ballake Sissoko, Indian *bansuri* player Henri Tournier, Middle Eastern *oud* players Alla and Farhan Sabbagh, and guitarist Michael O'Toole.

Liu's most innovative and engaged recent transcultural interaction, however, is perhaps her performance of Japanese composer Toshiyuki Hiraoka's 2008 composition "Three Pieces for *Pipa* and Guitar," with Irish guitarist Michael O'Toole. The highly syncopated and disjunct *pipa* line that drives the opening and ending of the third movement, "Twisted Illusion," presents a delicate atonal motif which slowly transforms, while supported by a homophonic guitar accompaniment. The B section in the ternary form piece brings the guitar to the forefront with a contrasting recurrent motif, while the *pipa* strums sparse dissonant chords beneath. The three-movement composition bears no resemblance to traditional Chinese repertoire or *pipa* techniques, which utilize neither atonality nor chordal writing, but works effectively as a contemporary composition in the Euro-North American tradition that has impacted Japan's contemporary music so heavily. This transcultural performance, then, brings together a Chinese and an Irish performer in the "distinct society" of Francophone-dominant Quebec to enact a musical text by a Japanese composer whose practice is clearly steeped in the contemporary compositional rubric of Europe and North America. Each of these cultural traditions are in turn marked by historical transcultural influences of their own that deny any claim to blending of "original" cultures here, but are still frequently framed as such in the artists' and media discussions. Such works move beyond the idea of the hybrid, in that the individual musicians seem to act from a globalized platform that permits unencumbered movement across cultural traditions in pursuit of aesthetic satisfaction and economic recompense, as I address below.¹⁷

Noting her ongoing work in fusing aesthetic forms and cultures, the jury of the Future Generations Millennium Prize, which Liu was awarded by the Canada Council in 2001, stated that Liu “aspires to combine her knowledge and practice of eastern traditions with western classical music, contemporary music and improvisation, thereby creating new musical forms, uniting different cultures and discovering new audiences” [<http://www.liufangmusic.net/English.biography.html> (10 July 2008)]. Highlighting the diasporic musician’s impact on the western musical world, Liu herself states that she is “always thinking of new collaborations and composing new music to integrate the *pipa* into western culture” (Chan 2004), which acts as the locus of her economic success. Her self-labelled “inter-cultural” professional collaborations, like those of many of her conservatory peers, actively seek to break through boundaries of culture in order to build and sustain a broad, lucrative audience in many nations, both within, but especially outside of the Chinese community.

Recently, a great deal of the repertoire Liu interprets beyond traditional Chinese standards is fairly straightforward performance of non-Chinese compositions on the Chinese *pipa* with classical guitar, including performances of North American and European composers such as Philip Glass, Antonio Vivaldi and Bela Bartok, and renditions of Irish or Japanese folk tunes that differ from traditional versions only on the basis of the Chinese instrument on which she performs. Here, Liu simply adds a few traditional “Chinese” techniques such as the five-finger tremolo characteristic to her instrument and an element of timbral shading. These interactions act to frame a space for new social and aesthetic dialogue, but do so largely within a hegemonic socio-economic system that privileges normative Euro-North American cultural tropes. Liu’s professional choices reflect – like most other conservatory-trained Chinese musicians in Canada – a willingness to redirect her aesthetic trajectory in order to conform to the hegemonic culture which she has adopted in an attempt to attain the financial viability that her homeland denied her, but also a creative agency of her own that shapes her particular direction in meeting non-Chinese traditions as a diasporic Chinese musician in Montreal. Here, she elects to work primarily outside of both the Chinese and Québécois microcultures to secure her professional success as Montreal’s most internationally active Chinese musician.

Chih-Lin Chou and GZEMS:

Chih-Lin Chou is a leader in Chinese music pedagogy in Montreal, and teaches the largest number of Chinese students in the city. Beginning in 2002, Chou

directed a youth ensemble of sixteen *guzheng*, *erhu*, *pipa*, percussion and western cello players called Gu-Zheng Ensemble of Montreal (GZEMs). She states that her students are “mostly second generation Chinese” youth (personal communication, August 7, 2009), encouraged to maintain connection with their parents’ natal culture. Chih-Lin is relatively isolated as a Chinese instrumentalist, having never met any Chinese musicians outside of southern Quebec despite having lived in Canada for over fifteen years. In fact, touring *pipa* player Liu Fang is one of the very few Chinese performers from Montreal who regularly interacts with musicians outside of her province. However, under the guidance of Professor Kevin Austin, Chou studied music at Concordia University in Montreal, quickly becoming influenced by her professor’s passion for improvisation and electro-acoustic music.

In 2006, Chou met musical partner Yang Li, a traditional *erhu* player who had at that point never attempted an improvised performance. Unphased by this, the two musicians began to create their own new works by at first stringing together large sections of other pieces, and then gradually learning to improvise compositions of their own that create a new transcultural musical language. Like other conservatory trained Chinese musicians who constantly seek the development of iconic new styles, the ensemble has recently worked to create their own unique “extended techniques” on their traditional Chinese instruments, such as double stops on the *erhu* played by using a wider bow fixed between the two strings in traditional Chinese fashion. Such efforts have aided the musicians in extending their dialogue with the particular Western free improvisation and electroacoustic traditions that Chou’s former professor introduced to them and continues to encourage them to engage. Through this creative process, the musicians seem to attain the “certain elemental, organic energy and open-endedness” that Paul Young describes in his analysis of Bakhtin’s argument for the subversive power of hybridity (Young 1995:21-22). While we are reminded continually of the hegemonic nature of uneven cultural interactions, Young argues that Homi Bhabha expands Bakhtin’s positive view by celebrating hybridity’s ability to present “an active moment of challenge and resistance against a dominant colonial power” (Young 1995:23). Importantly, the “organic energy and open-endedness” of individual agency must not be shunted to the side by the realistic recognition of the larger societal constraints against which such individuals act, for to do so is not only unduly (but popularly) pessimistic, but also presents an incomplete, unfair, and inaccurate model of transcultural interactions.

In 2007, Austin and Chou established the BBP music studio, from which they teach Chinese *guzheng*, *erhu*, theory and improvisation, along with associated musicians. Since November 2007, the Canadian Association of Orien-

tal Fine Arts (CAOFA) has been Montreal's center of operations for students seeking internationally recognized formal accreditation on traditional Chinese instrumental performance through China's conservatory exams, which are held annually in Canada by visiting examiners from the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing.¹⁸ In its first year in Montreal, twenty students took the mainland Chinese exams in Concordia University's concert hall, and received a stamp of approval from one of the most prestigious institutes in mainland China, with an average Chinese instrument grade of eighty-five percent. One of Austin's heartfelt aims is to bring together in collaboration all Asian arts and regions under the umbrella of the CAOFA organization. As such, CAOFA has organized pan-Asian concerts with Chinese, Vietnamese, Georgian and Russian musicians performing in successive sets in which each community shares its artistic culture. Again, Montreal's local artists creatively exert their own individual agency to permeate cultural boundaries through musical performance. As musicians, Chou, Li and Austin have each learned new ways of speaking with their instruments that reflect the cultural tropes of their adopted communities, and a shared desire to reach and communicate across cultural boundaries. Pierre Bourdieu suggests that "linguistic exchanges...are also relations of symbolic power in which the power relations between speakers or their respective groups are actualized" (1991:38). Although the history of disparity in power between their representative communities of origin cannot be forgotten or glossed over, these individual musicians have worked hard to construct an equal playing ground to bring these communities together in the present through creative self-expression, and the positivity of this reaching out must not be negated by the framing politics of power.

In their most recent compact disc recording (*Poems of Du Fu* 2009), Chou, Li and Austin provide a soundscape for Keith Holyoak's translation and reading of a series of eighteen brief classical Chinese poems by Du Fu. The CD producer, Airom Bleicher, states in the liner notes that he sought a composer "who could reflect Keith's translation style, staying true to the classical authenticity of the poetry but with a contemporary edge, making the work accessible to today's audience" (2009). Attempts at "authenticity" notwithstanding, the western translator's readings seem rather too emotionally-extroverted for this style of reserved classical Chinese poetry, in which metaphor, subtle shadings of language, and pregnant moments of emptiness are used to express emotion traditionally thought unseemly to voice directly. Yet the musical soundscape, described by the producer as a distillation of three hours of "partially improvised" studio performance in Montreal that animated readings recorded in California (Holyoak 2009), seems to counteract this effect in many tracks, providing a languid, almost stream of consciousness underscore to the poetry.

In these selections, the non-teleological structure of many traditional Chinese compositions, where cohesiveness is wrought by repetition of short melodic motifs rather than large sections of a piece, seems to work easily with the free improvisation techniques that Li and Chou have learned. Indeed, Chou and Li make use of many common traditional Chinese motifs in their improvisations: in effect they adapt their Chinese musical vocabulary to a new western grammar, putting their past skills and knowledge to use in a new framework.

For the poem “Facing the Snow,” the piece begins with a bold double strike on a large low-pitched gong – that stereotyped sonic symbol of Chineseness used to indicate Chinatown in outdated movies. The *erhu* then takes over with a long legato undulating line, in a style typical of traditional southeastern Chinese melodies in which the aesthetic preference is for seamlessly linked motifs that create “an unbroken silken thread” (Chow-Morris 2004). The *erhu* line presents many familiar-sounding traditional Chinese melodic figurations but recombines them to create a new melody – a compositional technique common in contemporary mainland China, but created here, again, in the framework of the contemporary free improvisation which Chou and Li have been learning with Austin. While these two compositional approaches merge easily, the dominantly placed gong seems to reify “Chineseness” in this piece by pinning it on a stereotype that draws in many non-Chinese performers in their first approaches to Chinese music, much like the pentatonic piano tune “Chinese Chopsticks,” and juxtaposing it with a southeastern style melody with which this kind of northern Chinese percussion would never traditionally appear. Such overt blending of regional signifiers would be heard as a cultural and aesthetic pastiche by modern Chinese audiences, and while this composition does not appear on the surface to represent an overt act of cultural hybridity, both contemporary western and Chinese approaches to Chinese music and poetry are clearly merged in this composition, thus reflecting culturally different ways of exploring new aesthetic tropes by each of the Chinese and Caucasian artists.

Shen Qi:

Local musician Shen Qi, who has lived in Montreal for fifteen years, has performed *erhu* for three hours a day most afternoons of the week since 1998, in the largest Chinese-style pavilion of the Chinese Garden. In a corner of the pavilion, she plays through a diverse repertoire, stopping often to answer questions from curious guests, with a selection of the five CDs that she recorded over a ten-year period of her life displayed in front of her for sale. Her

CD sales form her only income from her daily concerts, as the Chinese Garden administration charges her \$500 per month to rent a small corner of the pavilion in which to perform, all the while requiring her to maintain a strict employment schedule (personal communication, August 9, 2009). During the global economic crisis of 2008-2009, Qi noted that a decline in tourists visiting the venue forced her to question the viability of sustaining herself through her work at the garden. Qi supplements her income by teaching private lessons on her traditional instrument for \$35 per hour, and relates that only half of her students are Chinese, while the other half are Caucasians or Vietnamese who have seen her perform at the Botanical Gardens or elsewhere (personal communication, August 13, 2008), and choose to transgress the boundaries of Otherness by actively participating in Chinese artistic culture in Quebec.

Based on my fieldwork and several decades of involvement in the Chinese music communities across Canada, this multicultural student base appears to be fairly unique to Qi, outside of university settings, which reflects again the greater connection between the small Chinese microculture in Montreal and the wider community – a connection which is predicated on a



Figure 1. Shen Qi playing *erhu* in the Chinese pavilion at the Montreal Botanical Gardens (Photo by the author. Used with permission)

practical need for the Chinese community in Montreal to reach beyond their own loose borders in order to sustain themselves. Qi reveals that the Chinese Garden once saw a much heavier stream of American tourists than in recent times, and notes that they often expressed surprise to hear Chinese music in Canada, where Caucasian cultural homogeneity was assumed (personal communication, August 13, 2008). Qi's performances in the well-attended Botanical Gardens offer her a unique opportunity to educate not only local residents and Canadians, but also visitors from abroad about the very existence of her culture in Canada, thus helping to redefine publicly the identity of Montreal as a multicultural urban center and to reposition Chinese cultural activities within it despite ongoing internal cultural tensions.

Shen Qi has performed with other traditional Chinese instrumentalists, including two different *guzheng* players, and a *yangqin* performer, but relates somewhat wistfully that each eventually felt drawn to return to their homelands in China. Like others of the community, she laments the fact that it is difficult to find traditional Chinese music partners with whom to perform in Montreal – a fact which again makes the microcultural Chinese community in Quebec distinct from those in Toronto, Vancouver, Richmond, Calgary and Edmonton, where Chinese instrumentalists and vocalists are in much greater supply and musical connections within the Chinese community significantly easier to sustain. Qi has thus turned elsewhere for musical connection. She performed on the prestigious Québécois Cirque du Soleil acrobatic troupe's *Kooza* recording, and was invited to join the group as an *erhu* player, reflecting the well-known acrobatic troupe's efforts to include minority cultural groups in its performances. The Cirque du Soleil, established in 1984 with funding from the government of Quebec (Dickinson and Young 2008:370), is known for popular, but somewhat abstracted and atemporal uses of "ethnic" cultures, which are blended in fantastical postmodern hybridizations intended to be read by their audiences as simply "exotic." Nonetheless, Qi's work inside the Chinese Garden prevented her from accepting the circus' and other performance invitations, which might have changed the direction of her artistic career by providing a broad mainstream audience and artistic collaborators with a primarily western performance aesthetic. Instead, in addition to performing with Vietnamese *dan bau* and *erhu* player Huu Bach Quach, whom she recommended for the Cirque du Soleil performances, Qi has branched out by creating her own new forms of intercultural music.

In 2007, Qi joined with Chinese cellist Luo Di to form the duet VI Strings, which performs at cultural festivals and other venues. Their repertoire includes traditional Chinese standards such as "Stepping Higher and Higher," "Moon Over Two Springs" and "Fisherman's Song," all of which are

frequently performed in Chinese diasporic communities throughout Canada, but also their own version of Western standards such as “Danny Boy,” “Pachelbel Canon,” and Vittorio Monti’s dramatic turn of the century melody, “Czardas.” Qi also accepted an invitation to join the jazz sextet Le Carré Saint-Louis, with whom she reinterprets traditional Chinese melodies like “Racing Horses” as the head of a jazz chart. As I mentioned earlier, Qi and her ensemble have performed in the popular Montreal Jazz Festival, where she absorbed many inflections of the genre. Open to trying on many new aesthetic styles, Qi nonetheless related that she still prefers Chinese music to jazz, as she finds it to express “more emotion,” and professes that she does not yet quite “get” the jazz style that forms an important part of Montreal’s dominant musical discourse (personal communication, August 13, 2008). While the product of her “hybridized” cultural experimentations sounds integrated and musically well-blended, it is evident that she still feels more connected to Chinese artistic culture than to that of the contemporary West.

These performances create an intimate connection, where cultural aesthetics and social difference – dual exteriorities – are creatively brought to the fore, explored and ultimately negotiated into a new whole. This creative process is reflected in Shen Qi’s latest self-produced CD offering, *Soulful Strings*, published in 2007. Qi’s self-professed “favourite,” and the most recent of her five recordings, includes a mix of Chinese repertoire from different regions of the country: “Danse de Yao,” a contemporary Chinese arrangement of a Yao minority folk tune from Yunnan province which is played across Canada in diasporic Chinese orchestras in British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario; “La course de chevaux” (Racing Horses), a Chinese repertoire standard that features the Chinese two-stringed bowed lute; “Alamuhan,” a Uighur folk song from Xinjiang province; movie theme song “Chanson du Mont Yimeng” (Song of Yimeng Mountain); and the Yuan dynasty classical *guzhen* solo “Adieux à Yangguan” (Parting at Yangguan Pass). As noted in the earlier discussion of Liu Fang’s creative practice, the glossing and blending of regionally and temporally diverse Chinese repertoire supported by western chordal harmonies, countermelodies and forms is standard in contemporary concerts by Chinese performers who have trained in the national Chinese conservatories, as many of Montreal’s Chinese performers have done. These standards of the contemporary Chinese professional musician’s repertoire also mark intentional fusions of East and West.

Accompanied variously by western cello, guitar, bass, flute, recorder, and Chinese *guzheng* with European chordal harmonies, Qi also presents western repertoire on her Chinese *erhu*, including Puccini’s aria “O mio babbino caro” from the opera *Gianni Schicchi*, Dvorak’s aria “Song to the Moon” from

the turn of the twentieth century opera *Rusalka* (1918), and the popular tune “Danny Boy,” often viewed as the anthem of the Irish diaspora. Qi’s compact disc recordings over a ten-year period show her transition from performing purely traditional Chinese music on her first album, including such melodies as “Longing for the Homeland,” to her current engagement with western hybrid musical experiments. While she loves the emotion expressed in traditional Chinese repertoire, Qi admits that she is sometimes tired of playing the same traditional pieces again and again (personal communication, August 9, 2009). Yet despite her own desire to explore new repertoire, she relates that visitors to the Chinese Gardens have demonstrated through their fluctuating interest in compact disc sales that they prefer that she play “authentic” Chinese repertoire, such as the Chinese conservatory’s western-influenced re-compositions of traditional folk tunes, and give substantially less support to that which they perceive as western melodies or cultural hybridizations on her *erhu* (personal communication, August 9, 2009).

Such protests notwithstanding, and at the risk of real financial disincen-tive, all of the dozen tracks on Qi’s latest recording combine, with the excep-tion of one Chinese traditional selection, both western and Chinese instru-ments including, in various combinations, the featured *erhu*, *guzheng*, soprano voice (Shen Qi’s Mandarin and vocable singing), cello, guitar, double bass, flute, recorder, and small percussion.¹⁹ Here, the reified archetypes of “East” and “West” appear to blend unself-consciously, with artists inspired primarily by organic aesthetic impulses, as the rigid margins of each cultural trope seem to melt away. Although the merging of cultural elements does not confront the listener as contrived in Qi’s recording, one might be tempted to argue that the music is an example of the westernization of Chinese music, or conversely, the sinicization of western music: yet the boundaries between these two opposing acts require an assessment of dominant agency that is too simplistic to reflect justly the sensitivity and creativity of the process that these culturally diverse musicians have enacted. The shared agency of the musicians’ creative interac-tions may more accurately be considered an act of abrogation which reclaims the musical text and sets it on new ground.

Moreover, despite the active process by which cultures are blended here, to label this aesthetic product a hybridized artifact of westernization or sinici-zation unfairly highlights and demarcates duality, and pushes the whole to the shadows. Sarah Weiss argues in her article “Permeable Boundaries: Hybridity, Music, and the Reception of I La Galigo” (2008) that “thinking about hybrid-ity...makes us think about boundaries, be they cultural or genre. It makes us question our expectations for and ideas about the nature of boundaries, in particular, what they mean both to us and others” (233). Considering both

product and process in turn, without deflecting the satisfying wholeness of the resultant aesthetic product, we must recognize, too, that the creative aesthetic and cultural interplay of Qi and her Caucasian Québécois musicians have provoked the performers to pierce the socio-politically constructed boundaries of Us and Them, Self and Other, that often stand between the Chinese and non-Chinese communities: herein, the musicians have done so enthusiastically and rendered an organic aesthetic result.

In Qi's adaptation of "*Danse de Yao*" (Dance of the Yao), a Chinese *guoyue* standard that borrows melodies from south-western Yunnan province, the piece opens with a slow *guzheng* introduction played by Rao Shuhang. This gives way to a slightly jazzy ornamented western flute, played by Robert O'Callaghan, which takes over the dominant melody as the *guzheng* accompanies with block and broken chords. Soon Qi's *erhu* enters and takes the melody, while the *guzheng* continues its accompaniment of bass notes, doubled melody notes, and glissandi – known in Chinese music as "waterfalls," and easily identifiable as the most idiomatic *guzheng* technique. Next, the flute takes over the lead on melody once again, as the *erhu* shifts smoothly to countermelody and the doubling of inner chord notes from the *guzheng*'s ongoing chordal and glissandi accompaniment. The western flute and Chinese *erhu* continue to pass the melody back and forth, creating a texturally balanced interpretation in which neither East nor West can be heard as dominant – an unexpected choice in a solo recording in which the featured performer might typically be expected to remain largely in the foreground. In a brief bridge, the *guzheng* plays broken chords and glissandi beneath its own melody, while the *erhu* doubles chord notes. The piece continues to pass the melody and accompaniment parts between the flute, *erhu* and *guzheng*, with chordal, contrapuntal, and glissandi accompaniment by the *erhu* and *guzheng* and occasional scalar accents from the flute.

In the western piece "Danny Boy," the interplay of instruments is similar, and here too, the Chinese and western instruments continuously exchange positions of foregroundedness in the musical texture. A brief cello introduction opens the piece and gives way to a straightforward rendition of the melody on *erhu*, accompanied by first pizzicato and then arco cello. A recorder soon enters and takes over the melody in an ornamented version with cello countermelody. The melody is then passed back to the *erhu* with arco cello countermelody, followed by the addition of the recorder on countermelody as the cello plays bass. Next, the recorder takes up the melody switching places with the *erhu* on countermelody while the cello plays a bass line. The *erhu* then takes up the melody while the recorder again plays countermelody, and the cello continues to sustain a bass line. The recorder shifts to melody once more,

with *erhu* counter melody and a pizzicato cello accompaniment. The *erhu* then switches places a final time to play melody while the recorder plays counter-melody and the cello maintains an arco bass line. Finally, the piece dissipates over a set of mildly dissonant chords.

Despite my awareness of both cultural influences as a listener well versed in both aesthetics, the blending of eastern and western instruments and aesthetic styles does not leap out at me or strike me as contrived.²⁰ Rather, the recording provokes me to listen to a piece I “know” with fresh ears, newly attentive to the expressive potential of the melody and the creative possibilities it holds. Although Chinese instruments and musicians “take over” the familiar western melody at different points in the piece, I hear the performance neither as a Chinese appropriation nor domination of Western music; nor do I hear the inclusion of western instruments and musicians in “Danse de Yao” as a Western appropriation or domination of Chinese music. Through the intermingling of Chinese and western instruments and idiomatic techniques, the interpretation offers something fresh that is not simply the sum of its two parts. Thus while the process of merging aesthetics and cultures of different origins rests on conscious agency, and may easily be read as an act of hybridization that reflects the effects of both transculturation and reverse transculturation, the result itself is its own unified whole of nestled parts in an endless process of becoming nothing other than its own organic and authentic self.

Sarah Weiss suggests that performers of culturally hybrid music are frequently scrutinized with regard to their perceived “authenticity,” and questions “our assumptions about the nature of cultural boundaries and how we feel not only about the results of blending, blurring, de-centering, or otherwise shifting them, but how we use the cultural authenticity of those doing the hybridizing to help us assess the ‘quality’ or at least our reception of the production” (2008:218). Against the disapproval of her Chinese pavilion guests, this point becomes salient for Qi’s newest creative work. In her liner notes, written in French, English and Chinese, Shen Qi outlines her intentions in blending cultural influences in this contemporary recording: “combining not only oriental and occidental music, but also traditional and modern music, Qi’s recording *Soulful Strings* embodies the deeply expressive force of *erhu* and the international flavour of our time.” But although Qi attests to her awareness of larger cultural and temporal collusions, this artistic output is also intensely personal to her as a musician in diaspora:

My playing style has evolved from techniques based on traditional [Chinese] methods to one that I would consider today as a kind of soulful expression...the embodiment of my individuality. My

music enables me to view my deepest truths and breaks all language barriers to become part of my body and soul. Through the *erhu* I exchange all that is natural and good in life while allowing its sounds to grasp other people's heartstrings. (2007)

The recognition of her own movement away from traditional Chinese playing techniques to something that embodies her own "individuality" and "breaks all language barriers," suggests that the creative process reflected in this recording mirrors a personal struggle for individual agency that Qi has undertaken in her own life as a Chinese "outsider" in Francophone Quebec. This recording project, then, represents in Shen Qi's mind her own attempt to cross the nebulous boundaries of "us" and "them" in her cultural community through artistic creativity and cultural improvisation. Her recording process reflects what Lisa Lowe calls the "heterotropic spaces from which new practices are generated at the intersections of unevenly produced categories of otherness" (1991:24). Yet in her artistic output, it is clear that Qi may be read as both colonized and colonizer, at once possessing the agency to appropriate, recontextualize and subvert both western and Chinese musical repertoire,²¹ yet also acted upon by broader hegemonic forces in her presentation of Chinese melodies for consumption by a primarily western mainstream audience afforded disproportionate socio-economic clout. Here, Homi K. Bhabha's critique of Edward Said's "suggestion that colonial power and discourse is possessed entirely by the colonizer" as "an historical and theoretical simplification" seems as obvious as the problematics of attempting to inscribe firm boundaries between microculture and macroculture in such complex terrain (Bhabha 1987:158).²²

Conclusion

Indeed, each of these performers in Montreal's Chinese music community hold multivalent positions, both acting and being acted upon, as they press against and sometimes through the barriers that separate to create social and artistic conversations that unite and form new wholes. These musicians intentionally reach out across cultural boundaries in ways that mediate their own creative agency and the selves that others urge them – overtly or otherwise – to present in the name of authenticity, exoticism and economic viability. The aesthetic products and processes of Montreal's small, but heterogeneous Chinese music community reveal an array of responses to the artists' tenuous positions at once on the inside and on the outside. As we have seen, some of the

performances in Montreal's Chinese music community reflect confluences of space and time that reify "Chineseness," presenting Chinese culture as ancient, unchanging and unthreatening. Some musicians work to adapt the traditional aesthetic vocabulary of the homeland to a new western framework, or direct their energies practically to achieving economic viability in the globalized Euro-North American aesthetic marketplace. Other musicians have become adept at marrying Western and Chinese approaches to musical creation, building common ground through the very process of composition. Still others are successful in engaging creative play that seems organically to bridge fossilized constructs of East and West in spaces that the musicians aspire to make level. The concept of hybridity strikes at the heart of postmodern discourse itself, by shining light on the issue of fracture. As evidenced by this examination of heterogeneous acts of cultural cross-pollination in Montreal's Chinese diaspora, it is crucial, too, that we recognize the organic whole that results when cultural roots are drawn together in the creation of dynamic new artistic works and social spaces that complicate perceived barriers between insider and outsider. 🌿

Select Glossary

Arco: the technique of playing a string instrument by drawing a bow across the strings.

Dan Bau: a Vietnamese monochord whose pitch is changed by altering the tension of an affixed buffalo horn; the main indigenous instrument of Vietnam.

Dizi: a transverse bamboo flute with a bamboo membrane that creates a buzzy timbre.

Erhu: a two-stringed bowed lute with a python skin-covered sound box.

Gaohu: a high-pitched two-stringed bowed lute that is popular as a lead instrument in Cantonese ensemble music; a smaller member of the *erhu* family.

Guqin: an ancient plucked table zither commonly associated with Chinese literati.

Guzheng: a rectangular plucked zither with a harp-like sound.

Hulusi: a gourd-based mouth organ with one melodic and one drone pipe, which is popular in Yunnan province, China.

Jianpu: a cipher notation system used throughout China in modern times; literally "simple notation," this form of score writing is more specific in detailing rhythm and octaves than Chinese *gongchepu* character notation.

Pipa: a pear-shaped plucked fretted lute played with artificial plastic fingernails.

Pizzicato: the technique of playing a bowed string instrument by plucking the strings.

Sheng: a mouth organ traditionally made of gourd and bamboo pipes; the instrument is intended to resemble the mythical phoenix and in contemporary times exists in a family of different sizes.

Yangqin: a trapezoidal hammered dulcimer said to have descended from the Middle Eastern *santur*.

Yehu: a two-stringed bowed lute with a half-coconut shell soundbox that is played in Taiwan and southern China.

Zhongruan: a medium-sized fretted plucked lute with a round sound box.

Notes

1. I offer my grateful thanks to the anonymous reviewers of this article and editor Gordon E. Smith who offered many helpful suggestions.

2. While hybridity is criticized for its roots in negative imperialist descriptions of the mixing of races, hybridity is defined here as the joining or meeting of cultures viewed as distinctive by members from within those cultures. In this definition, I recognize both the positive subversive and creative possibilities of creolization and the historically hegemonic nature of diasporization (see Hall 1974). As Anjali Prabhu notes, “creolization is closely concerned with a certain synchronic consideration of a people, is forward-looking, and concerned with interaction, while diaspora is premised on a past (and shared) trauma that constitutes and links the members of a group” (2007:13-14). See Prabhu for an analysis of the various ways in which the term hybridity has been used by cultural theorists, and a Marxist critique of the importance of recognizing the implicit role of agency in different constructions of hybridity.

3. See Robert Vachon, director of Montreal’s Centre Interculturel Monchanin, for his insightful analysis of the multiple interpretations of the term “nation,” as it refers to Quebec since the separatist Parti québécois’ election in 1976 (Vachon, Robert and Jacques Langlais 1983).

4. The Portuguese minority community in Quebec, by comparison, has integrated more easily into Quebec society because of its traditional Catholic religious affiliation (Alpalhao 1980:222-237).

5. Chinese immigration to Montreal followed several waves which paralleled those that occurred across Canada, but occurred slightly after each wave reached the West coast of Canada. While the earliest immigrants came largely from a small region of Guangdong province in southern China known as Toishan, later waves came from Fujian, followed by Hong Kong, and since the 1990s, from diverse regions of mainland China. Notably, most Chinese immigrants to Canada came from the southern provinces until the 1990s, and thus northern Chinese culture remains largely unfamiliar to most Canadians.

6. The Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office of Toronto invited the Toronto Chinese Orchestra to perform a recital in the Montreal Chinese Cultural Center and the Complexe Desjardin shopping mall in 2008 and 2010, thus linking two diasporic Chinese microcultures which had not previously interacted musically. To

the amusement of the Toronto-based performers, who played regionally diverse contemporary repertoire, the 2010 performance was promoted as “Hong Kong in Montreal” on promotional posters.

7. In 1999, the *Amitié chinoise de Montréal* petitioned the Quebec government to “abroger les clauses juridiques dérogoires qui maintiennent des privilèges confessionnels” [repeal the derogatory legal clauses that maintain denominational privileges] of the Roman Catholic religion in Quebec’s public schools, which they argued extend exclusive privileges to Catholics and Protestants. The Chinese society argued that these exclusive rights “contribuent à freiner l’intégration et la participation des citoyens d’origine chinoise à la société québécoise” [contribute to impeding the integration and the participation of citizens of Chinese origin in Quebec society] (1999:3).

8. Bills 22 (1974) and 101 (1977) both attempted to inscribe the dominance of the French language in Quebec’s culture through restrictions on access to English language schools and bans on public signs in languages other than French. Bill 101 further discouraged multilingualism by proclaiming French as the “normal language of work, education, communications, and business” (Dickinson and Young 2008:324).

9. See Teitelbaum (1987) for insights into the relatively greater ease with which the French-speaking Haitian and Moroccan Jewish communities have integrated in Quebec society, and Vachon and Langlais (1983) for insights from individual ethnic minorities on the complexities of perceived linguistic and cultural affiliations in Quebec.

10. In Vachon and Langlais (1983), the premise of an “original” homogenous Caucasian Francophone culture is problematized by historical evidence of Amerindian immigration to Quebec from Asia more than 10,000 years ago (2; 44-51), African explorers of North America who left behind inscribed stones as early as 500 B.C., African translators of native languages who assisted European explorers like the “Father of New France,” Samuel de Champlain in 1606 (53-54), and Jewish settlers who arrived in Quebec as early as 1759, shortly after France lifted its ban on Jewish settlers in its colony (63). The term “colonization” originally referred to the imperial expansion and domination of indigenous cultures by European powers; however, the term, as used here, is expanded to include hegemonic cultural subjugation in a broader sense. Dorsinville (1983) uses the closely-related terms “dominator” and “dominated” to address the complex problem of non-imperial hierarchical oppression in regions such as Quebec, French Africa and the Caribbean (see also Ashcroft 1989:32-33).

11. This analysis includes musicians who perform Chinese music in contemporary, traditional or fusion forms, and spans both Chinese and non-Chinese performers, with an emphasis on those musicians most active in this regard in Montreal. There are large numbers of Chinese immigrants who perform western classical and popular musics at various levels. While the socio-musical interactions of these individuals with both Chinese and western music performers would provide a

fascinating area for future research, a fuller analysis of their role in the Chinese diasporic community falls beyond the scope of this paper except where it relates to the performance of Chinese music or Chinese music venues specifically. In the course of my fieldwork, I did not encounter musicians, other than those noted here, who play Chinese music on western instruments on a significant scale.

12. In Halifax, immigrants from the small Toishan region of the southern Chinese province of Guangdong predominate. In Toronto, the first wave of Toishan residents were initially replaced by an influx of Cantonese and then, since the 1990s, have been supplemented by a surge of mainlanders. In Calgary, the Toishan community was followed by the Cantonese who dominate the community today. Widespread regional opera troupes (Beijing, Cantonese, Fujian, and others) offer more extreme examples of the trend towards musical groups that are primarily defined by regional affiliations. It is important to note, however, that professional musicians are sometimes paid to perform with regional opera troupes when their skills are desirable, despite their lack of connection to that particular natal region.

13. I base this statement on my own extensive fieldwork on Chinese music communities in Halifax, Calgary, Montreal, Toronto, Edmonton, Vancouver, Richmond, Victoria, Saskatoon and Winnipeg.

14. Interestingly, Kevin Austin asserts that the Quebec mainstream feels that Montreal's Vietnamese community should speak French because of the colonial history of French Indochina, yet more readily accepts members of the diasporic Chinese community speaking English rather than the dominant French language.

15. See Richard Handler's excellent discussion of Quebec's preservation and reification of its Francophone "patrimoine" – old cultural artifacts, mores and culturally-significant individuals – as an act of possessive individualism (1988:140-158).

16. Toronto-based *erhu* player George Gao echoes this sentiment (Chan 2001).

17. I do not suggest that these professional musicians are free-floating signifiers, as they each consciously bring their own cultural roots to their creative work from the globalized platform on which they meet.

18. The British Columbia Chinese Orchestra, led by President Bill Lai, organized the Central Conservatory examinations in Vancouver, Toronto, Calgary, Edmonton and Montreal. Beginning in 2007, the Central Conservatory has recently begun examinations in the United States, following the example set in Canada.

19. Many Chinese instruments underwent modernization in the mid-1900s under the influence of western timbral standards. Thus instruments such as the *yangqin* and *zhongruan* are now strung with metal rather than silk strings, which provide an increased projection and dynamic level, as well as a greater degree of resonance. Many Chinese instruments are also available both in western-influenced chromatic versions suited to contemporary repertoire, as well as traditional pentatonic and heptatonic versions suited to non-chromatic repertoire, and in tempered and non-tempered tunings. The inclusion of western instruments such as percussion, cello and double bass is common in the modern Chinese orchestra, reflecting the fusion

of western and Chinese aesthetic influences in performances widely presented as traditional Chinese.

20. My analysis here is informed by nearly thirty years as a western flautist and twenty years as a Chinese wind instrument player and Chinese music scholar.

21. Terence Hawkes argues that “no European theory is likely to be appropriate in different cultural circumstances without itself undergoing radical rethinking – an ‘appropriation’ by a different discourse” (1989:33-34). While a “radical rethinking” of European theory – and by extension, practice – seems to be illustrated by this example, I argue against the negative connotation of “appropriation” in creative interplay which, while sometimes clearly present in creative practice and related to Marxist critiques of hegemonic relationships, suggests that cultural exchange in the aesthetic sphere is exclusively governed by domination and suppression.

22. As Robert Young (1990) and numerous other post-colonialist theorists argue, the assumption of univocality in artificially bounded discourses, such as colonialism and Orientalism, must be contested.

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