



## Theory Reception in China: Report on Journals of Central Conservatory and Shanghai Conservatory of Music

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[1] The Central Conservatory (established 1950) and Shanghai Conservatory (established 1927), now generally recognized as China's top two conservatories of music, started their journals in 1980 and 1979 respectively. These are neither ethnomusicology, musicology, nor theory journals. Specialized journals as such are still unknown in China. Rather, they embrace all these areas and serve at once as newsletters, magazines and scholarly journals. Understandably, original research works published are mainly on Chinese music. And if the influx of western music theory (henceforth "theory" to avoid redundancy) has in the past been checked by various historical factors, its flow today remains slow. Major reasons are poor resourcing and the considerable language barrier. Further, it is also a matter of policy. Conservatories are geared towards the training of composers and performers rather than scholars, this last group being viewed as somewhat supplementary to the whole system. But some importance has traditionally been attached to music analysis in recognition of its relevance to composition and performance, although the focus is on form, orchestration, and the like. A study of nearly two decades of journals published by the Central and Shanghai Conservatories shows a gradual shift from those areas. This report gives a brief account of the changes, noting in particular the dissemination of Schenkerian analysis and set theory.

[2] Descriptive analyses of Beethoven's works appear in early issues of the *Journal of the Central Conservatory of Music* (henceforth *JCCM*). Discussion of various formal issues also figures prominently. V. Protopopv's "The problems of music[al] forms in the works of D. Shostakovich" and M. Wennerstrom's "Form in twentieth-century music," for example, appear consecutively in *JCCM* 28–33 (1987–88), in Chinese translation. And there are many more articles about musical form ranging from a discussion of ritornello form (*JCCM* 36) to a formal analysis of Mendelssohn's *Songs Without Words* (*JCCM* 57). *Art of Music* (quarterly journal of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, henceforth abbreviated as *AM*) seems less preoccupied with the question of form. Instead, a surge of interest in 12-tone music arose around 1985. There were discussions of Schoenberg's Variations for Orchestra, Berg's Violin Concerto, and Webern's Symphony Op. 21, among others.<sup>(1)</sup> This was followed in the late 1980s by *JCCM*'s articles on 12-tone music. Qin Da-Ping's "Reading notes from the analysis of serial music compositions," for instance, also discussed fragments of Schoenberg's Variations for Orchestra and Webern's Symphony Op. 21, and a comprehensive analysis of Berg's Violin Concerto followed suit.<sup>(2)</sup> There are many parallels between articles of the two journals, although interactions as such are seldom acknowledged.

[3] In 1995, a discussion of Schenkerian analysis first appeared in *AM* when a series of six articles outlining twentieth-century analytical theories was published.<sup>(3)</sup> The topics covered ranged from Schenkerian analysis to Schoenberg's motivic analysis, to Meyer's analytical approach. And although these studies were grouped under the title of a critical survey, they remain rather introductory in tone. With *JCCM*, an article introducing Schenker's ideas first appeared in 1987, preceding *AM*'s by eight years. All in all, there are only two Schenkerian articles in *JCCM* (1987 and 1989), and two in *AM*. Both *JCCM* articles were written by Yu Su-Xian, author and editor(!) of a monograph on Schenkerian analysis published (1993), in which musical examples lifted from Felix Salzer's *Structural Hearing* proliferate.<sup>(4)</sup>

[4] Set theory barely receives a wider coverage in these journals. Even considering both *AM* and *JCCM*, there are still only four articles on set theory. The first two of these deal with only one technical side of the theory and in no way tackle the actual analysis of music. Logic in organizing pitches, on the other hand, analyses a Ding Shan-De prelude, drawing at once rigorously and exclusively on Allen Forte's *The Structure of Atonal Music*. That essay did not stir up any discussion nor was it followed by analyses along the same lines. Like other theoretical attempts recorded in *AM* and *JCCM*, it remains very much an isolated incidence. And though set theory was once again taken up in "Tone-sets motion—assembling and dispersion," it does not explore the relevance of set theory as an analytical tool. Instead, a merger of set theory with the ancient Chinese *I Ching*—a kind of data reshuffling—was proposed.<sup>(5)</sup>

[5] Given that Schenkerian analysis and set theory were met with only lukewarm interest, it is indeed surprising that *JCCM* gave great prominence to Leonard B. Meyer's and Eugene Narmour's analytical approach. Shortly before Meyer's *Emotion and meaning in music* (1956) appeared in translation (1991), *JCCM* published two articles about the book.<sup>(6)</sup> And that was coupled with the same journal's publication of up to five articles by Narmour (including journal articles and chapters from books) within a few years time.<sup>(7)</sup> For instance, Narmour's The top-down and bottom-up systems of musical implication, originally published in *Music Perception* in 1991, reappears in *JCCM* as early as 1993—a stark contrast to the thirty-five-year gap which separates *Emotion and Meaning in Music* from its Chinese translation. All of these publications signify considerable interest in Meyer's and Narmour's approach. That interest, however, soon evaporated, to reappear only years later in Yang Yan-Dis "A critical survey of analytical theories in twentieth-century musicology."

[6] In summary, a survey of journals published by Central and Shanghai Conservatories suggests that western music-theory research remains peripheral in today's China. Insofar as original research is concerned, both journals are primarily devoted to scholarship in Chinese music. Articles on theory are at best marginally original in approach. They serve mainly to introduce various theoretical ideas rather than to open up new directions. This is all understandable in a context where availability of up-to-date research materials remains an issue, and the value of scholarly research of music remains dubious. If theory research in China has in the past been cut off from the outside world because of its many ideological preferences, much pride continues to be attached to the training of internationally acclaimed composers and performers. In short, the relevance of musical scholarship still awaits recognition.

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## Footnotes

1. Chen Ming-Zhi, "Analysis of Anton Webern's Symphony (Op.21)," *AM* 23 (1985); Qian Ren-Kang, "Berg's Violin Concerto: a moving composition in the twelve-tone system (I & II)," *AM* 23-4 (1985-6); Zhu Jian, "Schoenberg's Variations for Orchestra," *AM* 37 (1989).

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2. Yang Ru-Huai, “The twelve-tone technique that unfolded in carrying on past tradition and forging ahead into the future—the analysis of Berg’s Violin Concerto (I & II),” *JCCM* 62–3 (1996).

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3. Yang Yan-Di, “A critical survey of analytical theories in twentieth-century musicology (1): musical analysis—a historical review and philosophical reflections,” *AM* 60 (1995); “A critical survey of analytical theories in twentieth-century musicology (2): Schenkerian analysis,” *AM* 61 (1995); “A critical survey of analytical theories in twentieth-century musicology (3): The expansion and modification of Schenkerian analysis,” *AM* 62 (1995); “A critical survey of analytical theories in twentieth-century musicology (4): motivic analysis—Schoenberg and his influences,” *AM* 63 (1995); “A critical survey of analytical theories in twentieth-century musicology (5): Meyer’s theory—psychological approach,” *AM* 64 (1996); “A critical survey of analytical theories in twentieth-century musicology (6): conclusions—critique and prospect,” *AM* 65 (1996). According to the author, a discussion of set theory is omitted as it has already been widely circulated in China in the late 80s.

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4. Schenkerian analysis was offered as an elective course at the Central Conservatory starting from 1987. It could well be Alexander Goehr who first introduced Schenker’s ideas to the Central Conservatory during his 1980 visit.

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5. Luo Zhong-Rong, “A Handy Way of Defining the Basic Form of the Set,” *JCCM* 26 (1987); Zhou Yu, Luo Zhong-Rong, “Inquiry into the Defining of the Basic Form of the Set,” *JCCM* 33 (1988); Luo Zhong-Rong, “Logic in organizing pitches,” *AM* 45 (1991); Zhao Ziao-Sheng, “Tone-sets motion—assembling and dispersion,” *AM* 64 (1996).

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6. He Qian-San, “L.B. Meyer’s *Emotion and Meaning in Music*: one of the representative works of western musical aesthetics (I & II),” *JCCM* (1990), 38–39.

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7. “On the relationship of analytical theory to performance and interpretation,” *JCCM* 48 (1992); “The ‘Genetic code’ of melody, cognitive structures generated by the implication-realization model,” *JCCM* 49 (1992); “The top-down and bottom-up systems of musical implication: Building on Meyer’s theory of emotional syntax,” *JCCM* 50 (1993); “Melodic implication and realization in Debussy’s *La terrasse des audiences du clair de lune*,” *JCCM* 52 (1993); and “The Melodic Structures of Music: Applications and Dimensions of the Implication-Realization Model,” *JCCM* 53 (1993).

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