

PROF LEE Ou Fan:

It is my privilege to speak after three distinguished professionals of music. I'm strictly a layman. I want to use English to facilitate communication.

I originally wanted to talk about a different topic, about architecture, particularly Hong Kong architecture, so I submitted my topic as The Invention of Cities, but I find myself strangely but luckily put amidst such distinguished company, so therefore I would like to combine both topics. Let us begin with music.

I think the topic today, The Dialogue between Tradition and Modernity, in musical terms, I think represents a new invention. We all know that in western music, most compositions and composers are moving toward a direction of what I might call beyond modernism. Modernism can be defined as a creation of musical forms, a new musical language, right after the Second World War. Those of you who are interested can always go to the very interesting seven-part documentary called Leaving Home, especially that segment called After the Wake.

Modernism arose in Europe for a purpose, because the Second World War reduced European culture to ruins. Out of the ruins of decay and devastation, musicians, artists and writers wanted to envision another world, a new world and they have to use a new language. The side effect of this new eruption is a certain eradication of tradition. However, music is a very strange thing. No matter how much you want to eradicate traditional forms, tradition, especially symphonic forms, sonata forms, continue to recur as if in a kind of a ghostly fashion.

The composer that I respect and like very much among contemporary European composers is the Italian composer Luciano Berio. He once gave a series of distinguished lectures at Harvard University and I was privileged to attend one such lecture.

He really talked about Mahler a lot and I just realised that in one of his compositions, he quoted Mahler's 7th Symphony, in very, very novel and strange ways, as if such quotations assume a new meaning and a new context and become part of his own new musical language.

I would call this reinvention, but also I will call this a dialogue, a dialogue in his own terms, with a past that continues to hover over his creative horizon.

Chinese composers and I'm privileged to know a few of them, have always been bothered by a similar question; namely, if we want to study western musical forms, using western scores, what about my Chinese origin? What about Chinese tradition, in other words?

If we look back to the period right after the Cultural Revolution, it's written up in some of the novels, you will find people like Qu Xiaosong common to you and Tan Dun and others, in fact they were friends of A-cheng who spoke yesterday. They were actively engaged in searching out for the roots of folk music. In other words, they would like to find some inspiration from Chinese folk music. Qu Xiaosong's early compositions are clearly examples of this. Tan Dun down to the present day continues with his own elaborations of folk Chinese idioms, but in his own musical language.

Last year, I think two years ago, my wife and I went to Macau and heard a very interesting performance of his water music which was supposed to be also a tribute to the music of Bach, but of course the water motif was from Chinese painting in fact real water as some of you will have heard that piece.

So the question facing modern Chinese composers in many ways is the same. How to evolve something new out of the old, rather than how to eradicate everything that is old in order to create something new.

This is my thesis about beyond modernism. Fortunately for China, there was the May 4th Movement and the shadows of the May 4th continue to hover over the intellectual horizons of contemporary China, since I'm a Professor of Literature, so I know the May 4th code.

The central impetus of the May 4th ideology is the disruption of the old. New China, new culture cannot be borne without a total destruction of ancient Chinese traditions. Nowadays, this sounds like a bizarre

position, but of course if you read the history books, that was a generally shared view, precisely because in the 1910s and 1920s, modern China was

trying to become a new China, a new nation state, so in many ways the May 4th movement was a perfect cultural manifestation of that historical transition.

Given the May 4th tradition, which I will call the modern Chinese tradition, if you like, we now have a situation in which contemporary artists are struggling between two poles. On one hand, the old issue of total westernisation in musical terms, let's call that international style. On the other hand, they continue to search for traditional roots in order to reformulate their artistic identities.

The result has been quite interesting and I must stake out my own position. I'm solidly opposed to the former and in support of the latter. That is to say that I always find different creative dialogues of modern forms and traditional motifs to be very, very interesting.

Some of us have seen or have heard a very interesting performance by the Hong Kong Philharmonic two nights ago of Chen Qigang's very interesting piece which in Chinese is called Die Lian Hua. It is supposed to be sort of a six or seven portrait in musical terms of a woman's emotions. The musical language is totally different from the Shumberg tradition. When I first heard it without reading the programme notes, I heard birds, I heard bees and then of course I thought about Olivia Mi'sion. Sure enough, Mr Chan studied with Olivia Mi'sion. We know that of course Mi'sion was a great inventor who basically heralded the new tradition of composing beyond the regulations of time and tempo.

When you listen to Mi'sion's bird music, you listen to the birds. You forget about the beat. You forget about the typical rhythm. So he ushers words and music into a new arena. Chen Qigang, in my view, seized on that possibility and returns it to a Chinese motif, so in his own ears, he hears birds and bees, but not in the western formulation, because when we think about Die Lian Hua, we think about Zhao Feng Yin, we think about butterflies, bees and flowers.

If you can sort of conjure up a certain mental image with the help of classical Chinese poetry, when your ears are listening to a kind of Mi'sion like music, you suddenly realise that Chen Qigang was grouping towards something.

I find his music to be very searching in the sense that he's grouping toward a new aesthetic. I think he's still doing that, an aesthetic that hopefully will recall or will bring back the echos of historical memories.

If you think about the two sopranos, one singing in the traditional way, the other in a western way, they begin with singing in the front and then they go back to the stage and they take turns to sing, so of course these are two personas of the same woman. But not only that, they are singing, bringing back echos of a certain forgotten past, so with the help of the orchestra and the traditional Chinese musical instruments, we hear the refrains or the new melodies of our past. This is strangely reminiscent but to me even more interesting then, the film *Raise the Red Lantern* and then I realised after reading the programme notes, in fact, Chen Qigang did the music for the ballet version of the film *Raise the Red Lantern*.

What I'm trying to say is that we come to, today, that is to say, in the present, we come to a certain crucial point. I think some of the Chinese compositions have merged to this topic, namely a creative or recreative or reinventive dialogue with modernity and tradition.

If music is, after all, an art form of time, you have to have a duration. You have to have notes. The new question would be: can music also be an art form of space? My answer is definitely yes. Think about the pauses, the intervals and if you look at some of the scores, you will see that they look very special, sort of a score that goes like this. I remember Chen Qigang once showed me his score. It's very special. Sometimes I'm thinking of the sort of structural patterns of *Festival Walk*. If you look at the architectural forms, they also sort of curving lines, special, very much like musical score.

In other words, music tries to break from the confines of the time bound traditional form, without, however, losing the grip of its, shall we say, traditional cultural roots. In that sense, music carries on its past tradition. As Prof Polisi mentioned, we heard also Stravinski's masterpiece, *The Rite of Spring*.

Some of you may know that the German philosopher be a vulgar primitive composer, using Russian folk tunes in order to cater to the vulgar American or world public. Arderno was wrong. Who is listening to the later

Shumberg except professionals and people like me? I love Shumberg too. The general musical public of course still listens to Stravinski.

In musical terms, Stravinski's Rite of Spring, let's forget about the images, basically emphasises rhythm. You have to get the beat right. I found the beat to be a little bit slow for my own taste, that performance. I thought the performance in the 1970s was better. But at the same time, that beat brings out a certain dynamism, which is very hard to pin down for the sort of late 20th century audience. When Stravinski wrote that piece in the early 20th century, of course, the 19th century tradition was still alive, so that primitivism was a form of artistic modernism of that point. But now how do we re-encounter the old primitive motifs? My friend and the famous choreographer, Lin Hwai-min once did a marvellous piece, a dance piece, based entirely on The Rite of Spring. I remember that when I attended rehearsals, he really got all the dancers tired out. It was a sustained dynamic portrait of urban life, urban young people.

So in a way, Stravinski is re-invented by Lin Hwai-min and becomes a representative of the dynamism of the western or the metropolitan city.

If you think along those lines, then it becomes even more interesting, because this will bring me to my architectural problem. If Stravinski and for that case, some of the other words and music, Gershwin, for instance, who uses jazz, reminds people of urban life, urban forms. What about architecture? Can architecture learn something from music? Can architecture be an art, not only of space, but of time?

I always quoted from a very difficult book by the architectural historian Christian Boyer. The book is called The City of Collective Memory. She argues in the first chapter of that book that western cities have evolved across several phases, from ancient Rome as a work of art to 19th century Paris as a city of panorama, to the late 20th century city of Los Angeles and maybe Hong Kong, as a city of spectacle or visual spectacle, if you like, and finally she argues that we should move toward a city of collective memory.

What is collective memory? This is the issue that I have been thinking about. Can architectural forms sustain a certain -- I wouldn't use the word "continuity", but a certain linkage, a re-invented linkage with memories of the past.

If that's the case, let's look at a very interesting exhibition of Hong Kong architecture at a recent Venice Biennale which is now on exhibition in the lobby of the Bank of China. This new concept is called displacement. The slogan says the following.

Value added displacement and metamorphosis and forwarding the possible. This will lead to something creative. A very interesting concept, because "displacement" as a term has been used repeatedly by theorists in cultural studies, but it is not replacement. The "displacement" meaning is to put something new into a context, thereby changing that context. That is called in Chinese, this is translated Yue Wei. Some kind of transgression. But it could be juxtaposition, it could be a reshuffling of possibilities. So therefore, in so doing, you can unfold some new possibilities.

Very well put for a city of tremendous density of people and space, so Hong Kong architecture thrives on using limited space, by making all sorts of small creations in limited spaces, such as a typical housing unit. Somehow strangely it reminds me of the music of a Hungarian composer who also composes minuscule compositions.

The question about Hong Kong architecture is that such inventive overtures are overwhelmed by the major financial project of housing development. We have one building after another all skyscrapers, all built in the same way. In a very vivid local term, this is called the jungle of cement. In Cantonese, it is shek see sum lam.

So the diversity of Hong Kong culture is now reduced to become more and more homogenous, functionality, profit making and of course bureaucracy. All the worse fears are now being realised in the public housing project, in Hong Kong architecture, if you want to put it very severely.

At the same time, new overtures, new possibilities continue to evolve, especially among some of the local critics, performers and the Hong Kong people. This is what I wanted to talk about two years ago. I remember clearly a rebuttal against Guggenheim, but I was not given my time. I remember my gestures.

If you think along this way, Hong Kong is a typical test case of, shall we say, transgression or in this case, displacement. What remains to be seen is after you displace something, after you unfold something, can you

find something truly meaningful and deeply related to the long tradition of China? That is my open question. Thank you.