

*Reality of the Exotic: Australian cultural engagement with East Asia, as demonstrated through a selection of Duncan McKie's mid-20<sup>th</sup> century art songs.*

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In July 2016, Australia went to the polls to vote in a new Federal parliament. The outcome saw the extreme right wing party, One Nation, gain four seats in the upper house. The party was able to exploit Australians' fear of invasion, and being a former British colony at the southern end of Asia the fear factor has been embedded in the nation's psyche for well over 200 years. Nonetheless, many Australians free of xenophobia have travelled to, and culture-makers have found the kaleidoscopic colours of the region to be a source of endless inspiration. In the Australian context fear and wonderment make for odd bedfellows, and the dichotomy is one that will be pursued in this paper.

From around the mid-1960s, Australian composers such Peter Sculthorpe, Richard Meale, and Anne Boyd, to name but a few, used music from Japan and Indonesia, as source material. Their usage of Asian music was determined more as a stance to demonstrate Australia's geographic placement rather than as a means of tapping into the exotic "otherness" of far off lands. Australian composer Duncan McKie (1904-1982) comes from an earlier generation and had a personal connection with Asia through his childhood experiences in China. In his case the sense of "other" was more personal, more ingrained than that his generation who wished to "re-view" a mysteriously vibrant Asia while nestled safely within a post-colonial mindset.

The discussion will be filtered through a selection of McKie's art songs that collectively come under the title of *P'ing Tan Pictures*, composed between 1935 and 1969. The paper will concentrate on the songs that used translations by Witter Bynner and Kiang Kang-Ku from their influential book, *The Jade Mountain* (1929).