

Symposium abstract

[Setting the Scene beyond Japan]

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*A Transnational Perspective on Art Songs, Composers and the Formation of a Modern Musical Identity in East Asia and Australia, focusing on Two Modest Composers: Linda Phillips (1899-2002) and Chen Tianhe (1911-1955)*

アリソン時田 問題提起

「世界から俯瞰する東アジア・オーストラリアの作曲家群像」

The take-up of western music in Japan, China and Korea contrasts markedly with the cases of India and Indonesia, which were also subjected to European colonial influence. By the 1920s, composers of music in western idiom in all three countries were creating art songs. In Australia this trend was prominent from the late nineteenth century.

The first half of the twentieth century was a prolific period for the art song globally. It thrived as a staple of home music-making by amateurs, and on the concert platform by professionals. It was promoted through the publication and consumption of sheet music as individual songs and anthologies, by specialist music journals, and critical reviews of concerts in newspapers. Concerts were held in civic buildings such as town halls. This was also the age of the development of sound technologies and radio broadcasting. Greatly improved travel and communications facilitated international recital tours by famous singers to both Australia and the East Asian region.

All composers of the period in the remote locations of colonial and semi-colonial East Asia, and of Federated Australia, were drawn to the smaller genres of piano and song, leading to a boom in the composition of art song in these settings.

Art songs used texts expressing local culture in the local language. They often also incorporated localized musical elements of scale, rhythm and timbre. This western musical genre thus became a vehicle of musical nationalism for countries far removed from Europe, ranging from the patriotic, even jingoistic, to a mild localized lyricism. Some might be accused of exploiting clichéd images of local colour for popular appeal.

This paper will attempt a cross-cultural comparison of the shared characteristics of the art songs of these four countries, especially looking at the choice of literary texts, the use of local musical idioms, and the gamut of themes expressed in the songs. Themes

include national and cultural identity; exoticism; depictions of nature and landscape; the expression of love, nostalgia, longing, grief and spirituality; and family bonds.

I will introduce two contrasting composers to illustrate the cross-cultural similarities and also differences. Australian woman composer Linda Phillips (1899-2002) and Chinese male composer Chen Tian-he (1911-1955) share many similarities as composers of art songs in the 1920s to 1940s. They were both actively composing in the 1920s to 1950s, and both were recognized as significant composers in the developing musical environment of a young musical culture. However, for vastly different reasons they were sidelined from the 1950s. I will explore these reasons, and refer to factors surrounding formation of the canon of art song in China and Australia.

(427 words)