

Chapter Title: Combinations of the Familiar and the Strange: Aspects of Asian-Dutch Encounters in Recent Music History  
Chapter Author(s): Emile Wennekes

Book Title: China and the West  
Book Subtitle: Music, Representation, and Reception  
Book Editor(s): Yang Hon-Lun, Michael Saffle  
Published by: University of Michigan Press. (2017)  
Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1qv5n9n.13>

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://about.jstor.org/terms>



This book is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>. Funding is provided by Knowledge Unlatched.



*University of Michigan Press* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *China and the West*

# *Combinations of the Familiar and the Strange*

## Aspects of Asian-Dutch Encounters in Recent Music History

*Emile Wennekes*

In heaven, the language spoken is Chinese—at least according to the messianistic figure HONG Xiuquan (1814–64), who considered himself the younger brother of Jesus Christ. In 1853, Hong established a New Jerusalem in the earthly paradise of Nanjing. A predecessor of MAO Zedong, Hong led his own followers in an uprising against the Manchu Qing dynasty. In 1959, a Hong museum was established in his birthplace, Hong Renkun. Yet not until the end of the last century did a Dutch librettist, Friso Haverkamp (born 1942), happen upon this amazing character. In writing the plot and text of the opera *Hier*<sup>o</sup> (2000),<sup>1</sup> Haverkamp incorporated Hong's intriguing vision of heaven: in the Dutch opera text, the language changes to Chinese when the scene changes from earthly Amsterdam to a heavenly afterlife. In *Hier*<sup>o</sup>, three soloists of the Beijing opera present Haverkamp's text in Chinese, in newly composed, Chinese-sounding passages by Guus Janssen (born 1951).

Friso Haverkamp has had a lifelong fascination with Chinese culture and history. In 2008, he provided the libretto for a second Chinese-themed opera, called *Hôtel de Pékin: Dreams for a Dragon Queen*, with music by another Dutch composer, Willem Jeths (born 1959).<sup>2</sup> The central character in *Hôtel de Pékin* is the empress dowager Cixi, whose death in 1911 ended the Qing dynasty. In *Hôtel de Pékin*, Cixi succumbs to a *Liebestod* together with QIN Shi Huangdi, China's legendary founding emperor, thus bridging more than two thousand years of imperial history. These two reception sites (to allude to the terminology of Hans Robert Jauss)<sup>3</sup> of Chinese culture—sites fore-

grounding the work of an ironically sensitive librettist and two subsequently receptive and creative composers of the same nationality but somewhat different ages and backgrounds—together represent a late twentieth-century perception of the East-West relationship and exemplify a transcultural attitude in Dutch composing. At the same time, *Hier°* and *Hôtel de Pékin* seem to reanimate a phrase attributed to Qing dynasty official ZHANG Zhi-dong: *Zhong(xue) wei ti, xi(xue) yong*, means “Chinese as substance, Western for (technical) usage.”<sup>4</sup>

A characteristically Asian-Dutch dualism between substance and surface in recent music history is the principal subject of this essay. In their combinations of musical and cultural elements at once “familiar” and “strange” from Asian and Western perspectives, recent works by Dutch composers such as Janssen, Jeths, Ton de Leeuw, and Peter Schat embody essential aspects of late twentieth-century and emerging twenty-first-century East-West musical relationships. Dutch perceptions of Asian culture did not appear out of the blue. Already in the 1950s, Guus Janssens’s composition teacher Ton de Leeuw (1926–96) expressed his conviction that the arts and philosophies of the West should merge with their counterparts from the East. In turn, de Leeuw has paid tribute to Jaap Kunst (1891–1960), his renowned professor of ethnomusicology. One could argue that this pedigree of perception reaches even farther back into the musical life of the Netherlands.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, throughout Western Europe, creative crossbreeding and confrontations between Eastern and Western musical idioms have had an extended and intriguing history. Holland—a small country that has had commercial ties with Asia for more than four hundred years, longer than most of its neighbors—offers a remarkable case study in this respect.

Although the first contacts between Dutch sailors and the East can be traced back to the mid-sixteenth century, not until 1595 did the Dutch fleet first appear off the coast of Java. In 1600, a Dutch ship called *De Liefde* (Love) found its way into the Bay of Usuki, Kyushu, Japan, after a dreadful trip and the loss of most of its crew. The survivors made careers for themselves as advisors to the shogun; in the process, they helped create a more or less stable basis for a relationship between Japan and the Dutch United Provinces. The Dutch also acted as a go-between in establishing regular trade relations between Japan and China as of 1633, while colonizing Taiwan themselves.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the extensive economic developments and the profound cultural knowledge that necessarily resulted from these and other encounters,

little was known for centuries in Holland about Chinese music. In 1883, for example, the otherwise well-informed author and conductor Henri Viotta (1848–1933) wrote, in his three-volume lexicon, about “the mysteries of Chinese music.” Viotta tells us that, as early as the days of Confucius, the Chinese were said to have a fixed tone system, one with the power to “satisfy the heart.” He also hints at the pentatonic basis of Chinese melody and mentions the use of smaller intervals than those of the semitone. Western scholars, he observes, have “tried in vain to attribute these intervals of a quarter or a third tone and even more complicated proportions to inaccurate observations, to aural illusion or to abstract mathematical calculations. . . . We are confronted with a riddle, one that can only be solved by a musical expedition.”<sup>7</sup> Here Viotta expresses an early and honest call for ethnomusicology.

That the answer to Viotta’s enigma might lie in the fact that Chinese scales are not tempered and that what Westerners call “major” and “minor” scales are mingled in Chinese music were some of the conclusions drawn by a certain J. A. Van Aalst, in an eighty-four-page English-language pamphlet published a year later in Shanghai. Van Aalst (1858–after 1914) was an administrator for the Chinese imperial government of the Qing dynasty.<sup>8</sup> His text, inferior though it may be from a contemporary perspective, rapidly became a major European resource for Chinese music—not only in the Low Countries but elsewhere as well. It was even used by Puccini on behalf of the chinoiserie in his opera *Turandot*.<sup>9</sup>

More than half a century later, an administrator for the Dutch Foreign Service did a much better job in terms of musical scholarship, although his work tickled the fancies of few, if any, composers. The groundbreaking book *The Lore of the Chinese Lute* (1940), by diplomat and novelist Robert van Gulik (1910–67), is still considered “the best introduction in Western languages to the important ch’in tradition,” to quote Chinese American composer CHOU Wen-chung.<sup>10</sup> In fact, van Gulik’s volume was recently listed in China among the most influential foreign books on Chinese culture.<sup>11</sup> Incidentally, van Gulik was also the *spiritus rex* of the Judge Dee mysteries, in which he adopted traditional aspects of Chinese detective fiction.

Much more can be said about Dutch perceptions of Asian music overall.<sup>12</sup> One could cite the reception accorded the work of Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore, the intellectual influences of Sufi teacher Hazrat Inayat Kahn, and the popularity of sitar player Pandit Ravi Shankar.<sup>13</sup> In 1970, Ton de Leeuw expressed concern about the pervading perceptions of Asian music in his time.

The drama playing out today is that Western expansion—especially in its negative, materialistic manifestations—has long suppressed those individuals that could call themselves authentic heirs of an Eastern tradition. . . . *Essential* contacts remain scarce. Our recent composers have—at most—a tourist type of interest; in this, they have the same attitude as their predecessors of the *fin de siècle* . . . . In short, we still fully live in an era of cultural colonialism.<sup>14</sup>

Much has since been written about cultural colonialism, transcultural understanding and misunderstanding, and the difficulties of distinguishing superficial influences from anything more substantial. The last issue is not uncommonly referred to as making the distinction between a “cosmetic” exoticism or “pentatonic romanticism,”<sup>15</sup> on the one hand, and an underlying or “structural” inspiration, in musical form, as a means of grappling with the Eastern “spirit” (whatever that may mean), on the other. Attempts to distinguish between binary opposites of these and other kinds usually go hand in hand with either ethical value judgments or opinions about artistic profundity.

In terms of a more profound interest and subsequent creative reception of “the East,” de Leeuw remains exemplary even today. In his *weltanschauung*, the contrast between East and West was central. To an extent, for him, the contrast of East versus West came down to spiritualism, on the one hand, and materialism, on the other. It pained de Leeuw to observe that the cultures of both worlds were being increasingly eroded, stripped of their defining characteristics, as history progressed. In his music, de Leeuw strove to achieve a synthesis between these contrasts. He visited India in the early 1960s to study its musical culture on behalf of the Dutch government, and he traveled in later years to Japan, Indonesia, and Iran (to name but a few of the nations he visited). At the Asian Composers’ Conference in Hong Kong in 1981, de Leeuw gave a lecture entitled “The Adaptations of Asian Forms in Contemporary Music,” in which he presented his personal creed.

I am . . . a Western composer, and I have no ambition to be a non-Western composer, or to imitate Asian music. . . . In my opinion, the composer is a sort of living sounding box. He does not create out of nothing, but he is reacting on all sources coming from outside. My sources have been from the beginning Western music as well as Asian music. This is part of

today's cultural conditions. Deep inside myself, I feel a constant and continuous awareness of all that has been created by mankind in the past.<sup>16</sup>

De Leeuw also observed,

Various aspects related to Asian Music have been determinant in my approach to musical form, e.g. the sense of timing. As an example—the slow start of an Indian classical raga . . . far from being monotonous, focuses the attention on a different and more subtle level. Even a single tone needs time to come into being, to develop, to die out. . . . The act of composition, to me, is a spiritual experience, far more than anything else.<sup>17</sup>

Exemplary of de Leeuw's approach is *Car nos Vignes sont en Fleur*, a choral composition also written in 1981. In this work, we hear a sort of "tone growth" at the very beginning, as if a sitar player were plucking more and more notes from the available universe of tones. In contrast to these Eastern elements, the text is unmistakably Western, the *Song of Songs*. In fact, *Car nos Vignes* is the first part of a trilogy based entirely on biblical texts. *Car nos Vignes* itself consists of seven tightly knit movements. After an exploration of tone A, the first movement opens with a text relating how, at night, in her sleep, the bride seeks the one for whom her heart yearns. In the last movement, a hymnlike conclusion takes as its starting point a sort of Gregorian melody, which is gradually adopted by the entire choir.

*Car nos Vignes* exemplifies essential aspects of East-West musical relationships. In it, de Leeuw attempts to synthesize Eastern and Western influences. The resulting music "does not EVOLVE, it IS," to borrow the words of Jaap Kunst describing Indonesian music.<sup>18</sup> The music of *Car nos Vignes* suggests an Eastern vernacular in its static harmony, its modest counterpoint and slow rhythmic motion, its use of modality, its subjective aim, and its search for a close relationship between the macrocosmic and microcosmic levels—characteristics that, in de Leeuw's opinion, defined Asian music. Nevertheless, this composition is certainly Western music in the end. Ton de Leeuw's oeuvre offers many other examples of this kind of merging. A substantial part of his work was inspired by haiku, for example, and he wrote a piece called *Gending* that is "a Western homage to the musician of the gamelan."<sup>19</sup> In other words, his approach was a personal search for accul-

turation, and his book about twentieth-century music, originally published in 1964, makes all this clear.<sup>20</sup>

Although de Leeuw once used (an English translation of) a poem by Shi-t'ao as a text,<sup>21</sup> his "Asian" music was more often defined by Indian, Indonesian, and Japanese influences. Concrete Chinese influences are less prominent in his work. Another Dutch composer of de Leeuw's generation, however, turned to China for inspiration. In 1980, the Year of the Ape, Peter Schat (1935–2003) introduced his so-called cartoon opera *Monkey Subdues the White-Bone Demon*. Schat's opera was inspired by WU Cheng-en and WANG Hsing-peï's popular sixteenth-century novel *Journey to the West*, which features the character of Mr. Monkey. The episode with the White-Bone Demon was also beautifully depicted during the seventeenth century in a total of 110 drawings by CHAO Hung-pen and CHIEN Hsiao-tai.

Through a facsimile reproduction of Wu and Wang's "graphic novel," published in Beijing in 1964, the West became acquainted with the adventures of Monkey, "who hatched from a stone egg that was fertilized by the wind."<sup>22</sup> Monkey lives for at least a thousand years. It takes him five hundred years to learn all sorts of magical arts, like moving through space at the speed of light. After many adventures and battles with the Kingdom of Heaven, he is imprisoned for five hundred years, until he is finally released by the monk Hsuan-tsang. Together, monk and Monkey undertake a pilgrimage of penance, following the light westward.

Schat's opera, a chamber work based on a Dutch-language libretto by the composer himself, relates the confrontations between the White-Bone Demon (coloratura soprano) and the monk Hsuan-tsang (countertenor) and his retinue: Monkey (tenor), Pigsy (baritone), and Sandy (bass-baritone). Schat's title explicates the story's outcome: Monkey finally overcomes his nemesis. In his "creative reception" of this ancient story, Schat not only used the original Chinese protagonists and story but also employed Chinese music as a source of inspiration. Although his "reception" of Chinese musical style extended only to the pentatonic scale, the way Schat dealt with that scale as a stylistic departure point reveals an interesting adaptation of its atmospheric and inherent musical possibilities. Nevertheless, Chinese music functions merely as a catalyst for Schat's artistic ideas and for the craftsmanship of this Western and, more specifically, Dutch composer.

*Monkey Subdues the White-Bone Demon* is scored for a Western ensemble of woodwinds (flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon), horn, percussion, strings, and harpsichord. Each protagonist has his or her own instrumental conno-

tations and specific musical motives, and, to quote the composer, it is with these chess pieces that “the game must be played in the twelve-note field.”<sup>23</sup> Despite the fact that Schat never employs the term *leitmotif* while referring to his characters, each character does undergo a composed, psychological development as the opera progresses.

Schat begins by constructing a motive that is based on the open-string notes of the violin—as was used, for instance, by Alban Berg in his Violin Concerto—and that also contains four of the five pentatonic tones. In transposing this four-note group twice at intervals of a major third, Schat chromatically fills in the octave. Schat explains that “the order of the notes within these groups can be free, thus making it possible to investigate ever-new relations within the same ‘tonality,’” as the composer defines it.<sup>24</sup> The introductory violin solo presents the motive, in a twelve-tone pentatonic environment, as well as within an instrumental context that illustrates the character of the monk Hsuan-tsang. The White-Bone Demon is instrumentally represented by broken chords on the harpsichord that are repeatedly interrupted by a tremolo on the marimba. Pigsy is characterized by a series of two-note chords, melodically performed by a duet between horn and bassoon. Finally, Monkey is represented by a flute playing a row of notes. In the opening measures of the opera, appropriately called “Parade,” some of these characteristics are introduced.

Space prohibits delving more deeply here into the intriguing manner in which Schat interweaves the various forms of these motives throughout his opera, but one additional example is important: Hsuan-tsang’s appearances are accompanied by chorales, “whose mild, consonant twelve-note tonality,” as Schat explains,

is brought about by a harmonic elaboration of the violin melody from the introduction. . . . In this harmonization, the different voices themselves acquire a strongly chromatic character, whilst the chords [in four-note groups] remain pentatonic, i.e. non-chromatic. . . . During the whole first act, this manner of writing does not change, just as Hsuan-tsang does not change his standpoint. . . . Not until he gets into difficulties in the second act do complications arise.<sup>25</sup>

It goes without saying that the pentatonic scale is a prominent—probably the most prominent—feature of Chinese music for many Western composers, performers, and listeners. Illustrated in Viotta’s nineteenth-century

encyclopedia, it is audible in every Dutch opera, past and present, that incorporates Chinese references. Nevertheless, every composer has his or her own approach to the pentatonic, be it a “picturesque deviation from the [Western] norm” (to paraphrase Carl Dahlhaus)<sup>26</sup> or something more associative (as it was for Peter Schat). Other composers, including Guus Janssen and Willem Jeths, have incorporated pentatonic elements into their own idioms. In these cases, the results have proven themselves neither typically Western nor altogether Chinese. Instead, they collectively comprise a hybrid musical-cultural framework.

Whereas the libretto of *Monkey Subdues the White-Bone Demon* generally follows the lines of a preexisting story, Haverkamp’s operas *Hier°* and *Hôtel de Pékin* were both based on newly invented stories. “It is a libretto made by a mad man,” wrote one critic of *Hier°*, who added, “It is nevertheless a stroke of genius.”<sup>27</sup> It is hard to recount in a few words what the hermetical opera *Hier°* is all about. Its narrative layers turn somersaults, combining morality with blasphemy in a warning against hubris: that whoever arrogantly messes around with immortality and divinity is doomed to fall. In *Hier°*, the historical character of Hong is conflated with two additional historical characters representing the Middle East and the West: Floris van Hall, the major shareholder of Amsterdam’s lost Crystal Palace<sup>28</sup> (the “Memory Palace” in Janssen’s opera), and the Jerusalem-based Rabbi B[enjamin] Hier. Hong, Hier, and van Hall together serve as inspirational alter egos or prefigurations of the opera’s complex protagonist.

Three Chinese sopranos symbolize the Holy Trinity in *Hier°*. Their appearances act as mirrors, reflecting “real” time, slowed time, and accelerated time. The sopranos also symbolize other trinities: past, present, and future; body, soul, and spirit. Since each soprano performs different functions at different times, Janssen has each of them sing in different tempi—except, that is, at one crucial moment. When Hier attempts his jump from earth to heaven, the Holy Trinity sings in unison to represent heavenly harmony.

If the libretto of *Hier°* qualifies as a madman’s creation, the opera’s music possesses an eclectic weirdness. In his score, Janssen, a stylistic omnivore, makes no distinctions between crooning and bel canto, between Viennese operetta and Chinese opera, between the harmonium and the *erhu*, between yodeling and free jazz. Instead, he combines every possible kind of music, using individual stylistic elements for slightly ironic surprises. Furthermore, Janssen divides his attention between improvised and composed musical statements, combining a warmhearted interest in other musical cultures

with his original yet firmly Western compositional stance. Elsewhere too, as in the pieces for music theater that Janssen has created in collaboration with librettist Friso Haverkamp, stylistic eclecticism predominates. In *Noach* (1994), another opera, Tuvan singers produce overtones full of heavenly fluting and hellish roaring; recordings of humpback whales accompany live vocalists, while wind instruments imitate heartrending animal noises; and so on.

*Hier°* calls for singers from the Beijing opera to be flown in to tell an absurdist story about an Amsterdam that yearns for immortality. Janssen himself traveled to China to develop his musical concept. There he invited performers from the Dalian Beijing Opera Troupe to join his project, in which the West and East would not only meet musically but collaborate intensively, challenging each other in order to break down conventional walls of prejudice. Parts of *Hier°* consist of actual cultural dialogues, combining composed passages with improvisations. To accentuate the work's Chinese atmosphere, Janssen incorporates the *dizi*, *pipa*, *jingerhu*, and *gu*. These instruments merge with Western instruments that are anything but traditionally operatic, including a (virtuoso) harmonium. The pentatonic scale dominates those scenes in which the sopranos symbolizing the Holy Trinity appear, but the newly constructed melodies in these same scenes are interwoven with jazz riffs and other typically Western musical material. The sopranos themselves are challenged to perform undiluted Chinese rap and an Everly Brothers look-alike song. In a furious stylistic quasi fugue, East chases West throughout *Hier°*, each culture alternately taking the lead in a bizarre musical discourse. In *Hier°*, the Chinese is Dutchified—or, more precisely, “Janssenfied.”

In an interview, Janssen—who affirmed his ambition to work with Chinese musicians at all costs—acknowledged, “If you step into that adventure, you first get the impression that you are dealing with Martians; Chinese culture and its music are that far away from us.”<sup>29</sup> To blend cultural differences, Janssen immediately set out to build stylistic bridges. He began by composing short vocal pieces, which he himself recorded on tape. In reaction to Janssen's pieces, the Chinese sopranos recorded their own interpretations and returned them to the composer, after which Janssen created new samples that were more difficult and—especially—more polyphonic.

Scene 27, entitled “HALMA,” exemplifies the eclectic mix of styles and genres that characterize *Hier°*. In this scene, the music moves in a swinging pace, established primarily by a jazzy rhythm section, augmented by several

keyboard instruments, and featuring a slide trombone. The Chinese instruments provide sustained, unchanging notes. The text consists of a list of Amsterdam street and canal names, recited in Dutch and echoed by the Holy Trinity in Chinese. The coda to this scene consists of an accelerating tremolo performed in unison by Western and Chinese percussion instruments, which leads, in turn, to a pentatonic improvisation provided by the harmonium and the pianos and accompanied by twittering birds. In this passage, as elsewhere, the pentatonic is deliberately foregrounded as ironic, superficial chinoiserie.

The opera *Hôtel de Pékin* is also scored for a combination of classical symphonic-orchestral and traditional Chinese instruments, including the *erhu*, *jinghu*, and *suona*. Composer Willem Jeths employs eight percussion players who perform on such unconventional noisemakers as crystal glasses, rain sticks, stones, and whistles; section members are also called on to tear apart pieces of paper and silk. Perhaps the world's largest tam-tam joins forces with six Chinese drums, two anvils, tuned water gongs, and *cencerros* (cowbells tuned a minor second apart; the bells are swung through the air after being struck). Finally, Jeths quotes canonical Western works, including the love duet from *Tristan und Isolde* and Messiaen's *Turangalila* symphony, as well as pieces by Berg, Franz Lehár, and Maurice Ravel. A brilliant orchestrator, Jeths is able to forge this combination of familiar and strange instruments, old and new works, and East-meets-West styles into a highly individual score.

*Hôtel de Pékin* was the first opera composed by Jeths but was not his first composition inspired by the East. In *Fas/Nefas* (1997), a concerto for harp and orchestra, the solo instrument is sardonically hammered with sticks and treated as if it were a Japanese koto. Jeths later reworked *Fas/Nefas* into a concerto for partially prepared piano; in that version of the work, the piano's innards are struck with sticks. In *TIM/BA* (2000), Jeths combines Western percussion instruments and piano with a gamelan. The title is illustrative: *TIM/BA* is short for *Timor/Barat*, Indonesian for "East/West." *TIM/BA* combines the limited (and, to most Western ears, out-of-tune) sounds of the gamelan ensemble with the chromaticism of Western instruments. In *Hôtel de Pékin*, Chinese and Western instruments are combined in a similar way.

Like *Hier*,<sup>o</sup> *Hôtel de Pékin* presents a cluster of story lines too complicated to summarize here. Jeths called the opera "a tribute to CHINA! certainly, but no less an homage to an exceptional woman: imperious, cruel, ruthless,

as well as thoughtful, elegant, charming and sophisticated Empress Dowager Cixi." He further explained,

Basically a stream of consciousness or interior monologue of Cixi's, articulated in 18 scenes or "DREAMS," the opera stages a kaleidoscopic range of images and flashes-back as Cixi [age seventy-three, dying in 1908, the opera's actual setting] rethinks and reenacts some key experiences, relationships and events in her life, scenes all converging on her last and deepest wish: to die for and in her immortal dream of a new CHINA.<sup>30</sup>

Some critics have argued, mainly from a Western point of view, that Cixi, by means of her extraordinary gifts for subtle leadership, kept the Qing dynasty in power longer than might have been expected in an era of turmoil, increasing internationalization, the Boxer Rebellion, and so on.<sup>31</sup> Others have adopted the Chinese point of view concluding that she hastened the dynasty's collapse.<sup>32</sup> This latter position is defended in *Hôtel de Pékin*.

Each character in this "Peking" opera by Jeths is linked with a specific instrument. Dramatic soprano Cixi is accompanied by the *erhu*, while countertenor Anzi, her eunich, is coupled with the clarinet. QIN Shi Haungdi, a part for basso profundo, has the tenor trombone as his instrumental counterpart. Within a compositional framework of this kind, other telling combinations exist, as episode 6 of *Hôtel de Pékin* illustrates. In this scene, Cixi commissions Anzi to strangle those mandarins that (might have) deserted to the Western enemy. Then she points to what she considers the real threat to China: her nephew, the Emperor Guangxu. In the opera, Guangxu is completely Westernized: he passes his time surfing the Internet, hanging around in the virtual world of Second Life, and playing computer games. The mandarins are killed to rescue the ancient empire, a task previously given to Cixi by Qin. With all the mandarins dead, Qin's tenor trombone is amalgamated with Cixi's *erhu*.

As in *Hier°*, an all-ladies vocal trio, the Versaces, appears in *Hôtel de Pékin*. This trio is partnered by an onstage band that plays pentatonic jazz on Chinese instruments. Throughout the 2008 production of *Hôtel de Pékin*, Chinese local color was provided by a troupe of some forty singers, dancers, and players, flown in from Nanjing.

In *Hôtel de Pékin*, Jeths calls for his singers to perform in a typically Western manner, although the use of minor seconds in singers' high registers could be interpreted as a reference to the Beijing opera. In fact, the

most important interval in *Hôtel de Pékin* is the minor second B–C, which symbolizes the choice Cixi must ultimately make: does she choose for Qin and imperial China, represented by the note C, or for the people, for the new China, for herself, represented by the note B? The final consequence of choosing the latter would be the end of empire. Cixi's dilemma is spelled out as early as the opera's opening measures: out of the first orchestral chord, the *erhu* ascends a half step from B to C, and the tenor trombone ascends a major seventh from C to B. In a similar manner, huge leaps in Cixi's vocal part represent her own ambiguity.

Jeths creates an interesting stylistic tension by conflating pentatonic passages and minor seconds. But since the Chinese pentatonic scale is anhemitonic (i.e., without half-step intervals), he could not actually have combined the two in any self-consistent way. The alternative he chose was the incorporation of the Japanese hemitonal pentatonic scale, which led to at least one inadvertently humorous observation: during a rehearsal of *Hôtel de Pékin*, one embarrassed Chinese musician observed, "This is golly Japanese pentatonic."<sup>33</sup> The deliberately kitschy chinoiserie introduced in scenes 5 and 10, for which Jeths did write Chinese pentatonic *pur sang*, is intended to show that Western attitudes toward China remain clichéd.

*Hier°* and *Hôtel de Pékin* must be understood as part of an overarching international trend, not only in terms of the way composers and librettists have dealt and continue to deal with Chinese (and other Asian) musical tradition, but also in terms of the historical narrative itself as a source of inspiration, irony, and limitation. The rise and fall of empires has influenced artists from all cultures and disciplines. Whereas dozens of previously powerful nations and rulers nowadays tend to play only marginal roles within the creative musical receptions of both Asia and the West, Chinese dynasties of the past remain inspiring for composers, librettists, playwrights, and moviemakers alike. Bernardo Bertolucci's groundbreaking feature film *The Last Emperor* (1987) incorporated music by a trio of Academy Award-winning composers (David Byrne, Ryuichi Sakamoto, and SU Cong). TAN Dun's opera *The First Emperor* has been staged several times: in 2006 and 2008 at the Metropolitan Opera in New York City (with Plácido Domingo in the title role) and in 2008 at the Staatstheater Saarbrücken (with Jevgenij Taruntson as Emperor Qin). *Iron Road* (2001) by Canadian composer CHAN Ka Nin inspired director David Wu to make a movie with the same name in 2008 (with Peter O'Toole). Stewart Wallace based *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (2008) on Amy Tan's novel of the same name. In 2008, Monkey from

*Journey to the West* was rediscovered by British composer Damon Albarn and designer Jamie Hewlitt, who turned the story of Monkey's adventures into an East-meets-West pop opera. They produced an animation sequence under the original title *Journey to the West*, which was used by the BBC to introduce coverage of the Beijing 2008 Summer Olympics.

In analyzing recent Dutch compositions that draw on some form of Eastern musical tradition or inspiration, we see a gradual shift away from a more substantial—or, in terms of form, a more structural—reception of Asian music. In its place, we discover a reception that might be described, albeit unfairly, as less substantial, more “superficial.” Those words do not do justice to the conscientious manner in which composers such as Janssen and Jeths have dealt with their material. If we compare de Leeuw's intrinsic approach with that of Janssen and Jeths, we discover that theirs is finally more “extrinsic,” more figurative—an approach that reflects specific artistic goals. Theirs is a “teleotean” way of dealing with “foreign” material.

Janssen and Jeths sometimes treat a Chinese-oriented idiom as *corpus alienum*, as *l'est pour l'est*, as chinoiserie for its own sake. Superficial musical orientalisms include the pentatonic improvisations in *Hier*<sup>o</sup> and aspects of scenes 5 and 10 in *Hôtel de Pékin*. In these cases, as Edward Said observed in a somewhat different context, the West is presented as and functions as traditionally “dominant . . . restructuring and having authority over the Orient.”<sup>34</sup> At other moments in *Hier*<sup>o</sup>, *Hôtel de Pékin*, and other Dutch works, however, Chinese musical elements are fully incorporated within composers' own Western idioms, producing eclectic and uniquely blended styles. Dramatic works composed in such styles call to mind Tan Dun's remark that opera will one day “no longer be a Western form, as it is no longer an Italian form.”<sup>35</sup>

Blended styles are the result either of a musical dialogue (in the work of Guus Janssen) or of something like a monologue (in the sense that Willem Jeths himself prescribed the characteristics of his own eclectic idiom). Without consulting them, Jeths upset at least a few of the Chinese musicians involved with his treatment of the pentatonic. Of course, Chinese music is much more and far richer than pentatonicism. Besides its timbral aspects, consider its linear structures, principles of recomposition, cyclical interactions, ethnic and regional pluralities, *Klangfarben* differentiations, virtuosity, and theatricality. These and other facets are still in need of analysis.<sup>36</sup>

Another feature of recent Asian-Dutch works also deserves discussion. Said remarked about the orientalist of the nineteenth century that none

of them “seem[ed] to have intended an Oriental as reader.”<sup>37</sup> From the very beginning, however, Jeths and Haverkamp have targeted Eastern as well as Western audiences and performers. Auditions in Nanjing for the featured role in *Hôtel de Pékin*, arguments with the Chinese censor, a delegation of Chinese officials present at the premiere, and plans for staging the opera in Beijing are evidence of a bicultural orientation, a focus on Western as well as Eastern performers and listeners. If *Hôtel de Pékin* is ever produced in China, the results would unquestionably provide another fascinating “reception site” within the emerging Sino-Dutch musical relationship and repertory.<sup>38</sup>

### Notes

1. *Hier*° premiered on 21 January 2000 in Amsterdam at the Stadsschouwburg, where it was presented by De Nederlandse Opera and directed by Pierre Audi.

2. *Hôtel de Pékin* premiered on 21 November 2008 in Enschede at the Nationaal Muziekkwartier, where it was directed by Amir Hosseinpour et al.

3. H. R. Jauss, *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970).

4. Quoted in Christian Utz, *Neue Musik und Interkulturalität: Von John Cage bis Tan Dun* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2002), 25.

5. For an overview of postwar Dutch musical life, see Emile Wennekes, “Music and Musical Life,” in *Dutch Culture in a European Perspective*, vol. 5, *Accounting for the Past: 1650–2000*, ed. D. W. Fokkema and F. Grijzenhout (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 253–27; Wennekes, “Yinyue He Yinyue Shenghuo,” in *Ouzhou Shiye Zhong De Helan Wenhua, 1650–2000: Chanshi Lishi*, ed. Douwe Fokkema and Frans Grijzenhout, trans. Wang Hao, Zhang Xiaohong, and Xie Yongxiang (Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2007), 235–54.

6. See Leonard Blussé, Willem Rimmelink, and Ivo Smits, *Bewogen Betrekingen, 400 jaar Nedeland-Japan* (Hilversum: Educatieve Omroep Teleac, 2000), 130–33.

7. Henri Viotta, *Lexicon der Toonkunst*, vol. 2 (Amsterdam: P. N. van Kampen und zoon, 1883), 631–32. This and all subsequent translations from the Dutch are my translations.

8. Van Aalst was a Belgian citizen. An 1886 book review in the *New York Times* suggested that he was a German, a mistake repeated by Krystyn R. Moon in *Yellowface: Creating the Chinese in American Popular Music and Performance, 1850s–1920s* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005).

9. See William Ashbrook and Harold Powers, *Puccini’s “Turandot”: The End of the Great Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 94–96.

10. CHOU Wen-chung, “Excerpts from ‘Chinese Historiography and Music: Some Observations,’” *Musical Quarterly* 62, no. 2 (1976): 218–40.

11. Information provided by Shawn Xiaoqiang Gong, Institute of African Studies, Zhejiang Normal University.

12. So-called world music focuses especially on African and Latin American music styles. Chinese music is not a prominent feature.

13. See Rokus de Groot, "Rabindranath Tagore and the Netherlands," in *Rabindranath Tagore, a Creative Unity*, ed. A. Biswas and Ch. Gordon-Graham (London: Tagore Centre UK, 2006), 47–59; de Groot, "Van Eeden en Tagore: Ethiek en muziek," *Tijdschrift van de Koninklijke Vereniging voor Nederlandse Muziekgeschiedenis* 49, no. 2 (1999): 98–147; de Groot, "Rabindranath Tagore and Frederik van Eeden: Reception of a Poet-King in the Netherlands," in *Hindustani Music: Thirteenth to Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Joep Bor et al. (Delhi: Manohar; Rotterdam: Codarts, 2010), 521–76.

14. Ton de Leeuw, "Muzikale confrontatie Oost–West," *Mens en Melodie (Muzikaal Eeuwkwartaal)* 25, no. 12 (1970): 48.

15. For "pentatonic romanticism," see Barbara Mittler, *Dangerous Tunes: The Politics of Chinese Music in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the People's Republic of China since 1949* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1997), 33.

16. Quoted in Rokus de Groot, *Compositie en intentie van Ton de Leeuws muziek: Van een evolutionair naar een cyclisch paradigma* (PhD diss., Utrecht University, 1991), 325.

17. Quoted in *ibid.*, 331.

18. Jaap Kunst, *Music in Java: Its History, Its Theory and Its Technique*, 3rd ed. (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1973), 1 (capitalization in the original). See also de Groot, *Compositie en intentie*, 309.

19. *Gending: A Western Homage to the Musicians of the Gamelan* (Amsterdam: Donemus, 1975).

20. See Ton de Leeuw, *Muziek van de Twintigste Eeuw: Een Onderzoek naar haar Elementen en Structuur* (Utrecht: Bohn, Scheltema and Holkema, 1964).

21. His brief but exalted hymn to the fascinating process of artistic creation, *Cloudy Forms* (1970), a composition for four-part male chorus, begins, "Where the brush and ink blend, cloudy forms are produced" (Emile Wennekes, booklet accompanying Netherlands Chamber Choir, *Ton de Leeuw: Choral Works*, Muziekgroep Nederland NM Classics 92102, 2000, compact disc).

22. The information presented in this discussion of Schat's opera and its inspiration is based on Peter Schat, "Monkey Subdues the White Bone Demon," in *The Tone Clock* (Chur: Harwood, 1993), 32–56.

23. *Ibid.*, 37.

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Ibid.*, 37–38.

26. Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 306.

27. Roland de Beer, *de Volkskrant* (Amsterdam), 24 January 2000.

28. See Emile Wennekes, *Het Paleis voor Volkslijft (1864–1929): “Edele Uiting eener stoute Gedachte!”* (The Hague: Sdu Uitgevers, 1999), 105–8, 277–78.

29. Wennekes, *NRC Handelsblad* (Rotterdam), 1 December 1999.

30. Friso Haverkamp, unpublished libretto, supplied to the author by the librettist (capitalization in the original).

31. See Sterling Seagrave, *Dragon Lady: The Life and Legend of the Last Empress of China* (New York: Vintage, 1992), 440–64.

32. See Edward Behr, *The Last Emperor* (London: Futura, 1987), 50–55.

33. Guido van Oorschot, *de Volkskrant*, 20 November 2008.

34. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Penguin, 1997), 3.

35. Quoted in Lois B. Morris and Robert Lipsyte, “For Tan Dun’s ‘First Emperor,’ the Met Does a Way-Out-of-Town Tryout,” *New York Times*, 16 May 2006.

36. See Utz, *Neue Musik*.

37. Said, *Orientalism*, 336.

38. For their help in the realization of this essay, I thank the former Research Institute for History and Culture (Utrecht University), Friso Haverkamp, Willem Jeths, Guus Janssen, Michael Nieuwenhuizen, Davo van Peursen, Donemus, Hans “Hema” van den Pol (†), Michael Saffle, and Cynthia Wilson.