

When Text Meets Music: Tradition and Musical Nationalism in Chinese Songs

Presented at Cornell University as part of the Analytical Approaches to World Musics (AAWM) Special Topics Symposium 2025



Ithaca, New York Oct 21, 2025 ([Issuewire.com](https://www.issuewire.com)) - The *Analytical Approaches to World Musics (AAWM) Special Topics Symposium 2025*, hosted at **Cornell University**, concluded with a special concert titled “**When Text Meets Music: Tradition and Musical Nationalism in Chinese Songs.**” The program brought together distinguished musicians and scholars from China and the United Kingdom to celebrate the intersection of Chinese classical poetry, traditional opera, and modern compositional practice.

Curated by **Dr. Siyang Yu**, founder of the *Half Lecture Half Concert* series, this cross-cultural event embodied the academic spirit of AAWM by merging performance, scholarship, and intercultural dialogue. The concert explored how ancient Chinese texts, poetic imagery, and folk traditions continue to inspire contemporary composition and performance, forming a living expression of musical nationalism in a global context.

Performers included:

- **Dr. Yaqi Wang**, pianist and composer, founder of *Concert Star International Classical Music Competition* and *Steinway & Sons Educational Partner*, performing her own work “*Song of Qinghuai River*” (《清淮》), inspired by the aesthetics of *Suzhou Pingtan* and the poetic landscape of Jiangnan.
- **Wei Wang**, soprano and founder of *UK Chinese Theatre Arts*, presenting highlights from *Peking Opera* and *Kunqu Opera*, including “*Mu Guiying Takes Command*” and “*Zao Luo Pao*”, demonstrating her mastery of traditional vocal techniques within a modern concert setting.
- **Ze Luo (Lori)**, pianist and singer, offered a lyrical performance of “*Hairpin Phoenix*” and “*The Yue Folk’s Song*”, merging Chinese and Western vocal aesthetics.
- **Wenfei Liu**, pipa virtuoso and multimedia artist, accompanied multiple works and illuminated the expressive depth of Chinese plucked-string traditions through a cross-disciplinary lens.
- **Xinyu Zhu**, bamboo flute (dizi) performer, adds a delicate timbral layer to operatic and folk pieces, enriching the ensemble’s sonic texture.
- **Chloe Xinyi Liang**, Associate Editor of *Analytical Approaches to World Music* and PhD (University of Sheffield), providing scholarly commentary on the cultural symbolism of music and poetry in modern Chinese art song.

The repertoire traversed a broad emotional and historical landscape, featuring ancient and modern texts such as “*The Yue Folk’s Song*” (a pre-Qin melody arranged by Yao Deng and Dongliang Bai), “*Yu Meiren – Listening to the Rain*” (composed by Dongliang Bai, lyrics by Jie Jiang), “*Hairpin Phoenix*” (by Siyang Yu, lyrics from Tang and Lu), “*Phoenix Seeking His Mate*” (by Yan Li), and “*The Lantern Festival Night*” (by Yan Li, lyrics by Xin Qiji).

Each piece highlighted a different dimension of Chinese cultural identity, from the resilience of heroines in Peking Opera and the poetic subtlety of *Suzhou Pingtan* to the reimagination of Tang and Song verse in contemporary art song. The blend of piano, pipa, bamboo flute, and operatic voice created a unique soundscape that transcended time and genre.

The event concluded with a lively discussion on the evolving dialogue between traditional Chinese musical forms and modern scholarship. Audience members—including music theorists, ethnomusicologists, and composers—praised the concert for its academic depth and artistic elegance, noting how it exemplified AAWM’s mission to bridge cultural heritage and analytical research.

As one of the highlights of the AAWM Symposium, “*When Text Meets Music*” reaffirmed the power of musical storytelling to connect generations and traditions, offering a contemporary vision of Chinese cultural artistry within the global music research community.

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