

## Introduction

Music has always been one of the most important things in my life. As a child, I was a poor athlete, and having Tourette's Syndrome certainly did not help that matter. I instead turned my interest to the piano. In doing so, I became the first in my generation to continue this tradition, which stretches back to my great-grandmother, who played for silent films. At the age of eleven, I began studying the piano, of my own initiative, and by thirteen, I had developed a deep appreciation for composers such as Beethoven and Tchaikovsky. In the years to come, my appetite for music was insatiable. I branched out to other genres, studying jazz, blues, and pop, and as I grew older, I learned to play other instruments: the clarinet, saxophone, guitar, ukulele, and banjo. However, I was gradually drawn towards the spirited yet rambunctious nature of rock music, intrigued by the effect it could have on its fan base. The poetry I so enjoyed listening to in its lyrics and the rebellious attitude of its frontmen sparked my interest in what would eventually become my Senior Integrated Project.

Despite my obvious affinity for music, something about language piqued my curiosity as a high school student. I can still remember my train of thought at the very moment I realized that language was my new passion: to me, language is very much like music. Like music, it is a complex form of expression that we as humans have developed to enrich our lives and the lives of those around us. Just as music can be played in a variety of modes, dynamics, and tempos, language is also a diverse array of patterns and constructions. From the moment I recognized

these parallels, I became determined to study foreign languages. Initially, I was unsure as to which language I should study, but Chinese soon became a natural choice.

Chinese is a beautiful language. The integration of tonality within speech was a concept that my mind embraced with enthusiasm. The alteration of tones in the midst of speaking makes conversation much like playing a solo. Sentences seem to groove along with a rhythm. Acquiring an accent was akin to relearning the notes of the staff, providing a foundation upon which the brilliant and complex melodies of the language can be understood. Even the written language managed to augment my fascination. Each page was a ballroom, and characters waltzed beautifully to a precise tempo. Brush strokes were in perfect harmony, as though each sang its own note in a perfectly rehearsed choir. This language, I knew, was one that I must learn.

It is no surprise, then, that I am a declared Chinese Language and Literature major here at Connecticut College. It is my hope to study in the city of Harbin in China via the CET program. Although I have a passionate interest in the language itself, I am equally captivated by Chinese literature, culture, and history. As the son of a history teacher, and the younger brother of a history student, I can say with assurance that my time spent around the dinner table at home has endowed me with a genuine regard for history and literature. CISLA will provide me with the opportunity to experience the wonderful things that this world has to offer and grant me invaluable insight into another culture.

### **Senior Integrated Project**

Upon the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, the People's Republic of China began to implement a long line of significant reforms that would continue to alter its economic and social structure into the modern era. Traces of capitalism began to trickle back into urban centers, and

trade with the West again made modern Western technology and culture more readily available. Despite the still prevalent role of the Chinese government in the political and social affairs of its ordinary citizens, a modern rock music scene, heavily influenced by American and European acts, nevertheless began its development during the 1980s, laying groundwork for a musical movement that would flourish in the urban underground for years to come.

In the beginning, between the years 1986 and 1989, a movement began in China known as *Xibeifeng*, or “Northwest Wind.” It was a quasi-grassroots musical movement that sought to integrate traditional Chinese folk melodies and instrumentation, particularly from Gansu and Sha’anxi provinces, with the increasingly popular Western style of music. What was produced was a hybrid that was distinctly Chinese in its sound and edgy enough to gain a following of musical progressives seeking to capitalize on the moderate lull in government suppression. Out of the *Xibeifeng* movement, Cui Jian, regarded as the father of Chinese rock, made headlines with his antiestablishment anthem *Yi Wu Suo You*, or “I Have Nothing”.

It was later that rock music, or *yaogun yinyue*, came in direct conflict with *tongsu*, or popular music produced at the behest of the government. *Tongsu* singers were carefully selected and provided with the best technology and songwriters in an attempt to win the heart of the public and transfer attention away from the amateur underground. As such, *tongsu* was fundamentally a mouthpiece for state propaganda and was perceived as illegitimate by a growing population of rebellious college students, while *yaogun yinyue* continued to push the boundaries of legality with its provocative political and social commentary and the raw, natural emotion of its frontmen.

In recent years, however, attitudes, as well as market conditions, have changed dramatically. The breakthrough success of rock and metal bands such as Tang Dynasty and Overload have indicated a shift in public perception. It has become increasingly easy for foreign rock acts to play shows in China, as the demand for imported music among China's youth has grown significantly. My proposed Senior Integrated Project will answer several questions regarding the historical, literary, and sociocultural aspects of the development of rock music in China. What were the conditions that gave birth to the Chinese rock movement? How does this movement compare to other similar musical movements in modern Chinese history, such as the rise of jazz in 1930s Shanghai? In what ways are the lyrics of modern rock music influenced by classical Chinese literature? What social and political overtones are present in Chinese rock, and how have these overtones affected the status of rock music in the eyes of the mainstream media as well as in China's greater population? Finally, how, if at all, has the rock movement in China altered the cultural atmosphere of China's urban youth?

### **Internship**

Beijing Midi School of Music is a two-year college in Beijing that specializes in the study of modern music, both historically as well as technically. It would be a tremendous opportunity to intern there as a research assistant to a professor, as I would not only be able to discuss my questions with experts in the field but also be able to meet with Chinese students who share my interest in rock music. To converse with students personally would be of enormous benefit to my understanding of the potential future of the modern music scene in China. Serving as a research assistant would not only assist in my own research on the subject, but would also

establish relationships with academics who could answer any questions I may have in the course of my studies.

### **Support Courses**

#### **Harbin CL470 Introduction to Classical Chinese**

This is a course I plan on taking during my semester abroad in Harbin. Because Classical Chinese has traditionally been the medium of composing poetry in China, it is frequently employed alongside Standard Mandarin in modern rock music to give the lyrics a more poetic quality. As such, a knowledge of Classical Chinese is essential if one is to fully understand Chinese song lyrics.

#### **Music 229 Ethnomusicology**

This course will enhance my understanding of the relationship between music and society, as well as how music relates to various sociocultural phenomena. It will also provide a basic introduction to fieldwork methodology.

#### **Sociology 214 Sociology of Culture**

This class discusses culture as a concept, and how it is defined, developed, distributed, and received. These concepts are vital to understanding the extent to which rock music can impact Chinese culture, how it is perceived by the media, how its prevalence varies from class to class, and its history within the public sphere

#### **History 262 Modern China: Changing National Identities in a Transnational East Asia**

This course will provide insight as to how modern Chinese identity has been shaped. Through learning about what factors impacted its development, I will have a better understanding of the viewpoints of both modern Chinese musicians and common citizens

## **Bibliography**

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Politics of Style." Austin, TX: University of Texas at Austin, 1992. Web.

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