

## “Messiaen and China”

### Abstract

This study explores the intricate relation between Messiaen and the People's Republic of China. Just how well Messiaen understood the difficult political situation in China in the 1950s is hard to gauge, but he might have gathered some insider information from his Chinese student Chang Hao, who found it necessary to cancel his plan to travel with Ma Yo-Yo's father back to China. It is also evident that Messiaen's decision to accept Chen Qigang as a private composition student in the 1980s was made not just on artistic grounds, but also in consideration of the looming importance of China. Judging from Messiaen's *Traité de rythme, de couleur et d'ornithologie*, Chinese music did not interest him much. He briefly commented on the Chinese modes and cited a few traditional ritual hymns and folk songs. What is likely Messiaen's singular adaptation of the traits of Chinese ritual music is nonetheless discovered in the finale of *Et exspecto resurrectionem mortuorum* (1964). A quarter of a century later, the publication of the Chinese translation (1989) of Yuri Kholopov's "O tryokh zarubezhnikh sistemakh garmonii" (1966), which group together Messiaen's *Technique de mon langage musical*, Schoenberg's *Harmonielehre* and Hindemith's *Unterweisung im Tonsatz*, added much esteem to the French composer's standing in China, a land Messiaen could have visited en route to Japan or Australia, but to which, for whatever reason, he never ventured.