

# The Encounter Between Xiao Youmei and Nie Er: Two Divergent Approaches to National Salvation Through Music

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## Abstract

*Music played a functional role in spreading new ideologies and cultural perspectives from the outset of the establishment of the Republic of China (1912–1949). However, even musicians who shared the aim of modernising the nation and were active in the same locations could differ markedly in their positions, both in their ideas on how to achieve this and in the actions they undertook towards that goal. This article explores the contrasting approaches of two twentieth-century Chinese composers, Xiao Youmei (1884–1940) and Nie Er (1912–1935), toward Western classical music. Xiao, classically trained in Western music, founded China's first specialised music conservatory, the National Conservatory of Music (Guoli Yinyue Xueyuan), later renamed the National College of Music (Guoli Yinyue Zhuanke Xuexiao), advocating for the role of Western classical music in elevating Chinese musical standards. In contrast, Nie, a left-wing composer, had a more complicated relationship with Western music. He publicly debated the role of music in China's modernisation and criticised fellow musicians in both the press and his writings. This article explores Nie's evolving attitude toward Western music in China by addressing key questions: Did Nie truly regard Western classical music as irrelevant, even though he studied violin under foreign instructors and recorded in his diary that he practiced classical music intensively? Furthermore, if he considered the National College of Music unimportant, how can his repeated attempts to gain admission be understood?*

*Drawing from these inquiries, this article reconstructs the encounter between the ideologies of two of China's foremost musicians during the Republican era. It highlights Xiao's advocacy for progressive social change through the promotion of Western musical education, while also demonstrating that Nie was more receptive to certain elements of Western music than has previously been acknowledged. Through this analysis the article enhances the understanding of the complex roles both composers played in shaping the modernisation of Chinese music and musical practices.*

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## Introduction

The introduction of Western culture to China from the 1840s onward not only brought processes of modernisation but also the problem of cultural hegemony. Beginning with the Self-Strengthening Movement in 1861, it became typical in the first half of the twentieth century to adapt Western education and technology to China's needs (Spence, 2013, p. 208). Shanghai, with less centralised political control than other cities,<sup>1</sup> was strongly influenced by this situation. Around the turn of the twentieth century, Shanghai became a major metropolis,

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<sup>1</sup> Despite the demise of the Qing dynasty (1636–1912) and the 1911 Revolution's founding of the Republic of China (1912–1949), the social structures left by the Qing dynasty did not completely collapse. Political and social instability marked this period in China's history, known as the Warlord Era. Different groups in Beijing and Nanjing competed to seizing power. Shanghai, on the other hand, was administered by foreign powers and stood somewhat outside these struggles for national dominance. See, for example, Spence, 2013, pp. 316–321. Appendix 1 provides a timeline of key dates relevant to the discussion in this article.

with its growth heavily dependent on various foreign concessions (Wang, 2001, p. 1660). With these concessions, Western foreigners transformed the city, resulting in a more urbanised outlook with new administrative and commercial enterprises. While the new streets and buildings signified the Western hegemonic presence, Chinese residents ignored these external influences (Lee, 1999, pp. 3–4, 308).<sup>2</sup> On the one hand, Shanghai residents accepted these influences without resistance and notice because they were so pervasive and embedded. Indeed, the external changes were seen as the Western achievements, which resulted in a new understanding of hierarchy. For example, in foreign concessions, residents of Shanghai could not engage in activities without permission. On the other hand, their unquestioned Chineseness allowed their disregard to be interpreted as an ability to embrace Western modernity openly, without the fear of cultural colonisation (Lee, 1999, p. 312). These external changes were also viewed as products of modernity, though they led to some issues of cultural colonialism. For example, the establishment of church schools provided a chance to disseminate Western culture, but it also led to an uncritical admiration and culture among the Chinese. However, the existence of China's cultural heritage for thousands of years enabled it to approach the issue of decolonisation in the process of learning. Therefore, Western-influenced Chinese patriots living in Shanghai could not avoid developing contradictory attitudes toward Western culture, as they sought to acquire Western learning while simultaneously patriotically opposing the impact of Western power. These contradictory attitudes were thoughtfully discussed in Paulo Freire's book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. He notes that when the oppressed experience oppression, they become dependent on the culture of their oppressors (1972, p. 42). However, this 'dependence' can manifest in various ways. An exemplification of this phenomenon is found in the views of the Chinese patriotic musicians who held differing opinions about Western music.<sup>3</sup>

There were divergences surrounding the influence of Western music in China, which led to conflicts among Chinese musicians. The main point of contention was the role of Western music in the modernisation of China. One of the most telling examples of this debate was the conceptual encounter between the ideologies of Xiao Youmei (1884–1940) and Nie Er (1912–1935), evidenced by Nie's public challenge to Xiao. This case study illustrates how Chinese musicians utilised Western culture to cultivate their own cultural identity, while simultaneously resisting Western colonialism—a process that was viewed as a form of

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<sup>2</sup> For more on Western culture, Western hegemony and cultural colonialism, see Lee, 1999, pp. 307–323.

<sup>3</sup> Western music in the Republican period generally referred to European, American, Japanese and other styles of music in general, especially classical music.

decolonisation. Many Chinese musicians felt that receiving Western education and training would enable them to resist its musical dominance and ultimately lead to a new form of Chinese music. For instance, Xiao Youmei (1934a, p. 638) argued that the development of Chinese traditional music necessitated the adoption of Western compositional techniques, including harmony, counterpoint, instrumentation and pattern analysis. Hence, his pursuit of Western musical education did not entail the abandonment of Chinese musical traditions; rather, it served to catalyse the evolution of Chinese music. However, due to ongoing foreign military action and seizures of Chinese territory, such as the Mukden Incident (1931) and the January 28 Incident (1932), a significant increase in anti-imperialist thinking prompted some musicians to question Western influences, including Western music. Nie Er was one such cynic; in his diary entry from 4 February 1932 (p. 391), he expressed his belief that Western classical music was counter revolutionary. Even though he was not yet a member of the Communist Party of China (CPC), his left-wing ideology<sup>4</sup> had started to manifest itself. In his political stance, Western classical music became a symbol of cultural repression intertwined with foreign militarism.

Xiao Youmei and Nie Er are both celebrated musicians in contemporary China, with extensive scholarly attention devoted to their work. Scholars examining Xiao have paid particular attention to his stance on music education, focusing on three specific influences that shaped his thoughts: Western, Japanese and traditional Chinese musical thought (Zhu, 2011; Zhang, 2014). Researchers have also highlighted the impact of his educational initiatives and why he emphasised the social role of music (Li and Shao, 2020), as well as the context of his contributions to the rise of music education in China (Ho, 2012). Moreover, due to his prolificacy as a composer, his musical compositions have been subjected to several forms of analysis. For instance, Chi Bing (2009) evaluated the components of Xiao's piano compositions, while Du Shanshan (2012) and Han Hua (2015) examined his vocal music using the renowned piece "Wen" ("Ask", 1922). More recently, Jin Tingting (2020) investigated the interplay between melody and lyrics, using Xiao's work as a case study.

The research on Nie Er focuses on his left-wing beliefs and musical works. For instance, Mi Lei (2008) treated Nie as a crucial example in examining the role of music during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945). Other researchers, such as He Shide, Wang Shu, Peng Huang and Yang Shuli, have examined his songs from a variety of perspectives. He

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<sup>4</sup> Left-wing ideology is recognised as progressive thinking that supports social reform. In the Republican period, it referred to anti-imperial and anti-feudalist thinking.

(1951) discussed the revolutionary ideas by analysing Nie’s vocal music. Yang (2012) and Wang and Peng (2013) explored the artistic characteristics of Nie’s prominent vocal works “Tietixia de Genü” (“Downtrodden Singing Girl”), and “Meiniang Qu” (“Song of Meiniang”). The focus of their research was Nie’s nationalism, which has also been studied by international scholars, including Joshua H. Howard (2012, 2021), who discussed Nie Er’s and China’s “sonic nationalism”. In summary, these investigations have enhanced our understanding of the cognitive processes of these two composers and establish a foundation for comparing them to one another.

Some comparative studies investigate Xiao and Nie alongside their contemporaries. Scholars have compared Xiao to music educators such as Wang Guangqi (1892–1936) (Xu, 2016), Cheng Maojun (1900–1957) (Liu, 2006), and Huang Zi (1904–1938) (Zhu, 2005),<sup>5</sup> all of whom were influenced by distinct Western music ideologies. In relation to Nie and his contemporaries, his relationship with Li Jinhui (1891–1967), leader of Mingyue Gewutuan (“Bright Moon Music and Dance Troupe”),<sup>6</sup> has been subject to investigation (Chen and Zhang, 2010; Zhang, 2010). Li is credited with formally introducing Nie to the music industry; however, Nie’s contrasting musical perspectives led to frequent disputes between the pair. Despite comparisons of Xiao or Nie with other contemporary musicians, there has been limited research directly comparing their work with each other. Xiao has primarily been recognised as a music educator, despite also being a prolific composer. In contrast, Nie has commonly been regarded solely as a composer, primarily one of left-wing and proletarian songs, which differ significantly in scale and approach to Xiao’s compositional work. Nevertheless, each sought to save the nation by inspiring the Chinese people’s spirit through music—whether by adopting Western music technology to create new compositions or by resisting the cultural colonisation brought by Western music. Thus, their distinct musical approaches toward this shared aim merit further examination.

### **Exploring the Backgrounds of Xiao Youmei and Nie Er**

To properly compare Xiao and Nie, it is imperative to delineate their distinctive musical ideologies, disparate educational backgrounds and work experiences, respective repertoires of

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<sup>5</sup> Wang Guangqi was a musicologist and renowned social activist. See further Xiang, 1994, pp. 191–208. Cheng was a Chinese composer. See further Xiang, 1994, pp. 397–408. Huang Zi was a music educator and composer. See further Xiang, 1994, pp. 530–553.

<sup>6</sup> Li Jinhui was also the founder of Zhongguo Ertong Gewuju (“Chinese Children’s Theatre”). In May 1927, he founded the Zhonghua Gewu Xuexiao (“Chinese Dance School”) which changed its name in 1930 to Mingyue Gewutuan (“Bright Moon Song and Dance Troupe”). In this article Mingyue Gewutuan is used as the standard. See Xiang, 1994, pp. 179–190.

musical compositions, approaches to Western music and political entanglements. This section outlines Xiao's and Nie's backgrounds, before discussing their dependencies on Western music. Given their shared status as composers of national anthems, the comparison of their music serves not only to elucidate their respective approaches to Western music but also to illuminate their social and political ideologies.

#### Nationalist Music Educator, Xiao Youmei

Xiao Youmei, the “father of contemporary music education” in China (Ho, 2012, p. 195), was born in 1884 in Zhongshan city, Guangdong province. He received home tuition and a private education, as his father was an old scholar of the Qing dynasty (Xiang, 1994, p. 87). In 1889, Xiao and his family relocated to Macau,<sup>7</sup> where he studied English and Japanese, laying the groundwork for his later studies in Japan. In 1892, Sun Zhongshan (1866–1925), the first interim president of the Republic of China (1912) and the first leader of the Nationalist Party of China (1919), became Xiao's neighbour in Macau. Sun and Xiao's family became close and Sun's revolutionary thoughts deeply influenced Xiao (Xiang, 1994a, p. 88).<sup>8</sup>

In 1900, Xiao returned to Guangdong province and enrolled at Shimin Junior High School<sup>9</sup> in Guangzhou city; two years later he travelled to Japan to study. From 1902 to 1906, he attended the Tokyo Music School where he studied singing and piano (Xiang, 1994, p. 88). In 1906, he joined the Tong Meng Hui (“Chinese Revolutionary Alliance”), a secret society founded by Sun Zhongshan, Song Jiaoren (1882–1913), and others, who were Chinese progressives in Japan (Xiang, 1994a, p. 88). In the same year, Xiao secured funding from the Qing dynasty's Guangdong government and enrolled at Tokyo Imperial University, where he studied education, graduating in 1909. In the same year, Xiao returned to China and achieved the “Wen Juren” degree (literally, “Recommended Man”), which the Qing dynasty had established for students who had studied abroad (Huang and Wang, 2007, pp. 54–56). On 1 January 1912, Sun Zhongshan became the first president of the Republican government in Nanjing following the 1911 Revolution. However, Sun was promptly replaced by Yuan Shikai (1859–1916) on 13 February 1912. In April, the Nanjing government was disbanded, and Xiao briefly served as Sun's secretary until its dissolution (Xiang, 1994a, p. 89). After that, Xiao

<sup>7</sup> Portugal gained perpetual occupation rights over Macau in the Sino-Portuguese Treaty of Peking (1887).

<sup>8</sup> Sun Zhongshan was another name for Sun Yat-sen. For more about Sun's revolutionary thoughts, see Zhang, 2006, pp. 54–101.

<sup>9</sup> While English translations are used for the names of educational institutions in the main article, their original Chinese names are provided in Appendix 2.

relocated to Guangzhou and accepted a position with the Guangdong Province Department of Education. Meanwhile, he joined the Chinese Nationalist Party.

In October 1912, Xiao received funding from the Republican government to study in Germany. In 1916, he received his doctoral degree in music from Leipzig University and returned to China in March 1920. Shortly after, he was appointed to the Department of Education in the Beiyang government<sup>10</sup> and was selected by the National Anthem Society to compose the melody for “Qing Yun Ge” (“Song of the Auspicious Cloud”).<sup>11</sup> In October 1920, his melody was chosen as the National Anthem of the Republic of China.<sup>12</sup> The following year, in 1921, based on Xiao’s suggestion, a music department was established at the National Beijing Women’s Higher Normal School,<sup>13</sup> the first of its kind in China. In 1922, a similar programme was set up at Peking University in Beijing and Xiao served as director of teaching affairs. During his seven years in Beijing,<sup>14</sup> he completed numerous musical compositions, including the solo songs *Wen* and *Xin Nishang Yuyiqu* (“Garment of New White Feathers”, 1923), and compiled several music education textbooks (Xiang, 1994a, pp. 94–98).

While in Beijing, Xiao devoted himself to building the first professional music conservatory in China, but the government did not support him, however this changed in 1927. When Cai Yuanpei (1868–1940)<sup>15</sup> returned to his role as education minister for the Nationalist government in Nanjing, he supported Xiao to open it because of Cai’s aesthetic educational thought. Cai believed that the spirit of China’s people changed with the aesthetic education. Therefore, Xiao received ¥3060 to fund the construction of a music conservatory in Shanghai: the National Conservatory of Music (Xiang, 1994a, p. 98).<sup>16</sup> In the beginning, Cai was the principal and Xiao was a professor and dean. From September 1928, the government tried to hire Xiao as the principal, but he repeatedly rejected the offer until July 1929. In September 1928, Xiao re-registered with the Chinese Nationalist Party (No. 4216-Hu) (Xiang, 1994a, p.

<sup>10</sup> The international community recognised the Beiyang Government as the legitimate Chinese government from 1912–1927.

<sup>11</sup> “Qing Yun Ge” was recorded in *Shangshu Dazhuan–Yuxiazhuan*, which is an ancient Chinese book of uncertain authorship and date. The Beiyang government selected “Qing Yun Ge” from this book as the lyrics for the national anthem and issued a public call for musical compositions.

<sup>12</sup> The national anthem, “Qing Yun Ge”, was subsequently replaced by “Sanmin Zhuyi Ge” (“Three Principles of the People”), which was composed by Cheng Maojun in 1928.

<sup>13</sup> The Ministry of Education changed this institute’s name to the National Beijing Women’s Normal University in 1924.

<sup>14</sup> Beijing, also named Beiping and Peking in the Republican period. In this paper, to avoid confusion, Beijing is used, except for some special official names, such as Peking University, the Sino-Portuguese Treaty of Peking, or the National Beiping University Art Academy.

<sup>15</sup> For more information about Cai’s aesthetic education and education reform, see Liang, 1996, pp. 1–20.

<sup>16</sup> The National Conservatory of Music was renamed the National College of Music at the request of the Ministry of Education in 1929. It was the predecessor of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. Elsewhere in this article the title National College of Music is used as the standard.

109). Although there is no documentation linking Xiao's registration to his educational work at the National College of Music, it has been inferred that he did so to benefit his role in educational leadership, as being a member of the ruling party was considered advantageous for such leadership positions. During this time, many organisations were established at or alongside the new music college, such as the Yinyue Wenyishe ("Music and Art Society", 1933), and the Yinyue Boyin Weiyuanhui ("Music Broadcasting Committee", 1934) (Xiang, 1994a, p. 105). Following the establishment of the music conservatory, Xiao faced funding challenges to keep the school running. Despite such difficulties, the institution nurtured many renowned Chinese musicians, including prominent composers He Lüting (1903–1999) and Xian Xinghai (1905–1945).<sup>17</sup> Additionally it trained a multitude of music teachers for different kinds of schools.

Therefore, it is no exaggeration to say that Xiao's contribution to cultivating musical talent laid a foundation for the development of Western music in China, because these musicians or music teachers, who underwent Western curricula, emerged as the main force for disseminating Western music in China. For example, as per the mandatory curriculum of 1929, there were fourteen distinct courses, of which only one focused on Chinese music, while ten were centred on Western music, and three were language or political classes (see figure 1). Furthermore, Xiao's reliance on Western music manifested not only in his approach to music education, but also in his musical compositions. The Western technique of composition and the piano accompaniment score for the National Anthem, "Qing Yun Ge", in E major is one clear piece of evidence of this (Xiang, 1994a, p. 93), as the recurring note *fah* (highlighted in red in figure 2), was not a trait of Chinese music. In addition, Xiao composed another version of "Qing Yun Ge", for military bands, but believed it was unsuitable for performance on the Chinese flute, the *di* (Xiao, 1921).

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<sup>17</sup> He Lüting (1903–1999) served as president of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music from 1949–1984. His famous works included "Mutong Duandi" ("Buffalo Boy's Flute", 1934) and "Tianya Genü" ("The Wandering Songstress", 1937); see further Xiang, 1994, pp. 485–501. Xian Xinghai (1905–1945) was known for "Huanghe Dahechang" ("The Yellow River Cantata", 1938); see further Xiang, 1994, pp. 617–636.

Course	Course Name <sup>18</sup>	Preparatory Course	Under-graduate Course	Teacher Training Program
		Points	Points	Points
Compulsory Courses	Dangyi (“The Principles of the Party”)	0.5		0.5
	Guowen, Shige (“Chinese, Poet”)	2.5	3.5	4
	Guoyin (“Chinese Music”)	0.5		0.5
	Diyi Waiguoyu (“English, French”)	6	8	9
	Putong Yuexue (“General Music theory”)	2		2
	Heshengxue (“Harmonics”)	4		4
	Zuoqufa Chubu (“Elementary Composition Skills”)	1		1
	Hechang (“Choir”)	1.5	0.5	1.5
	Shichang (“Sightsinging”)	1		1
	Yinyue Linglüefa (“Music Form Analysis”)	1		1
	Yinyueshi Gailun (“The Outline of Music History”)	2		2
	Jiaoyu Xue (“Pedagogy”)			1.5
	Jiaoshou Fa (“Teaching Theory”)			1
	Gedui Zhihuifa (“Choir Conductor Method”)			1

**Figure 1: Compulsory Courses**

Note: This information is from Yang Xiao, *A Study of The Music Education System of the National Conservatory of Music – the National College of Music* (2022). Shanghai: Shanghai Yinyue Xueyuan Chubanshe, pp. 148–149.

<sup>18</sup> For a better understanding, I have added English translations for all courses.



**卿雲歌**

Andante maestoso 蕭友梅作曲

歌聲

鋼琴

The musical score is written in G major (one sharp) and common time. It consists of four systems of music. The first system shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The piano part starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic and includes a crescendo (*cresc.*). The second system contains the lyrics '雲... 爛... 兮, 紉 纒 纒... 兮.' with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. The third system contains the lyrics '日月... 光... 華, 旦 復 旦... 兮' and features a decrescendo (*dim.*) dynamic. The fourth system repeats the lyrics '日月... 光... 華, 旦 復 旦... 兮' and includes a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic and a ritardando (*rit.*) marking. There are three red boxes highlighting specific notes in the vocal line: one in the second system and two in the third system.

**Figure 2: The Musical Score of “Qing Yun Ge”**  
Originally published in *Music Magazine* (31 May 1920).

### Left-Wing Song Composer, Nie Er

Nie Er (originally named Nie Shouxin) was born in Kunming, Yunnan province, in 1912.<sup>19</sup> After his father's death, his family lived in destitution. Upon completing elementary school in 1925, Nie enrolled in Yunnan First Associated Middle School, and later, in 1927, at Yunnan First Normal School to receive a tuition waiver (Xiang, 1994b, pp. 216–217). There, Nie was exposed to proletarian revolutionary ideas and began learning violin and piano (Xiang, 1994b, p. 219). He moved to Shanghai in 1930 to work as a salesclerk at the Yunfeng Shanghao department store, but the store went bankrupt in March 1931 (Xiang, 1994b, p. 220). In April of that year, Nie launched his formal music career by joining Mingyue Gewutuan as a violinist (Xiang, 1994b, p. 220).

Li Jinhui insisted on “music and dance as entertainment” (Li, 1994, p. 190), a viewpoint rejected by Nie's revolutionary ideas. As an example, within his article, ‘Zhongguo Gewu Duanlun [A Short Treatise on Chinese Song and Dance]’, he advocated that music ought to resound with fervour for the masses, simultaneously dismissing Li's proposition that “music serves solely for entertainment” (1932a, p. 54). Despite his criticisms, Nie's membership of Li's musical group gave him greater autonomy to compose his own material. In July 1932, Nie wrote several articles, such as ‘Xialiu [Dirty]’,<sup>20</sup> which criticised Li's work and intensified his conflict with him. After a meeting on 5 August 1932, Nie was asked to temporarily withdraw from the troupe. As a result, he left Shanghai and relocated to Beijing to seek new opportunities (Nie, 2011, pp. 472–481).

One month after he arrived in Beijing, Nie took the entrance exam for the National Beiping University Art Academy, which he failed. In October 1932, the Zuoyi Yinyuejia Lianmeng (“Leftist Musicians' Union”) was founded in Beijing and Nie was one of the founders (Xiang, 1994b, p. 224). After failing to secure a job in Beijing, he returned to Shanghai. In 1933, on the recommendation of the drama activist, playwright and poet Tian Han (1898–1968),<sup>21</sup> Nie joined the CPC. In February, Nie and other progressive musicians organised the Zhongguo Xinxin Yinyue Yanjiuhui (“Chinese Contemporary Music Research Group”). In April 1933, Nie became deputy director of the music department at the Shanghai branch of Pathé Records, where he recorded several works, including “Kaikuang Ge”

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<sup>19</sup> Nie Er was the name he gave to himself. Because he had perfect pitch, his friends and colleagues called him, Mr Erduo (“Mr Ear”). Therefore, he preferred to adopt this, and this name was more well recognised by the public.

<sup>20</sup> Original published in *Dianying yishu* (“The Art of Movie”) 8 July 1932b, see further Nie Er Quanji Bianweihui, 2011, p. 44.

<sup>21</sup> Tian Han was the lyricist of, “Yiyongjun Jinxingqu”.

(“Miners’ Song”, 1933), “Matou Gongren Ge” (“Dock Workers’ Song”, 1934) and “Kuli Ge” (“Song of the Labour Force”, 1934). Most of his compositions targeted the proletariat, aligning with his revolutionary ideals. In June 1934, the opera *Yangzijiang Fengbao* (“Storm on the Yangtze”), which Nie co-wrote with Tian Han, premiered in Shanghai and featured an anti-Japanese theme (Xiang, 1994b, p. 231). In May 1935, his famous work, “Yiyongjun Jinxingqu” (“March of the Volunteers”) was published, serving as the main theme song for the film *Fengyun Ernü* (“Children of Troubled Times”, 1935) (Xiang, 1994b, p. 232).

One perspective on the characteristics of Nie’s music suggests that Nie preferred the Western major scale, a limited vocal range and the repetition of a main melody—techniques he likely absorbed from Russian military songs (He, 2006, p. 85). These Western elements, combined with his revolutionary ideals, are reflected in the most famous song of his compositional work “Yiyongjun Jinxingqu” (see figure 3). After the foundation of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, this song was chosen as the provisional national anthem and officially endorsed in 1982, cementing Nie’s legacy in modern Chinese history. In July 1935, Nie died in an accident while in Japan. His works were significant, not only as anthems of revolution and the voice of the working class but also as examples of how Western musical traditions could be integrated into a distinctly Chinese revolutionary sound. Nie’s responses to Western classical music also reflected the impact of Western cultural colonialism, but his compositional approach was different from that of Xiao Youmei.

# 中华人民共和国国歌

(义勇军进行曲)

田 汉作词  
聂 耳作曲

进行曲速度

来! 不 愿 做 奴 隶 的 人 们! 把 我 们 的 血 肉,  
筑 成 我 们 新 的 长 城! 中 华 民 族  
到 了 最 危 险 的 时 候, 每 个 人 被 迫 着 发 出  
最 后 的 吼 声。 起 来! 起 来! 起 来!  
我 们 万 众 一 心, 冒 着 敌 人 的 炮 火 前 进!  
冒 着 敌 人 的 炮 火 前 进! 前 进! 前 进! 进!



**Figure 3: The Musical Score of “Yiyongjun Jinxingqu”**

Note: G major (circle mark); a limited vocal range (triangle mark); the repeat of a main melody (underline mark). This score is from the official website of the State Council the People’s Republic of China. Available at: [https://www.gov.cn/guoqing/2017-06/07/content\\_5200610.htm](https://www.gov.cn/guoqing/2017-06/07/content_5200610.htm) (Accessed: 4 April 2024).

### Differing Dependencies

To further explore the musical approaches of Xiao and Nie, the dependency on Western music evident in their musical thoughts must be further clarified. Initially, the matter necessitates a reassessment of dependence within the framework of this historical period. Frantz Fanon (1967, pp. 83–108) discusses the relationship between dependency and the colonised in his book, *Black Skin, White Masks*. He argues that, regardless of how colonisers justify their actions, two points define their colonial behaviours and create dependence. The first occurs when those who are colonised recognise their ‘backwardness’, and the second is that they show their desire to enter the coloniser’s world. Thus, people who reject their own music while admiring music from other countries may exhibit a form of dependence. In this respect, Xiao and Nie were no exceptions. As was outlined in the previous section, their music reflects characteristics and compositional techniques of Western music.

Both of them have different attitudes toward Western music and Chinese traditional music. Xiao believed that:

People would be influenced by listening to a great deal of beautiful music [such as Western classical music]. However, the voice of old Chinese musical instruments cannot inspire the people’s spirit. (Xiao, 1934b, p. 650)

Here, Xiao acknowledged the superior evolution of Western music over that of Chinese music. However, he elucidated that the burgeoning prevalence of ‘bad’ music in China (i.e. traditional Chinese music considered outdated) stemmed from a protracted history of governmental disregard for the cultural significance of nurturing the populace’s spiritual well-being through music (1934a, p. 638). He further noted (1934a, p. 638) that music received diminishing attention from the population after the Tang dynasty (618–907), as it was no longer regarded as a respectable profession. Consequently, fewer people researched music, and consequently the development of Chinese music halted. The underdevelopment of Chinese musicians meant that they lacked the ability to create keyboard instruments and staff notation (Xiao, 1934a, p. 638). These views indicate that Xiao assessed Chinese music through the lens of the Western musical system, providing additional support for his endorsement of Western music.

Similarly, Nie’s desire to study in the Western-style music conservatory and his preference for Western music also reveal the existence of dependence in his thought. In April 1929, Nie passed the entrance exam for the Music Class of the Art School of the Guangdong Opera Institution,<sup>22</sup> but dropped out one day later, claiming that he did not want to learn

<sup>22</sup> This school was founded by Ouyang Yuqian (1889–1962) in Guangzhou in 1929. Elsewhere in this article the title Guangdong Opera Institute is used as the standard.

traditional Cantonese performance in luogu (“gong and drum ensemble music”) or sixian (“music for silk-stringed instruments”) (Xiang, 1994b, p. 218).<sup>23</sup> His failure of the 1932 entrance examination for the National Beiping University Art Academy has already been mentioned and in 1934 he failed the entrance examination for the National College of Music. Nie’s unsuccessful attempts make it clear that learning Western music was more important to him than studying traditional Chinese music. Furthermore, while there are hints of traditional shan’ge (literally, “mountain songs”; a genre of folksong) and haozi (“work songs”; a genre of folksong) in Nie’s music,<sup>24</sup> his music showcased an array of Western music traits, with a notable emphasis on Russian military songs, as elucidated in the preceding discussion.

The above details demonstrate examples of Nie’s and Xiao’s dependence on Western music or Western music culture while their contrasting backgrounds led them to distinct kinds of dependence. Xiao’s heavy reliance on Western music was prompted by his experiences of studying abroad and his research on Western music. Given his familiarity with Western music, he insisted on the Western music educational method. Therefore, Xiao’s knowledge advocated societal change through reliance upon what he saw as developed Western music. It is worth noting that Xiao did not believe Chinese music was poor, he simply believed it to be less developed than Western music (Xiao, 1938, p. 679). As a result, he devoted himself to incorporating Western-style systems of music education into China to change Chinese musical culture. He believed that once Chinese music reached the same level as Western music, it would become more appreciated in Chinese society (Xiao, 1938, p. 680). Xiao’s dependence on Western music manifested itself in two ways: first, he borrowed Western music technology and institutions, such as instruments, notation, music structures and the organisational characteristic of German music education, to develop Chinese music, educating more Chinese musicians in Western musical means who could go on to compose new Chinese music; second, he disseminated Western music to cultivate a new spirit among the people and boost morale during the Second Sino-Japanese War.

In contrast, Nie did not have a chance to embrace a systematic Western music education, learning Western music and its compositional skills in a more piecemeal manner. Nie did not assume that Western music offered a grand panacea to China’s situation. Xiao (1930, p. 276), insisted on “art for the public”, and thus, Western music, which lacked a mass base in China, was not what he had in mind. If Xiao’s attitude toward Western music was one

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<sup>23</sup> These two ensembles provided the accompaniment in Cantonese Opera.

<sup>24</sup> Shan’ge is a form of Chinese music in which individuals sing improvised lyrics, often love songs. Haozi includes songs sung while working.

of inclusive selection, Nie's attitude was one of contradictory reception. Nie learned and questioned at the same time. He studied Western music intensively, as illustrated by his playing of the violin, analysis of harmony and attendance at Western music concerts, while believing that "Western classical music was a counterrevolution" (Nie, 1932, p. 391). Nie's ambivalent attitude was also induced by his political stance and his participation in left-wing organisations. Compared with Xiao, Nie did not intend to work with the government. Hence, he had greater freedom to express his dissatisfaction with society and musical trends, a freedom further enhanced by his use of pseudonyms, as explored in more detail below. Nie's aim was to compose music for the working class as a means of expressing their plight and challenging the capitalist nature of the era's artistic production more widely. In summary, their educational backgrounds, social and political standing and occupational requirements all contributed to shaping the nuanced dependency that both Xiao and Nie established on Western music. These differences provide the foundation for their ideological encounter.

### **The Conceptual Encounter Between Nie Er and Xiao Youmei**

The respective dependencies of Nie and Xiao do not diminish the value of their ideas or contributions; rather, they explain the underlying causes of the conflict between them and the root of their disagreement, even though both were ultimately committed to advancing China's interests. The ideological encounter between Nie and Xiao took place between 1933 and 1935. At the request of the Shanghai Municipal Education Bureau, the National College of Music had begun broadcasting Western music through the Shanghai Wireless Broadcasting Corporation ("Shanghai Wireless Broadcasting Corporation") in 1933 (Xiao, 1934b, p. 650). Nie, writing under the pseudonym Wang Daping,<sup>25</sup> published 'Yinianlaizhi Zhongguo Yinyue [The Achievement of Music in China]', in *Shenbao* ("Shanghai News") on 16 January 1935. There, Nie discussed the development of music from five perspectives, one of which was the radio programme. Nie initially praised the practice of the National College of Music's radio broadcasts, but then critiqued them for being too elitist to be appealing. He used the phrase "Experts in school" to indicate that their music was not grounded in wider social realities, such as the impoverished living conditions of individuals and the impact of war. However, according to Xiao's article 'Yinyue de Shili [The Power of Music]' (1934c, pp. 596–597), the choice of Western music in the College's radio programme was to alter the moral character of individuals

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<sup>25</sup> Nie used several pseudonyms, such as Nie Ziyi, Wang Daping, Black Angel, Zao Sen and Wan Yu. At that time, many authors used pseudonyms to avoid difficulty from the government or any other power that opposed progressive ideas.

through music. Though this was not a direct response to Nie's viewpoint, it expressed Xiao's thoughts on why he made radio programmes focused on Western music. Xiao deliberately introduced Western music that he considered 'good' to the public via radio broadcasts. This difference in perspective represents a key divergence between Xiao and Nie regarding how music could save China.

Nie and Xiao's conflicting perspectives concerning the role and contribution of Western music continued over the following years. On 3 June 1935, Nie delivered a speech entitled 'Zuijin Zhongguo Yinyuejie Zongjiantao [A Recent Review of the Music World in China]' at a gathering of artists in Japan. He distinguished three groups in Chinese music circles, first, Xiao Youmei and his National College of Music which represented Western music, especially, Western classical music; second, Li Jinhui and his *mimi zhiyin* ("vulgar song"); third, revolutionary movie music catering to the masses (Wang, 1992, pp. 296–297). Nie considered that Xiao only focused on composing classical music, without considering the Chinese people's needs (Wang, 1992, p. 296). Clearly, Nie's comments suggested that Xiao's music was unsuitable for the Chinese context and that classical music did not hold significant relevance in China. During the war era, revolutionary music that encouraged people to overcome difficult situations was seen as more relevant, while classical music, such as piano sonatas and violin concertos, had little practical effect. Under these circumstances, classical music represented a luxury that could be enjoyed only for leisure. However, Xiao responded to this opinion during an interview about Chinese new music in 1938, expressing that in:

learning and adopting Western techniques to create Chinese new music [...] during the war era, [we should] create more patriotic songs [i.e. revolutionary music] and circulate them for a short period of time: this would prove that music was not a luxury. (Xiao, 1938, pp. 679–680)

Xiao's answer proves that he viewed Western music was a tool for developing new Chinese music. The genre of new music included both classical and revolutionary music. Both types of music were composed by drawing on Western music, especially classical music techniques. Xiao's view reflected the complexities of the Republican period, in which different kinds of music could support different functions. While Nie Er's revolutionary songs served a purpose for left-wing organisations—encouraging the masses to overcome challenges in a difficult situation—Xiao's engagement with Western music contributed to the establishment of a music education system under the Nationalist Party. Therefore, while Nie did not highly rely on learning Western music or classical music techniques, Xiao depended heavily on Western



music, its techniques and its established education system to build a music system and contribute to China's broader educational development.

Comprehending the entanglements between Xiao and Nie is a complicated task. After an incomplete analysis, it is easy to draw one-sided conclusions. For example, in a recent newspaper article Huang Minxue stated that:

Nie used academic classical music and Li Jinhui's popular music as breakthroughs about his criticism to explore Marxist musical ideas and to implement revolutionary musical activities. (Huang, 2021)

Huang implies that Nie targeted Xiao and his National College of Music, citing Nie's claim in his diary in support of his argument:

Is classical music entertainment for the leisure class? What can [you] do if you practice études for several hours per day and become a violinist in a few decades? Can you evoke the spirit of the masses by playing a Beethoven sonata? (Huang, 2021)

Huang's argument is plausible given that Nie and Xiao had distinct musical ideals and that Nie had written those words. Nonetheless, two aspects remain unclear, each of which leads to a series of questions. On one hand, did Nie's placement of Xiao into the camp of Western music imply that he viewed this camp as hostile? Did Nie's division of the Chinese music industry into three camps—classical music (represented by Xiao Youmei), popular music (represented by Li Jinhui), and left-wing music (represented by Nie Er himself) (Wang, 1992, p. 296)—suggest hostility towards the other two camps? Did Nie approve of Xiao's work? These questions lack definitive answers, and it is important to clarify that none of them can be resolved through a single piece of evidence, such as this short quotation. On the other hand, is it possible that Nie's diary entries reflect his dissatisfaction with classical music? What about his desire to study Western music in a professional music conservatory? What was Nie's relationship with Western music, and how did Xiao perceive Western music? Only by addressing these issues, can the entanglement between Xiao and Nie be resolved. The following discussion analyses their encounters from two perspectives: social pressure and political affiliations.

Firstly, the social atmosphere imbued most aspiring musicians with a powerful sense of responsibility. This shared social pressure meant that Xiao and Nie both believed in the power of music to achieve societal transformation. Xiao believed that "music has a strong relationship with national spirit" (Xiao, 1934d, p. 613), and that "music could improve people's national consciousness and patriotism" (Xiao, 1937, p. 673). Nie also believed, according to his diary on 8 November 1930, that music held power to influence the masses (Nie, 1930, p. 276). Hence, at this point, Xiao and Nie had similar thoughts. They diverged on what kind of

music could best contribute to saving China. Describing his broadcasts mentioned above, Xiao insisted that “the sound of ancient Chinese musical instruments could not stir the soul,” so, most of the music that he selected was Western (Xiao, 1934b, p. 650). As already mentioned, according to his diary on 4 February 1932, Nie considered that Western classical music was counter-revolutionary (Nie, 1932, p. 391).<sup>26</sup> Yet he also wrote on 3 June 1934 that “music was a way for people to speak” (Nie, 1934, p. 553), and thus music should belong to the masses. From Nie’s perspective, classical music was not what the populace desired, so he contemplated what type of music would resonate with them instead. He questioned the function of classical music on multiple occasions in his diary.

Secondly, Xiao’s and Nie’s different political responsibilities led to their varying opinions concerning Western music’s educational function. Xiao worked for the government on his return to China in 1920 until his death in 1940. He dedicated himself to establishing a new music conservatory in China by transplanting the Western musical education system.<sup>27</sup> He paid attention to music education, arguing that three factors had contributed to the failure of the development of Chinese music: instruments, musicians and the music education system (Xiao, 1934a, p. 638). In relation to the first factor, and as already mentioned, Xiao believed that Chinese musicians after the Tang dynasty had not improved either China’s indigenous systems of music notation or its musical instruments. Concerning musicians, Xiao held that a lack of progressive spirit had prevented musicians from learning from other musical genres. Finally, according to Xiao, the evolution of musical education and the development of standard musical notation were impeded by the lack of any professional musical institution. After considering these three factors, Xiao was determined that establishing such a music education institution was the most crucial step to take. A formal institution for music education would address the development of music education, and then notation and instruments would also improve. His approach provided an efficient method for establishing a well-developed music education system in China; however, it also risked misleading those who perceived him as an uncritical adherent of Western classical music.

In contrast, Nie’s political outlook differed from Xiao’s. Nie had always desired a revolution, and his actions were typically aligned with that goal.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, it was impossible

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<sup>26</sup> Nie considered that Western classical music represented Xiao and the Nationalist Party government. Thus, from his political position within the CPC, he considered it to be counter revolutionary.

<sup>27</sup> For more about the music education system of this institution, see Xiao, 2022.

<sup>28</sup> In 1928, he joined the Sixteenth Regiment of the National Revolutionary Army, but he quit because of unjustified corporal punishment and frequent underfeeding. In 1929, after the explosion of the powder magazine, he took part in several activities to fight against the forces of Yunnan’s warlord. In 1930, he went to Shanghai to hide from the Yunnan authorities (Xiang, 1994, pp. 217–219).

for him to serve the government, as Xiao did. Since Nie had no official role, he did not need to assume responsibility for managing improvements in the education system. Xiao's "Copinism" (serving the Government in improving the education system) was not Nie's path (Xiao, 2022, p. 271). Nie's conception of the ideal musical education was one that matched his revolutionary beliefs. As a result, Nie, regularly complained about the highbrow education of the National College of Music. For example, he wrote in his diary on 24 September 1931 that:

We [i.e. Nie Er and his colleagues in Mingyu Gewutuan] decided not to study in the National College of Music in case of becoming labelled as having been taught by so-and-so, because it did not really offer the opportunity to study for us. (Nie, 1931, p. 338)

Meanwhile, Chinese old-style education was also not his desired means of studying music. As noted, he left the Guangdong Opera Institution because its Cantonese music education also fell short of his revolutionary expectations. To clarify, traditional Chinese music, such as Cantonese melodies, did not derive from the contemporary societal realities of its time, which did not meet the need of his revolutionary ideas about evoking the response of the people.

Part of Nie's argument was that the National College of Music was fixated solely on Western classical music. But to what extent did that claim reflect reality, and was Nie entirely opposed to Western music education? It takes time for a well-developed system to take shape, and education is no exception. Xiao's action, in establishing a replica of the music education system he had seen overseas, was a model that offered tested methods in a period of rapid change. However, it is not entirely accurate to identify the National College of Music as exclusively focused on Western music education. For instance, Chinese music was added in the 1930s (Xiao, 2002, p. 151) and the number of Chinese language classes were increased, while language classes in Italian, German and French were reduced (Xiao, 2002, p. 164). As the president of the conservatory, Xiao advocated that:

Learning Western music does not mean all of us will become the sons of Bach, Mozart or Beethoven, but that we become their students [...]. We should use their harmony [technique] to create our new music. (Xiao, 1934e, p. 616)

The new music that Xiao mentioned included both art music and patriotic songs.<sup>29</sup> Consequently, it is too reductive to say that the National College of Music represented the Western school of music.

Nevertheless, to explain Nie's attitude towards Western music education, his views towards Western classical music should be discussed. Nie's words about Western classical

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<sup>29</sup> Art music generally refers to a style that evolved from classical music and places emphasis on aesthetics, including instrumental music and vocal music.

music in his diary were triggered by the incident that occurred in Shanghai on 28 January 1932. Hence, he wrote about his doubt of the role of Western classical music because he considered it could do nothing during wartime. Nonetheless, he wrote this while he continued to practise the violin. This shows that he did not dislike Western classical music itself. Indeed, he expressed his desire to enter the National College of Music in his diary on several occasions, and in 1932 and 1934 he took the entrance exams for the National Beiping University Art Academy and the National College of Music respectively. This further suggests that Nie saw value in Western music education.

### **Conclusion**

Xiao and Nie were not natural opponents; rather, they were potentially able to appreciate each other's work. Although Xiao did not publicly acknowledge Nie Er or his songs, he encouraged musicians to create more socially valuable music and organised the teachers and students at the National College to compose patriotic songs. It is possible that Xiao recognised and even admired Nie's efforts as a patriotic songwriter.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, Nie's desire to study at the National College of Music also shows that he approved of Xiao's mission. As the first professional music school, Nie approved of this school.

Their ideological conflicts were induced by several factors, as they and those around them struggled to address Western musical hegemony. As the first Chinese music educator to earn a doctorate in music, Xiao's primary occupation remained in that field. As a music educator, his goal was to cultivate more musicians who could use music to change the difficult national situation; he believed that a lack of music teachers was the cause of an underdeveloped music education, which in turn was the reason why Chinese music was underdeveloped. The changing music curriculum was the first indication that he fought against Western hegemony in musical education; his thoughts on the restoration of Chinese music through "Keeping the spirit without losing its ethnicity" (Xiao, 1938, p. 679) offers a second indication. This meant that Chinese musical elements should not be completely discarded when composing with Western compositional techniques. His sixteen years of study abroad did not imprint in his consciousness an image of Western music alone. Nevertheless, breaking out of the model of the education system he had acquired through his training was clearly a hard task. In his opinion, it was an indisputable fact that Chinese music lagged behind Western music (Xiao,

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<sup>30</sup> Since 1933, Nie's output expanded. Some of his works, such as "Maibao Ge" ("Song of a Newsboy", 1933) and "Matou Gongren Ge", became popular. These works introduced Nie to a wider public and they were likely familiar to Xiao.

2022, p. 275).<sup>31</sup> Xiao and his colleagues at the National College of Music all struggled subtly against the hegemony of Western music by recognising Western musical technique as an additional avenue for developing Chinese music. Furthermore, their welcoming attitude cannot be regarded as acquiescence to the hegemony of Western music. A point of comparison is offered by considering the perspectives of contemporaneous Chinese novelists. As Leo Ou-Fan Lee states, these authors'

sense of Chinese identity was never in question *in spite of* the Western colonial presence in Shanghai [...]. [It] was only because of their unquestioned Chineseness that these writers were able to embrace Western modernity openly, without fear of colonization. (Lee, 1999, p. 312, original emphasis)

Similarly, Xiao's and Nie's acceptance of Western music indicated that they did not believe it could significantly threaten their Chineseness in the music they created. This is why Nie Er as a left-wing composer criticised elitist Western music discourse and attacked the commercial aims of the music industry, even while he also created music using Western techniques. Because of his educational background, he was better equipped than Xiao to challenge the hegemony of Western music. As a result, his radical rhetoric has occasionally led to misinterpretations by later readers. Instead, this rhetoric was an additional method by which he rejected Western cultural colonisation, freeing himself to use Western musical techniques and resources to create the modern music that he believed the Chinese people needed. Freire's fundamental contention for a revolt against the dependence on a banking model in education emphasises the necessity of a dual approach involving introspection and proactive measures, which can effectively convert reliance into autonomy (Freire, 1972, pp. 42, 56). Nie rejected the colonisation of Western music culture in exactly this alternative manner. The encounter between Xiao and Nie, and their divergence over the ways in which Western music could empower Chinese society, shows just how difficult such reflection and action could be, even when two musicians shared an overall aim.

The intricate entanglements that Xiao and Nie created offer a compelling example of one way that local populations worldwide approached the matter of invasive Western cultural hegemony in the early decades of the twentieth century. Xiao's and Nie's attitudes also symbolise the diverse perspectives of representatives of discrete social strata regarding cultural hegemony. Such perspectives shift, not only in response to the ongoing intrusion of foreign culture (and military or economic power) but also as the musicians mature and encounter new

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<sup>31</sup> Xiao's colleagues at the National College of Music, Huang Zi, Zhu Ying and Qing Zhu also believed that Chinese music was inferior to Western music (Xiao, 2022, pp. 262–275).

challenges and possibilities. The result is a complex pattern indicative of their individual rationalisations and resolutions to these challenges.

## Appendix 1: Timeline of Key Events

### 1644–1911: Qing dynasty

- 1861–1895: Self-Strengthening Movement
- 1866: Birth of Sun Zhongshan
- 1884: Birth of Xiao Youmei
- 1889: Xiao and his family move to Macau
- 1892: Sun moves to Macau
- 1902–1909: Xiao studies at the Tokyo Music School, Japan
- 1906: Xiao joins the Chinese Revolutionary Alliance
- 1906–1909: Xiao studies education at Tokyo Imperial University, Japan
- 1909: Xiao returns to China
- 1910: Xiao achieves the “Wen Juren” degree from the Qing government

### 1911–1912: The 1911 Revolution and end of the Qing dynasty

### 1912–1949: Republic of China

- 1912: (January) Sun Zhongshan becomes first president of the Republican government in Nanjing
- 1912: (February) Birth of Nie Er
- 1912: (March) Xiao Youmei becomes Sun Zhongshan’s secretary
- 1912: (April) Xiao accepts position with the Guangdong Province of Education and joins the Chinese Nationalist Party, Guangzhou
- 1912–1916: Xiao studies at Leipzig University and receives the doctoral degree in music, Germany
- 1920: (March) Xiao returns to China
- 1920: (September) Xiao appointed to the Department of Education in the Beiyang government, Beijing
- 1920: (September) The department of music of the National Beijing Women’s Higher Normal School founded
- 1920: (September) Xiao starts to teach music courses at Peking University
- 1920: (October) Xiao’s melody for “Qing Yun Ge” chosen as the National Anthem of the Republic of China
- 1922–1927: Xiao serves as director of teaching affairs at Peking University
- 1925: (March) Death of Sun Zhongshan
- 1925: (July) Nie completes elementary school, enrolls in Yunnan First Associated Middle School
- 1927: (July) Nie completes middle school, enrolls in Yunan First Normal School
- 1927: (October) Music department of Peking University closes
- 1927: (October) Cai Yuanpei becomes education minister for the Nationalist government, Nanjing
- 1927: (November) National Conservatory of Music founded
- 1927: (December) Xiao becomes temporary principal of the National Conservatory of Music
- 1928: (March) Nie joins the Sixteenth Regiment of the National Revolutionary Army
- 1928: (September) Xiao re-registers with Chinese Nationalist Party
- 1929: (April) Nie passes the entrance exam for the Music Class of the Art School of the Guangdong Opera Institution
- 1929: (July) Nie takes part in several activities to fight against the forces of Yunnan’s warlord
- 1929: (July) National Conservatory of Music renamed the National College of Music
- 1929: (August) Xiao becomes principal of the National College of Music

- 1930: (July) Nie moves to Shanghai to hide from the Yunnan authorities
- 1931: (April) Nie joins Mingyue Gewutuan
- 1931: (September) Mukden Incident
- 1932: (January) January 28 Incident
- 1932: (July) Nie publishes articles ‘Zhongguo Gewu Duanlun’ and ‘Xialiu’, in *Dianying Yishu*. (August) Nie asked to withdraw from Mingyue Gewutuan and moves to Beijing.
- 1932: (September) Nie fails the National Beiping University Art Academy entrance exam
- 1932: (October) Nie is a founding member of the Leftist Musicians’ Union
- 1932: (November) Nie returns to Shanghai
- 1933: National College of Music begins broadcasting Western classical music through the Shanghai Wireless Broadcasting Corporation
- 1933: (January) Nie joins the CPC
- 1933: (February) Nie and other progressive musicians organise the Chinese Contemporary Music Research Group
- 1934: (January) Nie fails the entrance examination for the National College of Music
- 1934: (March) Xiao publishes ‘Yinyue de Shili’, in *Yinyue Jiaoyu*
- 1935: (January) Nie publishes ‘Yinianlaizhi Zhongguo Yinyue’, in *Shenbao*
- 1935: (May) Nie’s song “Yiyongjun Jinxingqu” published
- 1935: (June) Nie delivers the speech ‘Zuijin Zhongguo Yinyuejie Zongjiantao’ in Japan
- 1935: (July) Death of Nie Er
- 1938: (February) Xiao gives interview about new music in China
- 1940: (December) Death of Xiao Youmei
- 1949–present: People’s Republic of China**
- 1949: (September) Nie’s “Yiyongjun Jinxingqu” selected as the provisional national anthem
- 1982: (August) Nie’s “Yiyongjun Jinxingqu” officially endorsed



**Appendix 2: English and Chinese Names of Educational Institutes**

<b>Name of Educational Institute (English Translation)</b>	<b>Original Chinese Name of Educational Institute</b>
Music Class of the Art School of the Guangdong Opera Institution	Guangdong Xiju Yanjiusuo Fushe Yanju Xuexiao Yinyueban
National Beiping University Art Academy	Guoli Beiping Daxue Yishu Xueyuan
National Beijing Women's Higher Normal School	Guoli Beijing Nüzi Gaodeng Shifan Xuexiao
National Beijing Women's Normal University	Guoli Beijing Nüzi Shifan Daxue
National College of Music	Guoli Yinyue Zhuanke Xuexiao
National Conservatory of Music	Guoli Yinyue Xueyuan
Shanghai Conservatory of Music	Shanghai Yinyue Xueyuan
Shimin Junior High School	Shimin Xuetao
Yunnan First Associated Middle School	Yunnan Diyi Lianhe Zhongxue
Yunnan First Normal School	Yunnan Shengli Diyi Shifan Xuexiao

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