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**World Listening: Decoloniality, Ecology, *Tianren heyi*, and Ethnomusicology in
China**

During our discussions throughout this semester about different possible world questions and various ways of world questioning, there's always been a series of questions in the back of my mind: Who is asking these questions? Whose world are we talking about? What kind of questions are we privileging? Who are *we*? I believe that all of these inquiries relate to what Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano names "the coloniality of power".¹ The coloniality of power and knowledge dates to at least the sixteenth century. Nor has it finished. It constantly generates new forms which permeate into today's world-system and into people's everyday life. As Nelson Maldonado-Torres elaborates in his discussion on the coloniality of being: "It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects we breathe coloniality all the time and every day."² It is occurring during the current covid-19 pandemic crisis, when the private health care system is out of reach for most indigenous communities, leaving them significantly vulnerable. It appears when Europe and the United States became the pandemic's epicenter and, instead of learning from the experience of Asia, some segments of the population still clung to the ugly racist labeling which has led to the rise of anti-Asian hate crimes. It is evident in academia if you think about how often Western theories and research concerns are prioritized by scholarship around the world, while

¹ Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Ethnocentrism, and Latin America," *NEPANTLA* 1, no. 3 (2000): 533-80.

² Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept," *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2-3 (2007): 243.

indigenous ways of knowing and their corresponding research traditions are rarely considered and consulted as important resources. It is manifest in the classroom, when students who are people of color and descendants of immigrants feel obliged to illuminate their positionality and cultural background in their essay assignments while the white students often just assume that the world is a shared one. It is also happening to me, when I become aware of how hard I am trying to talk, to write, and to think like my American colleagues.

Puerto Rican sociologist Ramón Grosfoguel's essay "Decolonizing Post-Colonial Studies and Paradigms of Political Economy: Transmodernity, Decolonial Thinking, and Global Coloniality" (2011) follows the intellectual tradition of modernity/coloniality group in applying an epistemological critique using feminist and decolonial thinking of subalternized racial/ethnic intellectuals.³ In particular, decolonial concepts, such as Argentinean philosopher Enrique Dussel's "transmodernity" and Quijano's "socialization of power." Grosfoguel calls for a horizontal dialogue to create a common critical language of decolonization that is anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchal, anti-colonial and anti-imperialist while respecting the epistemic perspective of critical thinking "*from* and *with* subalternized racial/ethnic/sexual spaces and bodies."⁴ He calls this new form of universality a "radical universal decolonial anti-systemic diversity."⁵

Inspired by this decolonial framework, in this assignment I will attempt to explore a few possible alternative epistemologies regarding the concept of world system and human-nature relationship, from a Global South perspective. I will also explore possible methods of decolonizing

³ Modernity/coloniality group is an interdisciplinary network developed by a group of Latin American intellectuals, such as Santiago Castro-Gomez, Enrique Dussel Anibal Quijano, Walter D. Mignolo, Ramón Grosfoguel, María Lugones, Nelson Maldonado, and several others. This group studies advances critical theories from a decolonial manner which destabilizes the Eurocentric modernity and privileges perspectives of subalternized and marginalized groups.

⁴ Grosfoguel, "Decolonizing Post-Colonial Studies and Paradigms of Political Economy," 25. Emphasis added.

⁵ Ibid., 31.

academia, particularly in my own research discipline, ethnomusicology. My approach also stems from my own positionality as an international graduate student being “in-between” home and the West. As part of a younger generation of international scholars that has been trained in both North American and Chinese research traditions, I feel both obliged and empowered to contribute to this conversation and to address indigenous scholarship that might be overlooked by Euroamericentric ways of knowing, being, and creating.

World System, Particular Places

Grosfoguel proposes an alternative decolonial conceptualization of the modern world-system from the epistemic perspective of racial/ethnic subalterns, challenging “the way traditional political-economy paradigms conceptualize capitalism as a global or world-system.”⁶ As he points out, a Eurocentric point of view regards the capitalist world-system as entirely economic, as a system in which the extraction of surplus value and the ceaseless accumulation of capital controls the behavior of the major social actors. Accordingly, economic relations become the dominant social modality and all other kinds of power relation are marginalized and concealed. To decolonize the current “European modern/colonial capitalist/patriarchal world-system,”⁷ as Grosfoguel advocates, it is necessary to alter the points of departure to “a decolonial epistemology that overtly assumes a decolonial geopolitics and body-politics of knowledge.”⁸ Extending from Quijano’s discussion of colonial power, Grosfoguel argues that the present world-system is a far more complex “historical-structural heterogeneous totality” under the colonality of power, which should be conceptualized as “an entanglement...of multiple and heterogeneous global

⁶ Ibid., 2.

⁷ Ibid., 3.

⁸ Ibid., 7.

hierarchies...of sexual, political, epistemic, economic, spiritual, linguistic and racial forms of domination and exploitation where the racial/ethnic hierarchy of the European/non-European divide transversally reconfigures all of the other global power structures.”⁹

Grosfoguel’s rereading of the modern world system addresses social relations other than economics, treating race, gender, sexuality, spirituality, and epistemology, as integral, entangled, and constitutive parts of current world system. This approach reveals that today’s world-system consists of not one but multiple and heterogeneous processes of colonial exploitation and domination inscribed by the unequal power relationship between the predominant White/European/Euro-American societies and subalternized others. This world system under the coloniality of power can be seen in operation in today’s international division of labor in the Global South, in transnational capitalism’s exploitation of female factory workers in South Korea and Mexico,¹⁰ in the absent and silenced agency of non-European countries in the narratives of International Relations,¹¹ in the continuous prevention of Africans’ agency under Euro–North American hegemony,¹² and in the neocolonial condition of people of color inside and outside the US under which is manifest as imperialism, capitalism, and patriarchy. It is only through a peripheral perspective we can see the diverse forms of labor division that organize capitalist accumulation at a world scale.

Grosfoguel’s alternative framework is also useful for examining societies, such as China, South Korea, and Japan, that seem to be an exception to this core-periphery relationship. In a

⁹ Ibid..

¹⁰ Nick Jensen and Jordan Dyett, “Gendered Exploitation Under Contemporary Capitalism,” *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology* 19, no.1-2 (2020): 201-16.

¹¹ Zeynep Gulsah Capan, “Decolonising International Relations?” *Third World Quarterly* 38, no.1 (2017): 1-15.

¹² Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, “The Entrapment of Africa within the Global Colonial Matrices of Power: Eurocentrism, Coloniality, and Deimperialization in the Twenty-First Century,” *Journal of Developing Societies* 29, no.4 (2013): 331-53.

debate between Marxist geographer David Harvey and Marxist economist John Smith in 2018 on roape.net regarding imperialism in the twenty-first century, the statement which engendered most debate was Harvey's comment on the Patnaiks' book *A Theory of Imperialism* (2017): "the historical drain of wealth from East to West for more than two centuries has been reversed over the last thirty years."¹³ This so-called "East", according to Harvey, is constituted by China, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore, especially China, currently the largest economy in the world. So, the relevant question here is, has China become the new imperialist super-exploiter? Or, where is the positionality of China in today's world political-economic system? It is true that, as Andy Higginbottom says within the *roape* exchange, "China is not yet 'way ahead' of Western imperialism, but is rapidly catching up and does threaten to soon begin to overtake them."¹⁴ No doubt that increasing profitable capital accumulation is occurring in China. It is also true that China superexploits workers domestically and to some extent internationally (especially in sub-Saharan Africa).¹⁵ However, leaving aside whether China is now draining wealth from the imperialist centres,¹⁶ is the power relationship between East and West really reversed? As the "coloniality of power" approach suggests, economy is only one of the multiple entangled constellations of power. In the case of China, even as it becomes a major economic influence and a new superpower in the world, the country still partially belongs to the peripheral group in the heterarchical structures of epistemic, linguistic, class, gender, and racial inequality formed by the dominant Euro-American hegemony. Most of the capital produced in China is being accumulated by transnational

¹³ David Harvey, "A Commentary on A Theory of Imperialism," In *A Theory of Imperialism*, Utsa Patnaik and Prabhat Patnaik (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 169.

¹⁴ Andy Higginbottom, "A Self-Enriching Pact: Imperialism and the Global South," Last modified April, 2018, ROAPE, <http://roape.net/2018/06/19/a-self-enriching-pact-imperialism-and-the-global-south/>.

¹⁵ Adam Mayer, "Dissolving Empire: David Harvey, John Smith, and the Migrant," Last modified April, 2018, ROAPE, <http://roape.net/2018/04/10/dissolving-empire-david-harvey-john-smith-and-the-migrant>.

¹⁶ In addition to Harvey and Smith, several inputs on this issue from economic perspective have been contributed to the debate by Patrick Bond, Walter Daum, Andy Higginbottom, Adam Mayer, and Lee Wengraf. See <https://rdln.wordpress.com/2018/06/22/the-debate-on-imperialism/> for a complete list of these entries.

corporations from Japan, Europe, and North America; China is still “workshop of the world” where surplus-value produced by cheap wage labor (especially female labor) and exports of low value goods are the main factors underlying economic development (even more so during the current global shortage of medical supplies); Chinese and Asiatic people in general are still confronting racism and xenophobia with and without the spread of coronavirus; and China is an absolute newcomer to the game of how cultural capital works in the modern world. The “coloniality of power” approach provides a framework to relativize the Eurocentric perspective of the world system as a single process of capitalist accumulation at a world scale. It helps us see the complexity of today’s modern/colonial capitalist/patriarchal world-system and the power relationship between different stakeholders within it.

Humanity and Nature

In the seminar, we read several different conceptualizations of environmentalism, ranging from the pessimistic concept of “Anthropocene,”¹⁷ through “Capitalocene,”¹⁸ to “Gaia.”¹⁹ All perform either a humancentric or ecocentric orthodoxy; all assume some kind of separation between human, non-human (or those presumed to be less human), and nature. While asking how human beings are entangled with ontological aspects of wider relational and ecological processes, it is worthwhile to look at and acknowledge epistemologies and insights that are not rooted in Western individualism. Since the early 1990s, Chinese scholars have increasingly discussed the ancient philosophy of *tianren heyi* as a potentially valuable alternative epistemology to modern

¹⁷ Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer, “The ‘Anthropocene’,” *Global Change Newsletter, International Geosphere-Biosphere Program Newsletter* 41 (2000): 17–18.

¹⁸ Jason W. Moore. “Name the System! Anthropocenes and the Capitalocene Alternative,” Jason W. Moore (blog), October 9, 2016, <https://jasonwmoore.wordpress.com/2016/10/09/name-the-system-anthropocenes-the-capitalocene-alternative/>.

¹⁹ James Lovelock, *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

environmental philosophy. It has the potential to disrupt the bifurcation of human and nature by addressing their interrelatedness and interdependence.²⁰ The idea of *tianren heyi* is at the core of Chinese ancient philosophy, encompassing conceptions and questions about the interrelatedness of everything in the universe. *Tianren heyi* could be roughly translated into English as “the unity between heaven and human.” It is a cosmology, as well as a way of being in the world. The discourse around the philosophy of *tianren heyi* is readily available in the philosophies of Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, and other East Asian traditions. Of course, there is not one ultimate explanation of what *tianren heyi* represents. Instead, it varies depending on different time periods, contexts, thinkers, and schools of scholarship. In Confucian discourses, “heaven” (*tian*) could be understood as the universe, the ultimate being, the moral law, or nature,²¹ while “human” (*ren*) could be interpreted as human being, humanness, human behavior, or human consciousness. Different aspects of these two concepts generate manifold relationships and explorations around them, among which the fundamental conception of unity between nature and human is the core value of Confucianism.

The Confucian worldview is a processual one. The universe is composed and empowered by *qi*, the vital energy in constant flow and flux. As sinologist Ban Wang elaborates, *qi* “captures an embracing process and a cosmic substance, at once physical, biological, spiritual, and moral. Permeating heaven and earth, it flows through humans, animals, and plants. Akin to the concept of ether, *qi* drives and facilitates our perception and sympathy with everything and everybody

²⁰ See Youlan Feng, *Zongguo Zhexueshi Xinbian* (New History of Chinese Philosophy), Volume 5, (China: Renmin Press, 1988); Xianlin Ji, “Tianren Heyi Xinjie” (New Interpretation on Tianren Heyi), *Chuantong Wenhua yu Xiandaihua* (Traditional Culture and Modernization) 1 (1993): 9-16; Mu Qian, *Hushang Xiansilu* (A Record of Leisurely Lakeside Thoughts), (Beijing: Sanlian Press, 2000); Xiaotong Fei, “Wenhualun zhong Ren yu Ziran Guanxi de Zairenshi” (Rethinking on Human-Nature Relationship in Culturalism), *Qunyan* (Popular Tribline) 9 (2002): 14-17.

²¹ *Tian* is often paired with *di* (earth) as a compound to indicate “heaven and earth” or “the universe”.

else.”²² In this sense, everything in the universe is not defined by the fixed substantial essence or beingness, but movements and changes.²³ Instead of the origin and essence of the universe or the universality of human nature, Chinese philosophy concerns all that is visible, their variety of manifestations, changes, and the interconnections between them. All events and matters are processual. They are not originated by any external agent or by transcendental creators, such as God in the Judeo-Christian tradition, but are constituted and generated by the interrelatedness of things and events. Taking movement and change as the point of departure, all living forms, lifeless objects, and heaven merge together, becoming and being each other.²⁴ As Song dynasty Confucian Zhang Zai (1020-1077) explains: “That (*qi*) which fills heaven and earth is my body, and that change which leads the universe is my nature. All people are my brothers and sisters, and all things are my companions” (*Xi Ming*).

In the interrelated universe, heaven provides humans with the context and circumstances for their self-growth and cultivation and is taken as the supreme moral authority and fundamental source of human virtue. Humans, as the consummation of heaven, attain excellence by cultivating their sense of morality and by maximizing their own potential, finally becoming an integral part of heaven by “embodying the potency of heaven and serving as examples for others.”²⁵ The core human virtue of Confucianism is “benevolence” (*ren*), which describes how humans should treat everything in the universe with care and love.²⁶ Confucius records in *Lun Yu* (The Analects of

²² Ban Wang, *Chinese Visions of World Order: Tianxia, Culture, and World Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 95.

²³ Mingming Wang, “Lianxiang, sikao yu bijiao: Fei Xiaotong ‘tianren heyilun’ yu renleixue ‘bentilun zhuanxiang’” (Association, Comparison and Reconsideration: Fei Xiaotong’s Thesis of “Heaven-Man Unity” and the Anthropological “Ontological Turn”), *Xueshu Yuekan* (Academic Monthly) 8 (2019): 160.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 150-57.

²⁵ Wonsuk Chang, “Confucian Person in the Making,” in *Confucianism in Context: Classic Philosophy and Contemporary Issues, East Asia and Beyond*, ed. Wonsuk Chang and Leah Kalmanson (New York: SUNY Press, 2010), 90.

²⁶ Xinzhong Yao, *Reconceptualizing Confucian Philosophy in the 21st Century*, (New York: Springer, 2017), 418.

Confucius) 6.28: “The humane person wants standing, and so he helps others to gain standing. He wants achievement, and so he helps others to achieve. To know how to proceed on the analogy of what is close at hand—this can be called the humane approach” (*Analects* 6.28).²⁷ Although the literal meaning of this short passage describes the harmonious relationship between human beings, Confucians intend to extend their moral care to natural beings and the natural world, acknowledging the interrelatedness and interdependence between everything in the universe. Heaven also forms the necessary environments and material conditions for human living and acting, such as the succession of four seasons and the generation and regeneration of the natural world. Humans need to respect the rhythm of the natural world and adjust their behavior to adapt to it. The conformity of humans to heaven also serves to protect human prosperity. In turn, humans carry out principles of heaven and augment its greatness. In this sense, neither heaven nor human can be conceived without one another.

In *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016), Donna Haraway calls for an alternative epistemology and method for us humans to live as situated beings in a connected world and to reconsider our relationship with and to make kin with all other human and non-human co-inhabitants with whom we share the planet and collaboratively live and die with. She asks us to stay with the troubled and damaged earth, be present, and live in responsibility, not as the center, but as a companion species. Also addressing multispecies relationality in the sense of ongoingness, the idea of *tianren heyi* in Chinese ancient philosophy offers a totally different departure point. This balanced philosophy shows the inseparable relationship between nature and human in a constantly active dynamic. In constant movement, no one is at the center of everything or has the power to occupy a privileged place in the world. Instead, humanity and nature live off and for each

²⁷ Burton Watson trans., *The Analects of Confucius* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 46.

other. More importantly, in this worldview, humanity, the self, or personhood, is not exclusive and divided from other beings. Instead of “becoming-*with* each other” like what Haraway suggests in *Staying with the Trouble*,²⁸ this self contains others. The self is partially others. The self becomes each other. ²⁹

Academia: Ethnomusicology

My field of research is ethnomusicology. A general definition of ethnomusicology would be “the study of music in its social and cultural contexts. Ethnomusicologists examine music as a social process in order to understand not only what music is but what it means to its practitioners and audiences” (The Society of Ethnomusicology webpage). Unfortunately, today’s ethnomusicology is still dominated by North American and Western European lens of thinking, knowing, and doing research. Western viewpoints and research concerns are being applied by ethnomusicologists to basically all musics, while indigenous ways of knowing and corresponding research traditions are rarely considered and consulted as important resources and references. Further, it is still difficult for indigenous scholars to break into the mainstream discourse of ethnomusicology due to various factors, including the hegemony of dominant culture, language barriers, limitation of resources, and restrictions on travel.

Different scholars have sought to disrupt the academic hegemony of Western epistemology and to bring in different voices. For example, stemming from his abundant experiences of doing research on Chinese music and teaching in Asian graduate programs, J. Lawrence Witzleben (1997) questions the suitability of Western ethnomusicology for the study of musics and the training of

²⁸ Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016), 3.

²⁹ Mingming Wang, “Lianxiang, sikao yu bijiao,” 163.

indigenous scholars in non-Euro-American societies, as well as advocates a multicultural awareness of music.³⁰ Steven Loza (2006) calls for more native voices in ethnomusicological discourse including those of important Latin American and African scholars such as José Martí, Marimba Ani, and Kofi Agawu. Loza identifies various practical problems in Western academia which suppressed the voices of so-called “developed nations” (ibid.), including the dominance of the Eurocentric canon, theories, and methods in the university system; the difficulty for minority scholars to get works published in major journals if their work did not fit “hegemonic ways of knowing”; the lack of diversity in academic faculty and curriculum; and the “theoretical fetish,” which refers to the pressure of minority scholars to use whatever Western theory is currently fashionable.³¹ While these were valuable interventions, most of the discussions on decolonizing the discipline were themselves conducted through the hegemonic structure of Western scholarship. Scholars of Indigenous and People of Color, as well as migrant scholars in English-speaking contexts have done significant work criticizing academic colonialism and offering alternative frameworks and methodologies of disciplinary transformations, but the number is still small, not to mention the underacknowledged discussions outside the English-speaking world. There is still a lack of indigenous/native/non-Western voice in this conversation.

Decolonizing ethnomusicology requires a platform on which different ethnomusicologies could have conversation on an equal level, communicating with ideas while holding on to their own research traditions. One crucial way to break the universalization of Eurocentric norms, and in which international students could play a special role, is to address indigenous scholarship’s distinctive path and to show that any music research tradition does not develop in a vacuum. To

³⁰ J. Lawrence Witzleben, “Whose Ethnomusicology? Western Ethnomusicology and the Study of Asian Music,” *Ethnomusicology* 41, no.2 (1997): 223-26.

³¹ Steven Loza, “Challenges to the Eurocentric Ethnomusicological Canon: Alternatives for Graduate Readings, Theory, and Method,” *Ethnomusicology* 50, no. 2 (2006): 362-69.

better illustrate this strategy, I will use ethnomusicology in China as an example. By sharing a few thoughts on the context and ideology of the current discourse of ethnic minority music research in China, I attempt to present an ethnomusicology rooted in its own social-historical context.

Western ethnomusicology was introduced into China in the 1980s.³² But before that, a long history of music research had already existed. The research system, methodologies, and academic concerns of current ethnomusicology in China all present a continuation of China's music research tradition since the early 20th century, constructing an "ethnomusicology rooted in China's social condition."³³³⁴ While ethnomusicology in North America and Western Europe presumes to have the all-embracing goal of being "the study of people making music" in all cultures,³⁵ Chinese scholars focus more on music at home and share more specific goals and social responsibilities that arise from China's social-political context.³⁶ For a long time, especially during the political disturbance before the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, music research in China mainly concentrated on collecting, categorizing, and researching on folk music to create new music that awakens the national spirit and to serve political needs. These works set the grounds for later music scholars' research subject and fieldwork methodologies. Since the entering of ethnomusicology, Chinese scholars critically adopt research methods and theories from the West and other related disciplines such as anthropology, ritual studies, folklore research, and

³² See Qia Shen, "Minzu Yinyuexue Yanjiu Fangfa Daolun" (Introduction to Methodology of Ethnomusicology), *Zhongguo Yinyuexue* (Musicology in China) 1 (1986): 62-77; Mu Yang, "Ethnomusicology with Chinese Characteristics?: A Critical Commentary," *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 35 (2003): 1-38; Yaxiong Du, "Minzu Yinyuexue Chuanru Woguo de Tujing he Guocheng" (The Transmission of Ethnomusicology to China), *Yinyue Yishu* (Art of Music) 2 (2012): 31-34.

³³ Qia Shen, "Minzu Yinyuexue Yanjiu Fangfa Daolun", 64.

³⁴ Currently, ethnomusicology in China has formed its own system and coexists with other music research disciplines such as musicology and Chinese traditional music theory in most of the major music institutes and universities.

³⁵ Jeff Todd Titon, ed. *Worlds of Music*, 2nd ed, (New York: Schirmer Books, 1992), 21.

³⁶ While the majority of Chinese ethnomusicology research centers on music in China from different ethnic groups, time periods, and genres, there are also a comparatively small amount of scholarship exploring music in other areas of the world.

cultural geography, then reconcile them with Chinese already existed research tradition. Other than to compile, archive, analyze, preserve, and compare Chinese music and its historical construction, Chinese scholars deploy ethnomusicological standpoint which looks at music in its cultural-social context and draws attention to a relational perspective on interactions between different ethnic communities. A main purpose of today's Chinese ethnomusicologists is to construct a multi-dimensional and multi-directional knowledge web of Chinese music, so that the research would have good return to the society.³⁷

For research on ethnic minority music in Chinese ethnomusicology, there is a fundamental ideological premise that distinguishes Chinese scholarship from Western ethnomusicology. While Western scholarship on China often centers on the music making of one single ethnic minority group or the negotiation between quasi-colonial state control and the assertion of minority identities, Chinese scholarship on ethnic minority music is based on the notion of China as a nation of what anthropologist Fei Xiaotong calls “plurality and unity.”³⁸ Writing about the interrelationship of ethnic groups in China, Fei states that “during a long period of mutual contact many groups were mixed, aligned, or integrated, while others were divided and became extinct. In time the groups unified into one group which consisted of a number of subunits that kept emerging, vanishing, and reemerging, so that parts of some subunits became a part of others, yet each retained its individual characteristics. Together they formed a national entity which was at once pluralistic and unified.”³⁹

³⁷ Minkang Yang, “Qianlun Zhongguo Minzuyinyue Lilun Huayutixi de Kifangxing he duoyangxing tezheng” (Discourse System of Chinese National Music Theory: Openness and Multiplicity), *Yinyue Yishu* (The Art of Music) 2 (2018): 66.

³⁸ Xiaotong Fei, “Zhonghua Minzu de Duoyuan yiti Geju” (Plurality and Unity in the Configuration of the Chinese People), *Beijing Daxue Xuebao* (Journal of Beijing University) 4 (1989): 1-19.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

This stance of Fei indicates that it is both necessary to understand China as a conscious national entity while acknowledging its ethnic and cultural diversity. Fei's approach has affected Chinese scholars' research on minority music in various ways. On one hand, for the research subject, instead of focusing on social differences and politicization of ethnic minority music which could be seen as the main concern in a large number of Western scholarship, Chinese scholars choose to look deep into the relationship between ethnic minority music and its cultural, social, and belief system within a multi-layered and multi-leveled methodological system. The center of scholars' research focuses on how to understand, interpret, translate, and represent ethnic minority knowledge and traditions. This is also a process of self-examination on scholars' positionality and their conversational relationship with ethnic communities. While continuing the obligation of scholars in the past to further deepen and develop a Chinese discourse of music theory, Chinese ethnomusicologists have been critically reflecting on previous music research tradition which stemmed from a Han-centric perspective and examined each identified ethnic group as a separated and isolated unit.

On the other hand, the notion of "plurality and unity" indicates that ethnic minority groups in China are closely inter-connected, culturally and socially, as they have co-habited in the same geographical land for centuries. Accordingly, Chinese scholars have conducted their research by integrating case studies, comparative research of multi-locations/region/ethnic groups, as well as research on the transborder or transnational ethnic groups, such as the Cross-Border ethnic music in the Lancang-Mekong River Basin or the music performance of transborder Kra-Dai speaking

ethnic groups in China.^{40 41}A lot of these research projects are conducted through collaborative work, such as group fieldwork and study groups, in which several different scholars might focus on the same geographical location, ethnic group, or research topic, but carry out their research from complementary perspectives. Compared to the normative Western ethnomusicology practice of fieldwork and writing by one individual scholar, Chinese scholarship of ethnic music offers an alternative way of doing ethnomusicological research.

Conclusion

This essay is a practice as well as an effort to echo the call of Grosfoguel to explore “a broader canon of thought than simply the Western canon” and to advocate a platform on which different traditions can have conversations on an equal platform, where different epistemologies/cosmologies/insights respect and learn from each other. In this ideal scenario, intellectual traditions would be able to have what Grosfoguel describes as “the critical dialogue between diverse critical epistemic/ethical/political projects towards a pluriversal as oppose to a universal world.”⁴² The three sketches offered here can only count as entry points into many, much broader and deeper discourses on decolonizing the coloniality of power and knowledge grounded in various concerns and dimensions. Nevertheless, this practice and exploration means much to international students like me who are constantly negotiating with different academic epistemologies and research traditions. Our unique positionality makes us the best channels to connect international academia with indigenous scholarship and to bring multiple voices into

⁴⁰ Bing Han, “1977 nian yilai zhongguoxuezheng dui lancangjiang——meigonghe liuyu jingwai kuajie minzu yinyue yanjiu zongshu” (Chinese Scholarship on the Cross-Border ethnic Music in the Lancang-Mekong River Basin since 1977), *Zhongguo Yinyuexue* (Musicology in China) 3 (2016): 194-205.

⁴¹ Minkang Yang, “Zhuangdongyuzu Wenhua Yujing xia de Dongzu Dage Yanjiu” (Scholarship on Galao of Dong people in the Context of transborder Kra-Dai Speaking Ethnic Groups), *Zhongyang Yinyue Xueyuan Xuebao* (Journal of the Central Conservatory of Music) 1 (2015): 3-9.

⁴² Grosfoguel, “Decolonizing Post-Colonial Studies and Paradigms of Political Economy,” 3.

dialogue with each other. It is also this process of engaging and negotiating with different scholarship and epistemologies that leads me to reevaluate my relationship with myself, the institutional system I am in, and scholarship at home, which represents a way to decolonize the Western hegemonic voice in myself.

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