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Dangerous Tunes
The Politics of Chinese Music
in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the
People’s Republic of China since 1949

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The idea for this dissertation emerged at the instigation of Dr. C. C. Liu from the University of Hong Kong, whom I met during my undergraduate years in Oxford. It was Dr. Liu who led me astray—away from intended ethnomusicological pursuits—onto the untrodden path of New Music in China. And it was Dr. Liu who provided me with a first and large stock of research material on this topic.

I am grateful for the generous support by the German Scholarship Foundation (Studienstiftung des Deutschen Volkes) throughout my work on this project. Thanks to them I was able to collect rare source material in Chinese musical history and to go on a “trip-around-the-world” to interview the diaspora of China’s composers.

All of the Chinese composers and scholars whom I visited during this trip made me feel welcome and provided me with their time and with scores and recordings of their music many of which are reproduced here (I apologize for the poor quality of some of the musical examples, but not all of the photocopying-machines which I used during my field-trip were in best conditions). I am very grateful for their generosity, their warmth and friendship.

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how contagious is his devotion to things Chinese. His supervision challenged and guided, his writings inspired me.

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to the memory of Mo Wuping, himself an important Chinese composer, who died while I was writing this book in the summer of 1993.

Evidently, a number of years have passed between writing and publishing this book. In the meantime not only is the tripartite division of China into a National, a Communist and a Colonial China, used in this book for reasons of comparison, about to be dissolved, but many more works of New Chinese Music have also been composed. While I am anxious to see how much the “One country, two systems” policy will affect life in Hong Kong, I presume that the greater number of my observations may hold true even after the Communist take-over. Chinese composers in Hong Kong, Taiwan and the PRC have observed that in recent years they are suppressed above all by the market. The exclusive importance of this inhibiting agent which crystallized during my research for this book may become ever more pronounced after July 1997. As concerns new compositions, I have attempted to make reference to some of them in passing here. Nevertheless, new and very different research projects have taken up much of my attention in the meantime and there is simply not enough time or space to be as comprehensive and substantial on newer compositions or biographical detail as one perhaps should. For more detailed discussion on recent developments I would therefore like to refer the reader to a useful (bi-lingual!) new journal, Music from China National Radio, which provides up-to-date information on Chinese composers and their compositions and to the section “People and Projects—Composers” in the journal CHIME as well as a number of new and forthcoming articles by others and myself some of which I may have mentioned in the footnotes.

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