

National Writing Board

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Author Report

22 June 2026

Title of Paper: Music in Maoist China

Code Number: 0526AMYO000903

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Total Score: (5–30) Reader One: 25 Reader Two: 25 Final: 25 (**Very Good—5**)

28-30	= A+	Superior	(reported score of 6)	(1 in 100 papers rated)
23-27	= A	Very Good	(reported score of 5)	
18-22	= B	Good	(reported score of 4)	
13-17	= C	Average	(reported score of 3)	
8-12	= D	Poor	(reported score of 2)	
5-7	= F	Very Poor	(reported score of 1)	

Actual length: 13,198 words

Each paper is read by two Readers, both senior secondary instructors.

I. Reading (Sources)

Score: (1-6) Reader One 5 Reader Two 5

Reader One:

The research here is extensive and nicely varied, from official Party proceeds to the popular media to more recent academic analyses that explore the dimensions and effectiveness of the CCP's propaganda campaigns on head, heart, and body.

Reader Two:

This essay includes 99 citations with 73 sources listed in the bibliography. The variation of sources is solid and the writer has a good mix of primary and secondary research including several impressive interviews. The following book-length studies were incorporated: Mao Zedong's *Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art*, Clark's *The Chinese Cultural Revolution: A History*, Bryant's *Music as Mao's Weapon: Remembering the Cultural Revolution*, *Revolutionary Arts – Music Section*, Zhang's "Yellow Music Criticism during China's Anti-Rightist Campaign," in *Sound Alignments: Popular Music in Asia's Cold War*, Wang's "Music Should Also Have A Chinese Style and Flavor in *On the Revolutionization, Nationalization, and Popularization of Music*, Volume I, Kraus *The Party and the Arts in China: The New Politics of Culture*, Tian's *The Chinese Folksong Movement of 1958*, and Li's "Revolutionary Echoes: Radios and Loudspeakers in the Mao Era," *Twentieth Century China*.

The main journals incorporated included: *Music Education Research*, *Asian Music*, *Modern China*, *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, *International Journal of Multicultural Education*, *Frontiers in Art Research*, *International Journal of Asian Studies*, *Social History*, *China Review*, and *Modern Asian Studies*.

The author also incorporated interviews with a peasant during the 1960s, a factory worker from the 1950s, and a navy soldier from the 1970s. Going the extra mile to conduct oral histories was impressive.

II. Thinking (Understanding)

Score: (1-6)	Reader One	5	Reader Two	5
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Reader One:

The argument is clear here in the first sections, and where I worried it might feel simplistic or repetitive, it is instead robust in its delineation of how comprehensively music and musical aesthetics were rethought at every level, from which words were sung to who sang them to correct choice of repertoire; from the very act of how to listen to music to the nationalizing of ethnic music through lyrics and instrumentation. In sum, the author presents a wide-spectrum argument that demonstrates how expansive the regime's thinking was in its approach to remaking China's entire musical culture. The closing section, which emphasizes how the author's interview subjects "experienced the [songs] as the natural soundtrack of their lives, as expressions of genuine feeling, as the medium through which they understood their place in history" (39) moves beyond the delineation of ideological rewriting to demonstrate how well this project worked in practice for some and perhaps many citizens and inculcate revolutionary values, what the author calls "the most remarkable measure of the CCP's success...not behavioral compliance but affective internalization," (44) without need of much technical infrastructure.

Reader Two:

The paper argues that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) under the leadership of Mao Zedong systematically steered music away from its artistic foundations, repurposing it as an instrument of political mobilization. The author breaks down the structure into a historical overview from 1942-1976 followed by Mao's ideology and the political framework within which artistic production was required to operate. The third section did an analysis of the revolutionization, nationalization, and popularization of music transformation during the three-decade period. The paper ends with a section on the legacy of revolutionary music.

The author has a mastery of the subject matter and shows deep insight into the topic. The attention to detail and comprehension of the topic was quite impressive!

III. Elaboration (Use of evidence)

Score: (1-6)	Reader One	5	Reader Two	5
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Reader One:

This is rich in source material that captures exactly how Mao and the party theorized the role of music and the various turns in the road toward total subordination of music to political ends. It cogently lays out the dialectical theorizing behind these notions of artistic production and reads what could easily be read as Communist boilerplate carefully and for exact strands of meaning. The discussion of precisely how revolutionary music was to be created and disseminated is especially instructive, particularly the breakdown of the theory behind the verbal and musical structure of

quotation songs. As a whole, the analysis is consistently detailed and intelligent in conveying how comprehensively the entire purpose of music was rethought and re-articulated as a means of building correct class consciousness, and then forced on the people from childhood on. The decision to complete the historical analysis with personal testimonies from “a triptych of the Maoist proletariat” (39) is both pleasing and clever.

Reader Two:

The author was able to utilize materials at the National Archives in Beijing. The central focal point in the paper centers around Mao’s famous “Talks at the Yan’an Forum of Art in 1942.” This particular shift would dominate Chinese literary content for the next several decades. The basis of the policy was that art and culture existed to support politics and ideology. The policy intensified with the proclamation of the People’s Republic of China in 1949 and later with the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in 1966. The author states, “The Revolution would persist for the next decade or so, representing the most radical phase of the CCP’s campaign to subordinate culture to political ends” (page 8). This early section of the manuscript relied on an abundance of high-quality secondary resources as well as transcripts from Mao’s speeches and party directives. The later sections incorporated a nice mix of primary and secondary research, making for a stellar research paper.

One minor area to consider would be whether the artistic community within China mounted any opposition to the policy directives implemented by Chairman Mao.

IV. Writing (Use of language)

Score: (1-6)	Reader One	5	Reader Two	5
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Reader One:

This is written with reflection and confidence, and it sets out its arguments with care and fluid language. The author tells this story with calm authority: “the establishment of a music department at Luyi signaled the CCP’s commitment to legitimizing music within their ideological orthodoxy and placing it at the center stage of their rural socialist revolution” (5). “By the time Mao died in September 1976, music in China had been almost completely severed from its artistic roots and transformed into a political weapon” (10). “This section traces how music was first ideologically purified, then culturally reengineered, and ultimately transformed and blended into daily life” (13). “What began under Mao as a project of conscripting ethnic musical traditions into a socialist nationalist framework had ossified in the post-Mao era into institutionalized curriculum” (30). “No one could opt out of the revolutionary soundscape; they could only choose the degree of their visible enthusiasm within it” (35).

Reader Two:

The writing is strong, with a few minor word choice issues and sentence structure issues. It would have been beneficial to include an additional block quote or two at particular junctures within the paper.

The structural layout of the paper was well-done and the sections were designed in a logical and coherent format. The cornerstone parts of the paper labeled as “Revolutionize, Nationalize, and Popularize” (pages 12-35) were nicely constructed with excellent attention to detail within the writing.

V. Overall Result

Score: (1-6) Reader One 5 Reader Two 5

Reader One:

This is an excellent paper that makes an impressively nuanced and sophisticated argument about the power of music to seep into and color every crevice of modern life, even as pockets of dissent, or non-compliance, remained. As the author puts it, "The CCP did not need to eradicate yellow music entirely to win the deeper battle. It needed only to ensure that revolutionary songs became inseparable from people's sense of self, their understanding of history, and their experience of collective life" (44). This paper compellingly demonstrates its thesis.

Reader Two:

The paper is excellent. The organization and writing is excellent and the research is very impressive. The mixture of primary and secondary sources makes for a strong academic paper that is also informative and interesting to read.

The National Writing Board's standards are necessarily high. This paper was a pleasure to read and the writer's efforts are dually noted.

Total Score (5–30) **Reader One** **25** **Reader Two** **25** **Final** **25**

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