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An Anthology of Chinese Experimental Music, CD. 3

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Seguimos con el recopilatorio chino, tercer CD de esta antología, y para animar un poco la cosa, colgamos al señor **Zbigniew Karkowski** (en el buen sentido de la palabra, luego miraremos hacia arriba a ver si se ve la sogá) junto a **Yan Jun** se trabajan (desconozco si en plan chino) uno de los libretos que acompañan a esta antología. Como en los dos anteriores entregas, tenemos a 12 músicos (no exactamente, pero bueno..) en los 12 temas de rigor.

1. **Torturing Nurse** (Shanghai)
Fugitive (2006)
2. **Wang Fan** (Beijing)
Zero (2006)
3. **Wuwei + Ulrich Morits** (Shanghai/Berlin)
Toy Ships (2003)
4. **Xper. Xr. & The Orphic Orchestra** (Hong Kong)
Hickory Dickory Dock (1992)
5. **Hong Qile** (Fuzhou)
j gmc (2007)
6. **Ying Fan** (Taipei)
L2255 mix (2007)
7. **Dead J** (Beijing)
Untitled (2007)
8. **Z.S.L.O** (Taipei)
422189 (1997)
9. **Jedung Kyng / Edging + Junky** (Guangzhou/Shanghai)
Dabao (2007)

10. **Tats Lau** (Hong Kong)
 Face The Antagonish (1992)
11. **Li Jianhong** (Hangzhou)
 Sod (2007)
12. **Dino** (Taipei)
 ~ ~ (2005)

[CD](#)



Como comentaba una líneas mas arriba, les pongo el texto que acompaña a la antología, texto tal cual, escaneado y sin corregir faltas de ortografía ni saltos de línea, estando este escrito en ingles, que disfruten de su traductor preferido:

**The Sound of the Underground
 An Overview of Experimental and Non-Academic Music in China**

by **Zbigniew Karkowski & Yan Jun**

The Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966-76) in one way or another eradicated most of the existing culture in China. At the same time as intellectuals were sent to rural labor camps, countless ancient buildings, antiques, books, paintings and various artifacts were just destroyed. This period created an enormous intellectual, cultural and artistic vacuum in China – destruction that in a sense, time is still healing.

So tradition of music culture and especially non-academic, purely experimental music, started from ‘point blank’ scratch sometime in the 80ies. With the market economy introduced in that decade and further media developments in the 90ies. there was a kind of an explosion in youth culture that had been held back for decades. Movements and music scenes that previously never reached China – like for instance psychedelic music, punk or neo-dada started to appear and expanded at astonishing pace. The birth of these alternative rock and punk music scenes that later developed into even more experimental trends is a direct result of global capitalism and profound change in China’s position within the World Order. It however did not develop the same way as it usually does in the West – with one eye looking forward and the other one always glancing at history. It started with ‘dakou’ and with piracy. Many international record companies and CD stores in the West occasionally dump excess inventory of un-salable or surplus CDs, by selling them to developing countries as recyclable plastic. Many of them are clipped with an electric saw – thus the name ‘dakou’ (to make a hole) – but many are not. In the early 90s these ended up for sale on the streets in China, and the selection consisted of almost everything from recent (surplus) rock and pop to 70s has-beens, classical music, free jazz etc. Since the Chinese government controls import of audio and video products very strictly, the phenomenon of ‘dakou’ became the main source of western music for rockers and new youth in the 90ies. Then came piracy. When DVD players and DVD movie phenomenon appeared, Chinese black market industry immediately jumped onto it. And because of not knowing what’s good and bad and what’s commercial and what’s absolutely non-commercial, they started making pirate copies of everything. Thus China became an incredible place where one could easily get very cheap (even for Chinese people) copies of anything, including the most rare, experimental art films ever made. One could find collected works of Andy Warhol or Stan Brakhage or Leni Riefenstahl next to Disney or James Bond. And consumers, hungry for anything that is new, were buying and watching everything. Just because it was affordable and it was new – probably an average Chinese person saw more experimental, cutting edge cinema than most well educated people in the West.

Thus Chinese underground rock and punk movements were in large part build on and influenced by, from one side – what was considered un-salable (trash) in the West, and from the other side – easy access to culture like movies that were very hard to find (considered very arty and elitist) in the West. This is quite extreme in itself. The first wave of China’s underground rock and punk scene seemed to be angry and politically motivated.

But this youth counter subculture had a very short history and their political stance was mainly about attitudes and appearances. Still, a very few of the rockers and punks in the 90ies tried to make their music more extreme, radical, noisy and freer than anything a Chinese audience had ever experienced until that time. This very underground and often illegal rock culture started a new (even more underground) subculture of experiments with sounds, which through the years developed into a tradition of creating purely abstract music. During the whole decade of 90ies, this subculture of experimentalism was slowly establishing itself throughout China with artists, record companies, different scenes and fanzines, and also with increasing international contacts. In the early 90s, the Hong Kong musician Dickson Dee who also founded the label Sound Factory, later renamed to NoiseAsia, started to active

promote indie rock and experimental music in China. He brought to Mainland China foreign artists like Otomo Yoshihide, Haino Keiji, Jon Rose, and many others. In 1995 he organized a short tour in China with John Zorn and Eye Yamatsuka (the lead singer of the japan-noise band Boredoms), it was the first ever noise music concerts in Mainland China. As an organizer, but also with releases on his labels, Dickson Dee introduced Chinese audiences to many new trends in experimental music.

In 1996, artist Wang Fan left the rock scene in Lanzhou and moved to Beijing, where he created arguably China's first real experimental music work: a mysterious 40-minute lo-fi piece.

Symptomatically, at that time he knew basically nothing about experimental and avant-garde music and traditions, he just invented what he wanted, he created sound that he heard inside his head. In that sense Wang Fan is a true pioneer of purely experimental music in China. At the time, he became very influential among many artists, although many just built on his style and very few went further into real experiments with sound.

After the decade of 90ies with provocative rock and punk scenes and small-scale experimentalism, the real breakthrough for Chinese underground and avant-garde music came in the early 21st century. Main reason for this was rapid spread of information thru internet, access to cheap technology (computers) and fast growing club scene which was introducing DJ culture (electronic music) on a larger scale. These factors led to the birth of a young generation of Chinese experimental musicians. Through the Internet, they are finally able to hear and download anything happening in experimental music elsewhere/ worldwide. This includes hearing 'classics' of different styles, from Aphex Twin (ambient) to Merzbow (noise). Dickson Dee continues to release CDs and to bring many foreign experimental musicians to Mainland China. Sound artist, curator and critic Yan Jun started Subjam label in Beijing.

Taiwanese composer and contemporary music theoretician Dajuin Yao established Post-Concrete label based in Berkeley, California and many new generation artists like Wang Changcun, Zhong Minje, Zhou Pei (Ronez), Zhang Anding (Zafka) started experimenting with noise and sound art and releasing records. FM3, maybe most well-known Chinese experimental music unit in the West (famous for their Buddha Machine release) became active in Beijing.

The years 2000 to 2003 is definitely the start of some kind of 'new scene' - one which functions and develops in a very different kind of reality than electronic music scenes in the West. Any connections to classical education at universities or institutions like studios are not relevant here. Neither is there any continuous history and tradition of experimentalism to build on - this because of more or less closed connections between different generations of experimentalists. In China today, the experimental music scene is young, in every sense of the word. In early November 2003, Dajuin Yao organized the Sounding Beijing festival in a venue called Loft Space. During three nights some of the most prominent names in Chinese experimental music shared the stage with several foreign artists, performing the most extreme and varied sorts of experimental music ever presented live in China. This event is generally regarded as a kind of break through for the electronic music community there. It was a sign for the young generation of experimental electronic musicians that they are not alone. There is a scene and many people are doing the same things as you - was the message. Also in 2003, the Post-Concrete label released a double CD entitled 'China, the sonic avant-garde', it was the most complete compilation of Chinese experimental sound makers to date.

Following the Sounding Beijing festival and the release of this CD the term Sound Art started to be widely used in China to describe various forms of sonic experiments. And in the same year (2003), Li Jianhong - composer, improviser, guitarist and founder of 2Pi records label, organized the first 2Pi festival in Hangzhou. Since then the 2Pi festival of noise and sound continues with new editions every Fall and has become the most important showcase of contemporary experimental music in China. So 2003 was very important year - when one speaks about Chinese experimental music scene, one can refer to pre 2003 and post 2003 generations.

After 2003 the scene is consolidated. The youngest generation of laptop artists started by using internet and hacking software. It was a DIY (do it yourself) culture, although one in which many of its members had little or no background in music, let alone any art music culture education. Laptop became the instrument of choice and artists started their own record labels for releasing their own music. The development in this field is moving fast and is rapidly changing with new styles and genres emerging all the time (like soundscape, field recordings, phonography). It is also obvious that the experimental music scene has changed the way the artists and their audiences listen to the world. In 2004, the hyperactive noise-unit Torturing Nurse was created in Shanghai, and artists such as Lin Zhiying, Zenlu, Bai Tian aka Bai+ian started performing and releasing their works on CD. Zhou Pei (Ronez) started the noise/experimental CDR label Doufu Records in Guilin, and today there are quite a few artists who run small CDR labels specializing in experimental music in China. Most sound artists have their own websites, myspace is very popular and Lawrence Lee, journalist and music critic, now based in Beijing, is running the Global Noise Online site, a database and forum for experimental music activities in China. Of course the scene is mainly centered around Beijing being not only the capital but also the cultural centre of China. In 2005 a weekly event called Waterland Kwanyin started in Beijing. Curated by Yan Jun and promoting all kinds of experimental music, it is still running today. Yan Jun also started the Kwanyin Records label, which documents many concerts by visiting artists on CD releases, and he also curates annually the MiniMidi festival, a smaller experimental scene and a kind of alternative to the larger and very commercial MIDI festival. Many foreign artists and activists have relocated to Beijing, for example Blixa Bargeld of Einstürzende Neubauten, and Michael Pettis who is teaching economy at Beijing University and also runs D22 Bar, an important venue for independent rock and experimental music in Western Beijing. There are also important activities in other provinces. In Guangzhou, Dickson Dee organizes many events at Mooka Space, and Chengdu is famous for its Little Bar, a stronghold for indie rock and experimental music for the last 10 years. In Hangzhou, there is the above mentioned 2Pi festival and 2Pi Records label. Shanghai hosts the overactive Junky of Shasha records/NOISHanghai and Harbin has a strong noise community which is mainly internet based. Important artists like Ronez is based in Guilin and Zenlu in Shenzhen. The network spreads all over China. Noise, ambient, idm, breakcore, 8bit, new minimalism, field recording based soundscapes and many other styles of

experimental music are being created in China by Chinese sound artists today. Labels like KwanYin Records, 2PI Records, NoiseAsia, Doufu Records, Shasha Records, Little Sound, Lonar Records, Shanshui Records release locally made as well as foreign experimental music. There are also distribution channels for this kind of music in China now, mainly through a company called Sugar Jar. New festivals start every year and new venues for presentation of experimental music appear in big cities. China has also become a very popular destination for experimental music artists from Europe, North America, Australia and Japan. There are even special festivals that are being sponsored by foreign embassies to promote cultural interchange. The Notch Festival for example, is the result of a co-operation between Nordic countries and China.

China means 'trendy', Beijing means 'cool'.

Anybody working in the culture and art field anywhere in the world has a reason to visit Beijing as it is one of the hottest cities in the world. Doing something in Beijing is so super contemporary. In this context the scene for experimental music has developed so fast. It is impossible to get a hold of what is actually happening at the present moment because the scene is constantly changing and the borders are being constantly pushed forward. Young Chinese sound artists are not afraid of total experimentation. There are experiments made at any level, which means integrating anything that might seem new. And after all these years of the hard-line communist regime, many things in China are indeed new for people there. With the lack of any experimental tradition, Chinese sound artists are not afraid to misinterpret anything or move too far from any tradition or style. This attitude of course creates a lot of bad music, but such a fearless and totally open attitude can also deliver very unique artworks. Within the sound arts community there are of course also critical voices saying that everything has developed too fast and it is now time to slow down and consider details and aesthetics. Artists need more practice, not only a social party. The next challenge will be to consider quality, hopefully things will start to mature soon. Changes are not the most important thing, what is needed is a discussion about what is a real and a good change. We all know that China is changing very fast in basically every field, and probably in the close future, Chinese culture and art will be much more interesting than people in general might believe. But in the long run there is a lack of natural evolution because every intellectual and artistic tradition was almost destroyed with the Cultural Revolution. Then, Chinese artists have tried to totally rebuild the inner and outer world as well as experimenting in every possible way for about 30 years now. That might shock the world of media, but it is not enough for real creation. Artists in China are still behaving like a child who is discovering a new world everyday. In the future, they will need to focus on what they really want.

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Francis Picabia

Uno de mis amigos, espíritu móvil y exaltado, decía encontrar diferencias entre las obras literarias, pictóricas o musicales, yo no era de su opinión y tuvimos una larga conversación sobre el asunto; nuestro delirio duró cerca de una hora, ¡hasta el momento en que nuestros cerebros más o menos transformados en carne hervida nos permitieron constatar la nada de toda teoría física o metafísica!

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