

## Colloquium April 24, 2026

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“Torch Festival: A Voice-Leading Analysis of Chinese New Music”

### **Abstract:**

The term “Chinese New Music,” described by Liu Jingzhi, is used to describe Chinese music that integrates its own musical heritage with eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and twentieth-century Western European music. While such repertoire is established based on traditional tonal concepts, it is not strictly tonal in the traditional Western sense. Such hybridity of musical language and tonality provides fascinating challenges for theorists.

This paper proposes the possibility of applying a neo-Schenkerian approach to voice-leading analysis in Chinese New Music. Synthesizing musical aesthetics and theoretical perspectives from both Western (Schenker, Brown, Thrasher and others) and Chinese (Sang, Li, Fan and others) scholars, the paper demonstrates similarities between different systems and also points out deviations among them, suggesting adjustments to achieve a Schenkerian analysis. This paper shows how voice-leading aids the perception of motives across different levels and the narration of programmatic content through a case study of Wang Xilin’s *Poems of Yunnan* (1963), including both formal and voice-leading analysis. In the end, I argue that applying voice-leading analysis to a pentatonic work can meaningfully challenge stereotypes about both music and analytical methods. Following Philip Ewell’s critique of Schenker’s racism, examining a pentatonic work through Schenkerian methods shows that the analytical framework can still operate meaningfully in other cultural contexts, even if it originates differently.