

College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University

DigitalCommons@CSB/SJU

Asian Studies Faculty Publications

Asian Studies

2022

Music and Sound in Weih sien Internment Camp in Japanese-occupied China

Zhihui Sophia Geng

College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University, sgeng@csbsju.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/asian_studies_pubs



Part of the [Asian History Commons](#), [Asian Studies Commons](#), [Catholic Studies Commons](#), [Chinese Studies Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), [Japanese Studies Commons](#), [Military History Commons](#), [Missions and World Christianity Commons](#), and the [Music Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Geng, Sophia. "Music and Sound in Weih sien Internment Camp in Japanese-occupied China." In *Sonic Histories of Occupation: Experiencing Sound and Empire in a Global Context*, edited by Russell P. Skelchy and Jeremy E. Taylor, 73–93. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350232310.0010>.

Copyright © Russell P. Skelchy and Jeremy E. Taylor 2022. Released under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 \(CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0\) International License](#). Open access was funded by the European Research Council.

Music and sound in Weihsien Internment Camp in Japanese-occupied China

Sophia Geng

Introduction

On 7 July 1937, Japanese forces based in Manchuria charged southward towards Beijing, invading north China and hence starting the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–45). On 7 December 1941, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, transforming the Second Sino-Japanese War into the Pacific War. As a result of Pearl Harbor, the status of Allied citizens living in China at the time changed from neutral to ‘enemy aliens.’ These Allied citizens included individuals and their families who worked in China as government officials, executives, engineers and Christian missionaries. They were forced into internment camps under the watchful eyes of the Japanese. At the end of 1942, the Japanese authorities decided to concentrate all ‘enemy aliens’ into larger camps. The chosen site for one such camp in north China was a Presbyterian mission compound called Ledao yuan (Courtyard of the Happy Way) in Weihsien (now Weixian) in Shandong Province. The Japanese referred to this site as the Weihsien Civilian Assembly Centre. From March 1943 to October 1945, anywhere between 1,500 and 2,000 foreign nationals were imprisoned in the camp. After the war, dozens of internees shared their experiences of imprisonment at Weihsien in memoirs, (auto) biographies and oral histories. Over thirty such accounts have been published, and there are many more unpublished accounts. This chapter taps into the large number of resources collected by internees and published through a digital memorial.¹

This chapter examines the distinctive auditory environments and music cultures that arose within the Weihsien Internment Camp and argues that the Weihsien internees forged a sense of belonging and community through their creative engagement with music and sound. A large variety of musical activities occurred during the camp’s two and a half years of existence. This included

institutionalized activities such as the formation of a choir, an orchestra, a theatre and a band organized or sponsored by the camp's Entertainment Committee. In addition, a wide range of informal and spontaneous music-making took place within the camp. The music that the internees performed ranged from popular pre-Second World War songs, folk music and dance melodies to classical repertoire. The internees also created new songs or creatively revised old songs to express their views of their involuntary confinement in the camp. The wide range of music-making and creativity displayed at Weihsien Internment Camp was similar to that which emerged in Nazi-controlled ghettos and labour camps across wartime Europe which have been examined by scholars in the field of Holocaust studies (e.g. Gilbert 2005).

The music analysed in this chapter includes three types: missionary music of faith, secular music of resilience and internees' music of resistance. At Weihsien Camp, about half of the internees were missionaries from America and Europe. These missionaries were allowed to practise religious services, in which prayers, chants, hymns and Mass were an integral part of their daily lives. Life within Weihsien was harsh, and hunger haunted the camp. The Japanese guards strictly controlled the camp's provisions. As a result, by October 1945, internees were so emaciated that they looked like skeletons of their former selves. However, throughout the existence of the camp, the Japanese did permit secular musical performances, either organized or spontaneous, as a form of entertainment. As a result, an array of musical productions that showcased the internees' resilience and creativity were developed in Weihsien Camp, despite the difficult situation that internees faced.

Sound and music were also used to discipline and manage internees. As McGinnis (2020: 226–30) points out, it was not uncommon to employ music as a tool to control or regulate prisoners' behaviour in camps operated by various governments during the Second World War. In the eyes of the captors, the captives' engagement with music was a harmless diversion providing that it was undertaken with the consent of camp administrators and under official supervision. Moreover, music offered the potential for captors to realign internees' views. The Japanese guards closely monitored music performed and produced by internees at Weihsien. Music had to be practised and performed in designated spaces. In addition, they forbade musical activities that proclaimed the internees' allegiance to their kings, queens or Allied governments. Thus, national anthems and patriotic songs were outlawed. Furthermore, musical productions that portrayed the Japanese government or army negatively (or even insinuated such sentiments) were not tolerated. Defiance of such regulations

would result in harsh punishment, which included verbal reprimands, solitary confinement, severe beatings or transfers to prisons that were notorious for their cruelty. The Japanese also threatened the withdrawal of privileges such as holding performances or gatherings to regulate the behaviour of internees.

Despite such hardships, internees created new forms of auditory expression through their ingenuity, and these forms of expression enabled them to defy, protest against or resist Japanese control. Japanese guards' limited understanding of the English language and Western musical traditions meant that defiance and resistance could be expressed through music in the camps in a clandestine fashion. The internees used music to warn their fellow internees of the approach of patrolling guards, for example. They improvised lyrics to transmit secret messages. They omitted lyrics of forbidden songs in order to practise them in secret. And on special occasions, they openly sang national anthems or taboo songs and braced for the wrath of their captors.

The production as well as the appreciation of musical performances offered comfort and a sense of connection with pre-occupation normalcy. Music could uplift people's spirits and offer emotional support to those who had to confront unbearable circumstances. Moreover, music could consolidate the communal bonds that were formed within the camp. Subsequently, music became a survival mechanism for the imprisoned and a way in which to respond to occupation and persecution. As Mary Taylor Previte (2019), who spent her formative years at the camp, put it: 'In a world of guard dogs, roll calls, and prisoner numbers; a world of hunger, guard towers, and barrier walls with electrified wire; men, women and children shaped their response to this world with music.'

Music matters in understanding the history of occupation. As Gilbert argues (2005: 4), music is 'a unique legacy of the time: fragments of shared ideas and interpretation, orally conveyed and preserved, from communities that otherwise left few traces'. Music provides a medium through which we can study occupation as it was taking place, rather than examining it retrospectively. Music also captures the makers, performers, listeners and non-participants in their diverse social roles as captors, prisoners, collaborators and bystanders.

In this chapter, literary analysis, archival and historical research and psychological interpretations are employed to understand the features and functions of music under the circumstances of internment in wartime China. By studying sonic histories of occupation, we can explore issues as broad as oppression, hegemony, hierarchy, disparity, resilience, resistance and memory. Sonic histories of occupation connect major forces shaping the modern world, such as imperialism and colonialism, and individualized experiences including

capitulation, abandonment, appeasement, submission, acquiescence, endurance and resistance. In addition, the study of 'sonic occupation' offers us a venue in which to examine inequality and empowerment, including but not limited to race, gender, class, ability, sexuality, language and nationality. Music functioned in many ways under occupation. It was an expression of identity, as well as a common language that could both bridge and enlarge sociocultural, political and economic gaps.

Music of faith

Internees began to arrive at Weihsien Internment Camp in late March of 1943. Eventually, over 2,000 Allied prisoners would be squeezed into this space of 150 by 200 yards (approximately 137 metres by 182 metres). Internees found themselves in barren rooms behind barrier walls with electrified wires and guard towers. Among the interned were some 800 British citizens, 600 Americans, 250 Dutch citizens, 250 Belgians, some Greeks, some Russians (mainly spouses of British and American men) and one Norwegian. Among this group were about 1,000 missionaries, with approximately 600 Catholics and 400 Protestants. The remaining 1,000 were Allied citizens who had been working in China at the time of the attack on Pearl Harbor. In terms of age, there were about 400 internees over 60 years old and about 400 under 15 years of age (Langdon 1966: 20–1). The Japanese left it to internees themselves to do all the manual labour of the camp, such as pumping and boiling water, cooking, cleaning and laundry duties.

The Japanese authorities only supplied internees with two small meals a day. Breakfast was dry bread soaked in hot water with Chinese leeks and tea. Dinner was stew, bread and tea. As a result of the scanty portions and heavy manual labour, hunger began to spread (Wolf 1990: 175–6). Sister Wibora Muehlenbein, OSB, recollected in her memoirs that 'We were always hungry. People were dropping pounds without the worry of modern diets. Also, sanitary conditions – aside from the problem of contaminated water – were such that dysentery and other intestinal diseases were soon common. We needed more food – more nutritious food – and better sanitary conditions under which to prepare it' (Muehlenbein 1962: 163). Sister Ann Colette Wolf, SP, described the scarcity of food in her book *Against All Odds: Sisters of Providence Mission to the Chinese*: 'All those who had eggs saved the shells so that they could be washed, dried, and pounded into powder. This powder was mixed with food to supply the needed calcium in the body' (1990: 179).

Although the situation was harsh, the missionaries in the camp actively participated in musical performances and productions. Christians believe that a liturgical song has a pre-eminent place in the *ars celebrandi*, for not only is it a means of active participation but it is another source of power. In adversity, the religious at the camp turned to song and music with even more intensity, which in turn created an extraordinary auditory experience for singers as well as listeners. Herbert Hudson Taylor, a leader of the China Inland Mission, was 80 years old when Pearl Harbor was attacked. In his two-and-a-half-year internment at Weihsien, early each morning his fellow internees would hear him sing, 'Courage, brother, do not stumble; though the path be dark as night. There's a star to guide the humble, trust in God and do the right' (Taylor n.d.). His singing, which was a natural expression of his faith, carried a message of courage to his fellow internees and was mentioned in several memoirs.

The Japanese guards allowed music for several reasons. First of all, Weihsien was a civilian camp, and no captured military personnel or intelligence officers were held there. The purpose of the camp was not to exterminate such captives but to isolate them and potentially use them in exchange for the release of Japanese citizens. Second, the initial commandant of the camp was Lieutenant Colonel Jimbo Nobuhiko – a Catholic. Unlike some commandants in other Japanese internment camps, Jimbo showed more restraint at Weihsien. Before being assigned as head of the camp, he had been part of the Imperial Japanese Army occupying the Philippines. Due to his refusal to carry out an order to execute Manuel Roxas,² Jimbo had been threatened with court martial. He was later transferred to Weihsien as punishment (Ocampo 2018). Although Jimbo rejected the internees' request for more provisions at the camp canteens, he showed more restraint in using intimidation and punishment compared to his counterparts in similar camps (such as Stanley Camp in Hong Kong). Finally, the Japanese intended to use Weihsien as their 'model camp' for publicity purposes. The encouragement of certain sounds at the camp was therefore one way for them to create the image that they were competent operators of well-managed 'civilian assembly centres'. For instance, when there were external visitors to Weihsien, they would let interned children in the camp do the headcount in Japanese. The innocent voices of children counting in Japanese presented a seemingly harmonious scene to visitors (Previte 1985).

Missionaries in the camp kept their hopes and spirits alive by invoking the power of sound: singing hymns at Mass, chanting and praying. Sometimes they even added a sense of humour to their songs. Sister Francetta Vetter recalled how 'We had vegetables, the ever-present bean sprouts. The bean sprouts were

so prevalent that one of the great missionaries composed a little song, and the refrain of this song was “All things do have an end; only bean sprouts are without end” (Vetter c. 1955–8).

The primary location of liturgical music was the camp’s assembly hall, which had a seating capacity of about 500 people. Every morning, priests offered a large number of Masses there: daily Masses began at about 5.00 am and continued until the 7.30 am roll-call. Fourteen altars were set up in the assembly hall, but they were insufficient in accommodating more than 300 priests and bishops. Many priests said Mass in their rooms. They placed a board on their beds, covering it with a small linen cloth to use as a makeshift altar. Each congregation of sisters also had ‘altars’ set up in their rooms, so that the priests were able to celebrate Mass daily (Wolf 1990: 179).

Some Masses were so galvanizing that they left a long-lasting impression on both singers and listeners. Years later, when missionaries took up the pen to recount their lives in the camp, many described in detail the uplifting effects of religious singing. Sister Francis de Sales, SP, recounted the High Mass on the first Sunday after the internees arrived at the camp:

When the Mass began, one of the Belgian priests, director of the choir at Tatung Regional Seminary, mounted the sanctuary step and lifted his hand as the signal for the congregation to begin. It was a thrilling moment. Without any practice, missionaries from Europe and America here in Asia lifted up their voices and sang in beautiful tones, perfect rhythm and accent, the Mass of Angels. Here was the one, holy, Catholic and apostolic church in action. Non-Catholics spoke, even after months of seeing the weekly Catholic ceremonies, of the impression that first High Mass in camp made on them. (Wolf 1990: 179)

The power of ecumenism was also displayed in their Sunday Masses as Sister Muehlenbein (1980: 168) recounted in her memoir:

Our Sunday Mass was always as solemn as possible. Usually one of the six bishops present in the camp officiated with the other five, in all their regalia, on the stage which served as sanctuary. The Scheut Fathers took charge of the singing. Their *Christus Vincit* was truly raising the roof right off the building. Every Sunday found the windows crowded with non-catholics [*sic*] who said only one word when we came out from the service, ‘Beautiful’. Several conversions among the internees resulted.

Internment brought different styles of religious music together. This confluence enabled listeners to experience a variety of liturgical and religious musical traditions. Seeing non-Catholics gathered around the church windows, Sister

Muehlenbein was proud of the awe-inspiring music of her Catholic faith. In her opinion, the experience of listening was so impressive for the non-Catholic audience in the camp that it played a decisive role in the conversion of several of them. In this case, music was not only a way to sustain the faith of the Catholic religious in the camp but also a magnet to draw non-believers to their religion, thereby ultimately fulfilling their mission's call (i.e. conversion to Catholicism).

Music of faith was sung not only by the adult missionaries but also by children at Weihsien. Mary Taylor Previte's *Songs of Salvation at Weihsien Prison Camp* (1985) captures the important role music played in children's lives. As a daughter of inland missionaries, Previte had been studying at Chefoo School in Shandong Province. After Pearl Harbor, this school was taken over by the Japanese and turned into a military centre. Students were first put into a concentration camp on Temple Hill in Chefoo. In September 1943, the staff and students were relocated to Weihsien, where they remained until the end of the Second World War. The situation was grim: 'Separated from our parents, we found ourselves crammed into a world of gut-wrenching hunger, guard dogs, bayonet drills, prisoner numbers and badges, daily roll calls, bed bugs, flies, and unspeakable sanitation' (Previte 1985). However, thanks to the uplifting environment created by the adults around them, children's memories of their years in Weihsien were not purely about the cruelty of war; this was also 'a story of heroes, a story of hope, a story of triumph' (Previte 2005).

In a 2014 interview with *This American Life*, 82-year-old Mary Previte reflected on how the music of faith shaped her formative years:

It was like you weren't going to be afraid if you could sing about it. We would sing, (SINGING) 'Day is done'. Gone the sun from the sea, from the hills, from the sky. All is well, safely rest. God is nigh. How could you be afraid when you're singing about all is well, safely rest, God is nigh? How could you be afraid of that? So we were constantly putting things into music. (*This American Life* n.d.)

Music of resilience

In tandem with religious music that called for faith and courage, there was a wide variety of secular music in the form of concerts, choirs, dramatic performances and operas at Weihsien. A large proportion of this music was organized by the Entertainment Committee, which was composed of missionaries as well as secular internees. The establishment of the Entertainment Committee (alongside committees that focused on the survival needs of the internees) testified to the

importance of entertainment in the hearts of the internees. As Sears Eldredge explains, ‘The most difficult time psychologically was their leisure hours between the evening meal and “Lights Out!” Some activity had to be found to fill these hours; something they could participate in, or look forward to, that would occupy their minds and prevent them from brooding on their future as POWs’ (2012: 21). To Eldredge, music and theatre in these wartime camps were not entertainment but a strategy for survival.

Internees involved in the Entertainment Committee not only sent uplifting messages through music but also practised resilience and ingenuity themselves. Sister Francetta Vetter shared her recollections of the committee after the war: ‘One of our sisters, Sister Ursuline, was on this committee to provide entertainment. There were a number of sisters and a number of lay people, men and women who composed a song and they also wrote music because they had very few copies’ (Vetter c. 1955–8). Vetter recounted how the Entertainment Committee had to spend many hours copying songs and musical pieces so that all those who took part could have a copy. After many years, Sister Francetta still remembered the ‘very beautiful choir’ organized by the Entertainment Committee. To her, the music performances served an important purpose. As she concludes, ‘In this way some of our sad moments were made very cheerful’ (Vetter c. 1955–8).

Mary Taylor Preville (1985) also remembered the shield that musical activities created for them in the camp:

Someone found a battered piano mouldering in the church basement and made it the centrepiece of a 22-piece symphonette. It was a glorious combination – brass by the Salvation Army band, woodwinds by the Tientsin Dance Band, and violins and cellos by assorted private citizens. . . . There was also a choral society that sang classical songs and madrigals – Handel’s *The Messiah*, Mendelssohn’s *Elijah* and Stainer’s *The Crucifixion*. And yet another group of prisoners organized a sophisticated drama society, whose ultimate triumph was its production of George Bernard Shaw’s *Androcles and the Lion*. To costume 10 Roman guards with armor and helmets, stage hands soldered together tin cans from the Red Cross food parcels. . . . The church was always jammed for these performances. It was our escape from the police dogs, barbed wire barriers, stinking latrines and gnawing hunger.

Mary Taylor Preville’s account throws light on the ingenuity of the internees. Alongside the active choral society, a drama society creatively recycled tin cans from Red Cross food parcels to make Roman guard costumes to be used in performances. Greg Leck, in his *Captives of Empires*, quoted an internee called Marie Regier, who recounted:

Shaw's *Androcles and the Lion* was produced, a play which the amateur club of Tientsin would have discarded as requiring too expensive a setting. Not so at Weih sien. Every soldier was enveloped in a perfect suit of armor created out of Red Cross tins invisibly welded together while Red Cross cartons piled on top of each other gave the illusion of Roman pillars. (Leck 2006: 273)

A Weih sien Dramatic Club poster designed by Jacqueline De St. Hubert advertised 'Red, Hot, Blue: A Nonstop Vaudeville', which was held on 31 March and 1 April 1944. The programme for this performance was suitably colourful. It included an 'Introduction', a 'Page from History', 'Hula', 'Ignorance is Bliss', 'Waltz', 'Song', 'Pettin' in the Park in Parea', 'Shades of Hawaii', 'French Cancan', 'Duologue', 'Rhumba, Adapted from the French' and a 'Finale'. This vaudeville performance provided an escape from the harsh realities of camp life. It also shows the internees' desire for a peaceful world in which they could resume lives filled with colour and joviality.³

In addition to producing posters to advertise such performances, the internees composed lyrics depicting camp life. Resilience and hope shine through in the lyrics of all of these songs. For example, an internee whose name has been lost with the passing of time wrote a song titled 'The Weih sien Chorus' to the tune of Solomon Levi:

Oh the joys of Weih sien! Oh the Weih sien day!
Good old Weih sien, tra-la-la-la-la-la!
We rise in the dark, and light the fires with coal that's really rocks,
We carry the water, collect the porridge, and empty the garbage box.
They cry 'puhsing' at everything, we smile and shout 'hooray'.
We'll live to see another year, and another Christmas Day.
And now we've come to the end of the song, and we hope it won't be long
Until we leave this Weih sien Camp – in that we can't be wrong.
So let's decide before we go that we will always strive
To whistle and sing a merry song in nineteen forty five.⁴

This song, possibly written for Christmas 1944, captures the optimism in the camp. As Greg Leck eloquently surmises (2006: 282):

concerts and plays fostered a community spirit, and helped provide relaxation and fun. They provided diversions from the dreary, and sometimes suffocating, atmosphere of the camp. They could be uplifting [. . .] In addition to serving as a diversion and temporary escape from camp life, such entertainments also served as reminders that there was another world, one of refined living and conveniences, and enjoyment.

Other songs had a more humorous spin. ‘Weihsien’s Sure a Dandy Place’ is a case in point:

Weihhsien’s sure a hungry place,
 I like it awfully well,
 You wait in queue eternally,
 And only get a smell . . .
 Weihhsien’s sure a sumptuous place,
 With kitchens only three,
 And when you’ve gone in all of these,
 There’s nil for you and me . . .
 Weihhsien’s sure a newsy place,
 I like it more and more,
 With rumours, whispers that you hear,
 You know less than before. (Leck 2006: 278)

This song depicts the harsh conditions at Weihsien: the scarcity of food, long queues, limited cooking facilities, rumours and gossip. Its clever use of contrasting phrases such as ‘dandy’ with ‘awful’, and ‘sumptuous’ with ‘nil’, creates a satirical effect. The internees, after a long day’s work, could relate to the details in the song and felt validated and pleased by its satire.

The ‘Weihsien Camp Song’ (with lyrics by Nancy Cochran and music by Solomon Levi) is another good example of this humorous and light-hearted spirit. The song portrays the dramatically changed lives of the secular internees of the camp. Former high-ranking executives of international companies now had to engage in back-breaking manual labour:

We used to be executives who labored with our brains,
 With secretaries neat and quick to spare us many pains.
 And when the ticker tape gave out we didn’t touch a thing,
 The office staff could tend to that, we did the ordering.
Chorus
 But now we’re in Weihsien
 Nothing’s too dirty to do
 Slops, pots or garbage or stirring a vegetable stew
 To shine in this delightful camp, you join the labor corps
 Where, if you do your work too well, they work you more and more.
 For since we’ve come to Weihsien camp they’ve worked us till we’re dead
 Though now we’re called the labor corps, we’ll be a corpse instead.
Baker
 Some say that white’s a color pure so baking should be chaste

So now you see me plastered up from head to foot in paste.
But since Cordell's supporting us the bakery can go
For now the comfort money's come, why should we raise the dough!

Butcher

I used to take my steak well done. I could not stand it rare,
But now when're the cows come home, the blood gets in hair.
We call it roast or steak or chops, but when the cookings through
No matter how we cut it up, it all turns into stew.

Stoker

If mama just could see me now, she wouldn't know her boy
My rosy cheeks and golden locks were once her pride and joy
But stoking fires and hauling coal have crusted me with jet
Though ladies may prefer us blondes, alas I'm now brunette.

Officer

I thought I'd take an office job to spare my lily hands
And so I signed with the police and issued my commands
But when police began to count they put me on the shelf
For though I counted everyone I clean forgot myself.

Ladies

You'd think to hear these fellows sing, the men do all the work
But I am here to tell you now, the ladies never shirk.
We clean the leeks, we scrub the floors but then, what really hurts
When they have done the dirty work, we have to wash their shirts.⁵

Set to a blues tune, the 'Weihsien Camp Song' was comical and jolly. In it, the internees marvelled at their change of fate from privileged executives to manual labourers. The jovial and self-deprecating depictions of camp life inherent in such songs also offered a new lens for reflecting on lives that had been disrupted by war. Through such a lens, seemingly insoluble struggles took on a sense of chance or serendipity and therefore seemed less malicious and overwhelming. For many internees, this realization could break the grip of self-pity, stress and depression.

Music of resistance

Resistance to imprisonment existed in many forms at Weihsien Camp. There were a small number of escapes from the camp, for example, while one internee, Father Raymond J. de Jaegher, hid messages in pails of human refuse that were shared with anti-Japanese resistance guerrillas outside the camp (de Jaegher

1969: 238). In addition, however, internees demonstrated resistance by defying camp regulations and by spreading forbidden messages. Music became an important tool through which such defiance and resistance could be displayed.

One of the best-known instances of resistance through music could be found in the underground black market. As starvation threatened the well-being of the internees – especially those who were ill or frail – some internees decided to take matters into their own hands. Among them were several Trappist monks who lived in a section of the camp where mounds of earth were piled against the wall. Sister Ann Colette Wolf fondly recalled several ‘black-market heroes’ in her biography (1990: 177–8). The monks cleverly used chants, prayers and songs to hide black-market activities from the watchful eyes of Japanese sentries. Standing on the mound, a monk would pry loose a few bricks to create a small hole in the wall through which eggs, peanuts, sugar and money could be passed. If a Japanese guard happened to pass the area, two Trappist friends further down the line would begin a Gregorian chant. At this signal, the monk near the brick wall would quickly cover the items that were being passed through the wall with his long robe. By the time the Japanese guard had reached him, the monk would be kneeling, deep in prayer (1990: 177).

Among such ‘black-market heroes’, Father Scanlan, a British Trappist, was the most brave and ingenious in using music as a way to defy Japanese guards. Sister Ann Colette Wolf in *Against All Odds* recounts Father Scanlan’s early morning singing:

On one occasion Scanlan was caught by the Japanese guards. He was condemned to two weeks of solitary confinement in a small shed near the officers’ quarters. Scanlan was supposed to exist on bread and water. About the sixth night after Scanlan was imprisoned, he arose at 2 a.m. and began chanting the morning prayer in a very loud voice. One of the Japanese officials, disturbed by the loudness, told him to stop chanting. But Scanlan told him the monks always chant their morning Prayer at 2 a.m. and he had to do it. Scanlan was released after eight days in prison. The first time he appeared in the dining room after release, he received a thunderous ovation. Hundreds of people stood up, clapped enthusiastically, and spontaneously sang, ‘For he’s a jolly good fellow.’ (1990: 178)

The internees’ appreciation of Father Scanlan’s bravery did not stop there. For the camp’s first Independence Day celebration in 1943, internees created a song inspired by Father Scanlan’s solitary confinement experience:

Many thanks to my friends, your good wishes
Flooded my lonely cell yesterday

Oh why can't I swim like the fishes,
So the rain could have washed me away
But confinement has some compensation
I'm not in a rush to be free,
Before it was Tsingtao that fed me
Now my food comes from dining room three.
The scene that I have from my window
A pasture where cattle do browse,
So how can a fellow be lonely
When the girls come to visit the cows.
The Fourth was in honour of freedom
Which is what I have anything but.
Oh, give me eggs when I need them
And I'll gladly sit tight in my hut.

OH, I hope that the time passes swiftly,
And I will be seeing you soon
Then you'll find me right back in the harness
By the light of the silvery moon. (Henshaw 2012: 158)

On other occasions, the internees displayed resistance by ridiculing the camp's policies through musical performances. Sitting in the front rows, the guards were present at all the entertainment events. They may well have been curious about Western-style entertainment, but by attending, they were able to monitor the performances closely. Although the Japanese made it clear that any ridicule of the camp's policies would not be tolerated, the internees sometimes took risks to challenge this proviso. On one occasion, the Entertainment Committee put on a parody based on an English poem. In this parody, a father pursued his eloping daughter. He held out an egg as an inducement for his daughter to return to him. When that failed, he held out two eggs. Watching this, the internees burst into laughter because this plot insinuated and ridiculed the camp's stinginess in providing basic products such as eggs despite the internees' repeated pleas. Watching the laughing audience, the Japanese guards in the audience were seriously offended, and the internees almost lost their right to put on such performances thereafter (Muehlenbein 1962: 166).

Similarly, internees used music to convey forbidden messages to their fellow internees. Although no radios were allowed in the camp, a few internees secretly manufactured radios from scraps, often picking up news from Tokyo. Nicholas Mihailoff was one such internee. Before internment, Mihailoff had worked at the Tientsin British Motor Corporation. In Weih sien, he repaired Japanese radios.

By stealing spare parts, Mihailoff was able to assemble a working receiver. He hid this but passed on the news that he heard from his radio to trusted fellow internees. One Friday night in July 1943, a whisper travelled rapidly around the camp that Sicily had fallen to the Allies. The song leader in charge of the singing group kept singing the tune 'Santa Lucia' over and over again. When the song leader was sure the internees knew the message, he changed the words 'Santa Lucia' at the end of the chorus to 'Goodbye, Sicilia.' Everyone enthusiastically joined in the singing, much to the consternation of the guards (Wolf 1990: 181).

In addition to these planned acts of choral resistance, other incidents of defiance and resistance occurred spontaneously. Although patriotic songs and national anthems were forbidden, sometimes circumstances led the internees to sing their favourite song, such as 'God Bless America.' Ida Talbot noted one such incident in her diary on 4 July 1943. On that Independence Day, a section of the camp's wall collapsed after days of heavy rain. 'People just keep on Massing to see the broken wall and to look out onto freedom. Then people sang "God bless America". It is very touching time, and how we longed with all our hearts that this was all over.' The Japanese were the last ones to know, then they brought over a bale of barbed wire. The collapse of the prison wall on Independence Day looked like an omen of freedom to many. Some priests from America dressed up in blue shirts, white pants and red ties. Some even wore the letter 'V' on their clothing. Sitting on the stage in the assembly hall, they sang patriotic songs. Ida writes, 'At God Bless America, the Stars & Stripes was unfurled. It was impressive. What a day!' (Talbot n.d.)

In *Captives of Empire*, Greg Leck (2006) recounts a similar spontaneous burst of singing. In July 1945, the Weih sien Dramatic Club presented its annual song, dance and skit revue – 'Red, Hot and Blue.' 'The euphoria at this point in time was so great at the final curtain, the entire audience spontaneously arose to sing *God Save the King* and *God Bless America*.'

Each time the internees defied their captors, there were risks. One significant event which risked the wrath of the Japanese guards occurred on 5 May 1945 – the day of the German surrender. A daring internee utilized sound to celebrate this event, tolling a bell in the camp to convey this forbidden message to his fellow internees. As Norman Cliff recollected: 'Just before 11-p.m. the startling sound of a tolling bell customarily used as the signal for roll-call, broke the stillness of the night and aroused the sleeping community. This was followed at a short interval by scurrying feet racing round the alleys, and the raucous sound of agitated Japanese voices and then the wail of a siren' (Cliff 1945). The internees were gathered for a roll-call, standing for more than an hour in the cold of the

early morning. The Japanese withheld the internees' food rations for a week before the ringer turned himself in. Peter Fox, hearing the good news of Nazi Germany's surrender over the homemade radio, rang the bell in celebration. In his confession, he stated: 'The bell was rung by me last Saturday night as an expression of joy & thanksgiving for peace in Europe. I regret any unforeseen inconvenience caused to anyone' (Cliff 1945).

The best example illustrating Weihsien's ingenuity in employing sound and music for the purpose of resistance is probably the Salvation Army Band. According to Peter Bazire, in early 1943, upon hearing the news that the Salvation Army was to be moved from Peking to Weihsien, Brigadier Leonard Stranks cycled around and asked people to bring musical instruments to Weihsien. He put some brass instruments between mattresses and tied them together in pairs to protect them. In the spring of 1943, Brigadier Stranks put together the Salvation Army Band soon after their arrival at Weihsien. Brigadier Stranks served as the conductor and he also played the E flat bass. The band practised on Tuesday evenings in the sewing room and played three times a week at meetings or in the open air (Bazire n.d.). Marcy Ditmanson, daughter of Brigadier Stranks, recorded the band's roles in celebrating 4 July 1944:

We've celebrated the 'Fourth' with a full day's program of athletic, religious and social events, with the whole community, regardless of nationality, either participating in or enjoying the goings-on. We had to have permission, of course, for the celeb(ration). . . . We had a special church service at 11:45, well attended by both Am(ericans) and Brit(ish). The band played. Most of the selections we played, (Am)erican[s] were instrumented in camp: 'Star Spangled Banner', 'O Beautiful for Spacious Skies' 'God Bless America', . . . The (base)ball game in the evening was between the Am(ericans) and the (Brit)ish [. . .] At the close of the game we played 'God Bless Am(ericans)' and 'My Country, 'tis of Thee'. All the spectators, numbering 5-6 hundred, I suppose, stood at attention as we played the latter piece. It was a most impressive moment. To the Br(ish), of course, we were playing their nat'l anthem; to the Americans one of the best-loved patriotic hymns. (Bazire n.d.)

The next day, Marcy Ditmanson's diary records: 'There have been some repercussions from yesterday's celebrations.' 'My Country, 'tis of Thee' was an American patriotic song, but the Japanese objected to the Salvation Army Band playing 'national anthems'. Brigadier Stranks responded that neither of these songs were national anthems, betting on the guards' ignorance of the history of 'My Country, 'tis of Thee'. However, as 'My Country, 'tis of Thee' shared the same melody as 'God Save the King', Britons in the camp stood to attention in honour

of their national anthem when hearing it. In the end, Stranks was warned by Schmidt, head of Weih sien's Disciplinary Committee, not to play any more patriotic airs (Bazire n.d.).

As captives living in a compound enclosed with barbed wire and watchtowers, internees had few options to express their complaints, protests and resistance. As Greg Leck argues, 'Most resistance could only take the form of opportunistic, symbolic, or token acts designed to be a psychological boost. Anything more overt or forceful would gain nothing and only invoke the wrath of the Japanese' (Leck 2006: 347). The Salvation Army Band was ingenious in that it not only cleverly negotiated with the guards to keep performing patriotic songs but also invented a 'Victory Medley'. By jumbling tunes together and omitting the top lines, the band was able to practise a Victory Medley that included the national anthems of all the Allied forces represented in the camp. According to Peter Bazire (n.d.), in the summer of 1945, the Salvation Army Band 'began practicing the national anthems of all the countries represented in the camp, but NOT the top line, so as not to arouse the suspicion of our guards. These tunes were arranged as a medley by a band member'.⁶ Mary Taylor Previte, in *Songs of Salvation*, also mentioned this Victory Medley. This was a joyful mix of four Allied national anthems – American, English, Chinese and Russian, sandwiched between triumphant hymns of the church – 'Onward, Christian Soldiers', 'Rise Up, O Men of God' and 'Battle Hymn of the Republic'. This Victory Medley uplifted the spirits of the internees each day they practised. More importantly, it repeatedly showed the limitations of the guards in terms of their knowledge. Consequently, their resistance to the camp's rules as well as the outplaying of the Japanese guards exposed the destructibility of the guards and the Axis Powers behind them.

On 17 August 1945, the Salvation Army Band saw all their covert practice come to fruition. As Mary Taylor Previte recounts, on this day an American airplane flew lower and lower in the skies above Weih sien. Seven parachutes drifted to the ground. Waves of prisoners ran into the fields beyond the camp to look for them. They hoisted the paratroopers' leader onto their shoulders and carried him back towards the camp in triumph:

In the distance, from a mound near the camp gate, the music of 'Happy Days Are Here Again' drifted out into the fields. It was the Salvation Army band blasting its joyful Victory Medley. When they got to 'The Star Spangled Banner,' the crowd hushed . . .

From up on his throne of shoulders, the young, sun-bronzed American major struggled down to a standing salute. And up on the mound by the gate, one

of the musicians in the band, a young American trombonist, crumpled to the ground and wept. (Previte 1985)

Conclusion

In the Weih sien Internment Camp, the approximately 2,000 internees were able to create a distinctive musical culture characterized by faith, resilience and courage. In their religious services, the approximately 1,000 missionaries created an auditory environment of faith where ecumenism shone through in hymns and Masses. Taking advantage of the Japanese guards' authorization of secular musical activities, the internees set up an Entertainment Committee. Under its auspices, they created a wide range of musical productions in the forms of concerts, operas and dramas. This showcased the internees' resilience and creativity under strenuous circumstances. Additionally, the internees were ingenious in availing of music to express their defiance and resistance to their captors.

As this study of the diverse musical activities in Weih sien Internment Camp reveals, music brought the prisoners reprieve from the cruel reality of their captivity and offered a reconnection to the pre-war world representing stability and normalcy. It also provided a space for the internees to process their lives in the camp, and more importantly, to share their efforts to make sense of the Japanese occupation. Living an interned life permeated by hunger, uncertainty, crowdedness and demanding labour, music had the power to draw people together, to forge a communal identity that outlasted their captivity. In a seemingly incongruous way, Weih sien became an endearing place to the makers and audience of musical activities. By October 1945, the internees were awaiting evacuation. They created their last song to the tune of 'The Old Oaken Bucket' to say farewell to Weih sien and to each other:

How dear to our hearts are the scenes of old Weih sien
When fond recollection presents them to view
The court yards, the main roads, the well trodden by ways, paths
And every loved spot where we stood in a queue
The beautiful garden, the wide spreading shade trees
The birds whose gay songs start the day with good cheer
But foremost among them a holding our mem'ries
The wonderful people that dwell with us here.
They're folks that we eat with
They're folks that we play with

They're folks that we live with
 The best of all here.
 They're preachers and teachers and doctors and nurses
 Professors, musicians, and artists a few
 They're blonde and brunette and ones and all in between ones
 They're old ones and young ones and wee babies too
 They're Catholic fathers and busy Dutch cleansers
 They've fashions in headgear and gowns without end
 We list to the talk that betrays many nations
 But all of them now are just neighbors and friends
 They're folks that we eat with
 They're folks that we play with
 They're folks that we live with
 The best of all here.
 When we are far away will mem'ries throng
 Of Weihsien as we knew it in tale and song?
 And as we sit imbibing ice-cold tea
 Will we remember soup in kitchens three?
 And as we motor o'er country wide
 Think of the garbage cans we dumped outside/
 No matter where we roam when once we're free
 Weihsien will ever be part of you and me.
 No matter where we roam when once we're free
 Weihsien will ever be part of you and me.⁷

Music, as an essential and shared form of cultural practice, functioned in many ways in occupied countries during the Second World War. Music was an expression of the individual as well as communal identities. Additionally, it was a common language that could either bridge or enlarge sociocultural, political and economic gaps. The study of sonic occupation during the Second World War adds to existing conversations in the field of sound and music studies. Moreover, shifting from an ocularcentric to an auditory focus, this study of music at an internment camp sheds light on the significant role of sound and music in understanding foreign occupation and wartime camps. By contextualized analysis of diverse sounds and music created and listened to by various groups at Weihsien, this chapter is able to reveal the multifaceted employment of music by internees. Without oversimplifying the complex interplay between music and hierarchy, this chapter commends the human spirit, manifested in the faith, resilience, courage and ingenuity of various prisoners, that shone through in musical activities undertaken in the dire circumstances of oppression, occupation and persecution.

Notes

- 1 www.weihsien-paintings.org (accessed 7 January 2021).
- 2 Manuel Roxas was a speaker and general when the Philippines was occupied by Japan during the Second World War. After the war, he served as president of the Philippines from 1946 until his death in 1948.
- 3 Details are taken from the Dramatic Club poster drawn by Jacqueline De St. Hubert. Available online: http://www.weihsien-paintings.org/Christian_deSaintHubert/paintings/p_dramaticClub01.htm (accessed 7 January 2021).
- 4 Unknown, 'The Weihsien Chorus', collected by former internee Norman Cliff. Available online: http://www.weihsien-paintings.org/NormanCliff/Songs/txt_SolomonLevi.htm (accessed 7 January 2021).
- 5 Nancy Cochran and music by Solomon Levi, 'Weihsien Camp Song'. Available online: http://weihsien-paintings.org/TerriStewart/Songs/txt_WeUsedToBe---.htm (accessed 1 January 2021).
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 'Farewell Song at the Evacuation of Weihsien Internment Camp in October 1945'. Available online: http://weihsien-paintings.org/TerriStewart/Songs/txt_TheOldOakenBucket.htm (accessed 1 January 2021).

References

- Bazire, P. (n.d.), 'The Salvation Army Band in Weihsien: 1943–1945': Available online: <http://www.weihsien-paintings.org/PeterBazire/text/TheSalvationArmyBandWeihsien.htm> (accessed 1 January 2021).
- Cliff, N. (n.d.), 'From Norman Cliff's Scrapbooks': Available online: <http://www.weihsien-paintings.org/NormanCliff> (accessed 6 January 2021).
- Cliff, N. (1945), 'Alarm at Weihsien: Incident of 5th May, 1945': Available online: <http://www.weihsien-paintings.org/NormanCliff/Diary/BellIncident/BellIncident.html> (accessed 1 January 2021).
- De Jaeger, R. (1969), *The Enemy Within: An Eyewitness Account of the Communist Conquest of China*, Bombay: St. Paul Publications.
- Eldredge, S. (2012), 'Wonder Bar: Music and Theatre as Strategies for Survival in a Second World War POW Hospital Camp', in G. Carr and H. Mytum (eds), *Cultural Heritage and Prisoners of War: Creativity Behind Barbed Wire*, 19–33, New York: Routledge.
- Freud, S. (1962), *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. J. Strachey, New York: W. W. Norton and Co.
- Gilbert, S. (2005), *Music in the Holocaust: Confronting Life in the Nazi Ghettos and Camps*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Henshaw, J. (2012), 'Beyond Collaboration and Resistance: Accommodation at the Weihshien Internment Camp, China, 1943–1945', in G. Carr and H. Mytum (eds), *Cultural Heritage and Prisoners of War: Creativity Behind Barbed Wire*, 152–68, New York: Routledge.
- Langdon, G. (1966), *Shantung Compound*, New York: Harper and Row.
- Leck, G. (2006), *Captives of Empire: The Japanese Internment of Allied Civilians in China, 1941–1945*, Bangor, PA: Shandy Press.
- McDonald, G. (1980), *With Lamps Burning*, St Joseph, MN: Saint Benedict's Convent.
- McGinnis, K. (2020), 'A Musical Reeducation: Music-Making in America's German POW Camps and the Intellectual Diversion Program', in P. Potter, C. Baade and R. Marvin (eds), *Music in World War II: Coping with Wartime in Europe and the United States*, 226–45, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Moore, R. (2016), *Moondani Kyema: 'Embrace the Dawn': My Story*, 2nd edn, Traralgon: Kyema Publishing.
- Muehlenbein, W. (1962), Unpublished memoir manuscript, draft one, Saint Benedict's Monastery Archives, St Joseph, MN.
- Muehlenbein, W. (1978), 'Midwest China Oral History Interviews' in *China Oral Histories*, 51: Available online: http://digitalcommons.luthersem.edu/china_histories/51 (accessed 6 January 2021).
- Muehlenbein, W. (1980), *Benedictine Mission to China*, St Joseph, MN: Saint Benedict's Convent.
- Norman, G. (n.d.), 'Poem Written on the Arrival of the Chefoo Group in Weihshien': Available online: http://www.weihshienpaintings.org/NormanCliff/Songs/txt_poem.htm (accessed 6 January 2021).
- Nicolini-Zani, M. (2016), *Christian Monks on Chinese Soil: A History of Monastic Missions to China*, trans. S. Senyk and W. Skudlarek, Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press.
- Ocampo, A. (2018), 'Postwar Friendship Between Two Soldiers', *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 31 January: Available online: <https://opinion.inquirer.net/110677/postwar-friendship-two-soldiers#ixzz5g6hmmSiV> (accessed 7 January 2021).
- Pander, L. (n.d.), 'Weihshien: March 1943 to October 1945': Available online: <http://www.weihshien-paintings.org> (accessed 6 January 2021).
- Previte, M. T. (1985), 'A Song of Salvation at Weihshien Prison Camp': Available online: <http://www.weihshien-paintings.org/Mprevite/inquirer/MPprevite.htm> (accessed 7 January 2021).
- Previte, M. T. (2005), 'Speech at Weihshien Concentration Camp Liberation 60th Anniversary Celebration', 17 August: Available online: http://www.weihshien-paintings.org/60YearsAfter/texts/Mary_speech.htm (accessed 7 January 2021).
- Previte, M. T. (2019), Unpublished interview with the author, 2 January.
- Talbot, I. (n.d.), *Ms Ida Talbot's (Unabridged) Weihshien Diary*: Available online: <http://www.weihshien-paintings.org/ChSancton/diary/Diary/calendar.htm> (accessed 7 January 2021).

- Taylor, J. (n.d.), 'God's Faithfulness to Nine Generations', *OMF International*: Available online: <https://omf.org/us/gods-faithfulness-to-nine-generations/> (accessed 7 January 2021).
- This American Life* (n.d.), Interview of Mary Taylor Previte, Episode 559: Captain's Log: Available online: <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/559/transcript> (accessed 1 January 2021).
- Vetter, F. (c. 1955–58), 'Sister Francetta Vetter: Oral History Tape Interview, Tokyo, Japan', transcript, Saint Benedict's Monastery Archives, St Joseph, MN.
- Wolf, A. (1990), *Against All Odds: Sisters of Providence Mission to the Chinese, 1920–1990*, Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, IN: Saint Mary-of-the-Woods.