

How the Great Composer Became an Icon in the People's Republic: The Story of Mao Zedong and Beethoven

by Jonathan Spence

In the annals of history, there are few relationships as unlikely as that between Mao Zedong, the founder of the People's Republic of China, and Ludwig van Beethoven, the German composer. Mao, a ruthless revolutionary, was known for his austere lifestyle and his disdain for Western culture. Beethoven, on the other hand, was a passionate romantic who believed in the power of music to change the world.

Despite their vast differences, Mao and Beethoven shared a common bond: a love of music. Mao was a talented musician himself, and he often played the piano in his spare time. He was particularly fond of Beethoven's music, which he found to be both inspiring and uplifting.



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by Morton Manus

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Mao's love of Beethoven's music had a profound impact on his political ideology. Beethoven's music, with its themes of struggle, triumph, and hope, resonated with Mao's own revolutionary spirit. Mao believed that Beethoven's music could inspire the Chinese people to overthrow their oppressors and build a new, more just society.

Mao's admiration for Beethoven was not just limited to his music. He also admired Beethoven's personal qualities, such as his courage, determination, and resilience. Mao saw Beethoven as a model for all revolutionaries, and he often quoted Beethoven's words in his own speeches.

Mao's love of Beethoven's music was not shared by all of his comrades. Some of the more conservative members of the Chinese Communist Party viewed Beethoven's music as being too bourgeois and decadent. They argued that Mao should focus on promoting Chinese folk music instead.

Mao, however, refused to listen to their criticisms. He believed that Beethoven's music had a universal appeal that could transcend cultural and political boundaries. He also believed that Beethoven's music could help to promote unity and cooperation among the Chinese people.

Mao's love of Beethoven's music reached its peak during the Cultural Revolution, a period of political turmoil that lasted from 1966 to 1976. During the Cultural Revolution, Mao's personality cult reached its height, and his image was everywhere. Beethoven's music was also ubiquitous during this time, and it was often used to accompany propaganda films and speeches.

For many Chinese people, Beethoven's music became a symbol of resistance and hope during the Cultural Revolution. Beethoven's music was a reminder that even in the darkest of times, there is always hope for a better future.

Mao Zedong died in 1976, but his love of Beethoven's music continues to live on. Beethoven's music is still popular in China today, and it is often performed at official state functions.

The story of Mao Zedong and Beethoven is a fascinating and insightful account of the unlikely relationship between two towering figures of the 20th century. It is a story that reveals the power of music to inspire, to unite, and to give hope.

Bibliography

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