

Traveling Entrepreneurs, Traveling Sounds: The Early Gramophone Business in India and China

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During the first global economy, roughly from Western industrialization to World War I, the gramophone, much like other consumer goods, circulated relatively freely around the world. This paper compares the market in India and China asking how gramophone companies established themselves there and focuses on the interaction between Western businesspeople and local partners. The article first shows how agents started exploring strategies for “localizing” music and, second, how in both countries their interaction with local partners was first shaped by curiosity and commercial interest, and later by traditionalism and nationalism, the latter of which paradoxically both inhibited and enabled Western business. Based on diaries, corporate files, trade journals, and consular reports, the paper shows that the highly localized and politicized demand for music made access to local knowledge a crucial competitive advantage.

Keywords: China, gramophone industry, India, international business, nationalism.

From the 1880s until the outbreak of World War I, the gramophone, much like other consumer goods, circulated relatively freely around the world.¹ In both India and China, Western gramophones entered the market in the late nineteenth century and quickly became popular with both Western residents and the local population. Companies based in the United States, Great Britain, Germany, France, and Switzerland engaged in fierce competition over market share in both countries, which were considered promising but culturally foreign and challenging consumer markets. The cultural effects of this new enterprise were manifold and characterize the globally shared experience of traveling sounds. As R. Murray Schafer noted in his classic book on soundscapes, “The soundscape of the world is changing. Modern man is beginning to inhabit a world with an acoustic environment radically different from any he has hitherto known.”²

There is an extensive literature on the early gramophone industry in Western countries that showcases how the technology matured, which business strategies were

successfully or unsuccessfully employed to sell gramophones and records, and how consumers reacted to the offerings.³ Several studies have also expanded beyond the Western context and have shown the particular challenges related to more distant markets, for example in Asia. For India, M. S. Kinnear's historically informed discography, Gerry Farrell's monograph on Indian music and its relationship to the West, Vibodh Parthasarathi's analysis of the early gramophone business, Christina Lubinski's description of the business dynamics in the Indian market, and A. N. Sharma's wonderfully illustrated "Bajanaama" describe the market from different perspectives.⁴ For China, Andreas Steen's monograph on the early history of the gramophone and its complex cultural position between entertainment and politics as well as Andrew Jones's book on the gramophone business and the emergence of "yellow music" analyze the opportunities and challenges of this particular market.⁵ More recently, this topic has also been addressed in China's academia, for example by Ge Tao and Qian Nairong, and by collectors and enthusiasts such as Du Jun Min.⁶ However, most studies remain confined by national boundaries and focus on one national market in isolation. While there are good reasons to look closely at the idiosyncrasies of individual markets, in particular when it comes to markets as complex and large as China and India, in this paper we deliberately chose a different perspective, for two primary reasons. First, our comparative study of China and India highlights the similarities and differences between Western companies' approaches to China and India, as well as the reactions by local consumers. Unlike single-market studies, it thus allows us to distinguish between typical foreign or Asian market strategies and market-specific activities. Second, the primary source material from corporate archives and diverse trade journals suggests that many of the strategies developed were not targeted at one specific foreign market, but rather probed in different national contexts and carried over from one market to another. Only when prompted by necessity, it seems, did gramophone companies diverge from their established approach, and it is precisely those moments of reflection on market idiosyncrasies that we are most interested in.

These issues are particularly relevant in the gramophone business due to the network effects of this industry.⁷ The gramophone business was composed of two complementary streams of income, the selling of gramophones ("the hardware") and recordings ("the software"). Both were heavily intertwined and dependent on one another. With two competing technological systems available—the disc and the cylinder system—consumers selected their hardware, among other factors, based on considerations about the available recordings. Once the decision was taken, switching between the two systems was very costly. The software (musical and other recordings), however, was deeply embedded in local culture. To understand the demand in these markets, Western entrepreneurs depended heavily on support by local intermediaries and cultural experts who knew consumer preferences more intimately.

Based on government reports, corporate archives, and trade journals, this paper analyses the challenges Western companies faced in the Chinese and Indian market and identifies similarities and differences regarding their approach towards an

unknown musical culture. We first compare how the gramophone came to India and China, respectively, and how it was perceived upon arrival. We then discuss the strategy of the first movers and the early attempts at understanding and responding to local expectations. In section 3, we explore the increasingly fierce competition between Western companies up until World War I. In the last section, we consider the political pressures and indigenous competition influencing the market. The conclusion summarizes the results of this comparative exercise.

The Gramophone Comes to Asia

The gramophone is an invention of the last third of the nineteenth century.⁸ American inventor Thomas Edison developed what he called the “phonograph” in 1877 and received a patent on February 19, 1878.⁹ As a scientific sensation the machine was showcased in different countries immediately after its invention. During an exhibition in the South Kensington Museum (today the Victoria and Albert Museum) it was introduced to China’s first envoy to England, Guo Songtao, who found it important enough to make a note in his diary in May 1878.¹⁰ However, the phonograph remained a curiosity, because it was not immediately clear for what purpose it should be used. In addition, it was difficult to operate, the recording quality was low and recordings were usually ruined after a few playbacks. Incremental improvements to the technology by Edison and others over the following decade eventually turned gramophones and recordings into a true commodity.¹¹ The series of improvements that made the business profitable led to a series of patents acquired in different national contexts and frequent legal battles over copyright infringements and lawsuits. Major manufacturers of gramophones (for an overview, see table 1) engaged in strategic contractual agreements, dividing the world market between them. For example, the Anglo-American Gramophone Co. agreed with the American firm Victor to serve Europe, the British Empire, and Russia, while leaving the rest of the world to Victor. As a consequence, after 1907, India was served by the Gramophone Co., whereas China was part of Victor’s sphere of influence.¹²

From its inception, the gramophone business was highly international. The gramophone companies’ entry strategies to India and China had many similarities. The gramophone was one of many technological items manufactured in the West and exported to India and China since the late nineteenth century, others being sewing machines, typewriters, bicycles, cameras, clocks, watches, radios, electric fans, and cars.¹³ It travelled in the footsteps of imperialist expansion and colonial politics.

In both countries, the novelty item had to be introduced to the public, which regarded it with curiosity and sometimes resistance. In India, events were held to celebrate the gramophone’s arrival, such as a “Phonograph Concert” at the Dalhousie Institute in Calcutta (Kolkata) on November 16, 1899, where the Edison phonograph was played for the public.¹⁴ Similarly, in China, Thomas Edison’s local agent Everett Frazar (1834–1901), was sent as a special agent in 1889 to introduce the phonograph to China (and Japan.) In the following summer, Frazar & Co., Shanghai, sent a phonograph to

Table 1. Major gramophone companies before World War I

Company	Founding date (country)	Label
Nicole Frère, Nicole Frere Ltd (1897)	1815 (Switzerland, as manufacturer of musical boxes), 1881 (UK)	Nicole Record
Edison Phonograph Co.	1887 (USA)	Edison Records
Columbia Records	1889 (USA)	Columbia Records
American Talking Machine Co.	1889 (USA)	Vitaphone
Société Pathé Frères	1896 (France)	Pathé Discs
Gramophone Co.*	1897 (UK)	His Master's Voice
Victor Talking Machine Co.	ca 1900; incorporated 1901 (USA)	His Master's Voice (US rights)
International Talking Machine Co. mbH	ca 1903 (Germany)	Odeon
Beka Record GmbH, Beka Record Aktiengesellschaft (1910)	1904 (Germany)	Beka-Grand Record, Ideal, Meister

*The Gramophone Co. Ltd merged with a typewriter manufacturer in 1900 and changed its name to Gramophone and Typewriter Ltd. In 1907 it changed its name again to Gramophone Co. Ltd and continued with this name until 1974. See Martland, *Recording History*, 68 n103. In this article, the company is referred to as Gramophone or the Gramophone Co.

China's most powerful man, Viceroy Li Hongzhang (1821–1901) in Tianjin. As his son revealed in a letter, Li was enthusiastic about the machine, invited Edison to China and even proposed a Chinese name for the machine: “Transfer-Language-Box” (*Chuan yu he*).¹⁵ Although Edison never visited China, the gramophone was continuously discussed in Chinese scientific circles and journals, but generally regarded as insufficient and too fragile. Still in 1893, Frazar was pessimistic about the export business and wrote to Edison “in regard to supplying phonographs for China & Japan, I think however it is a waste of time to write on the subject.”¹⁶

Improvements to the technology eventually allowed the business to develop further. The representatives of the different gramophone companies enjoyed increasingly greater success, first in India, then also in China. Both countries were considered promising markets. With a population of 287 million¹⁷ in 1901, India had the potential of becoming a massive market for consumer goods and was considered a stepping stone to other Asian markets. The German electrical company Siemens, for example, sought to attract investors in its telegraph line to India by arguing already in 1867 that the country “with its enormous population and growing production” was not only one of the largest markets in the world but also a “gate for Europeans to the important markets of China, Japan, and Australia.”¹⁸ More important, the political context made India very accessible. The British government had assumed control of the territories of the former East India Company in the Government of India Act of 1858. To govern India, the Act provided for a Secretary of State and a Council of

India in Britain, both composed of British nationals. In India, the head of the British administration was the governor general of India in Calcutta, who after 1858 governed directly over the provinces of British India. He also indirectly governed the nominally sovereign native states, which were under the suzerainty of the British monarch. Anglo-Saxon property law and free trade policy in the British colony ensured a relatively open field for Western businesses regardless of their country of origin. Despite being under British control, India was “commercially . . . a country of equal opportunities for all the nations of the world,”¹⁹ as an American consular report of 1915 highlighted.

China, on the other hand, had been forced into trade relations with the West by the so-called “unequal treaties,” the first of which was signed in August 1842 following the First Opium War. One of the results was that China had to open five treaty ports for international trade, and Hong Kong became a British colony. In the following decades, China’s government was pressed to open an increasing number of “treaty ports,” which developed into centres of Sino-Western commercial interaction, modern entertainment, and lifestyles. By the end of the nineteenth century, about a hundred treaty ports existed in China, of which Shanghai and Tianjin were the largest and most influential on the coast. In addition, foreign powers had begun to eagerly divide China into several “spheres of influence” and established colonies after China’s defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War (1895). The conflict between foreign imperialism and anti-foreign Chinese nationalism reached its climax in 1900, when the so-called Boxer Uprising threatened the Western presence in China. The signing of the “Boxer Protocol” in September 1901 precipitated the start of a decade of anti-Manchu nationalist agitation and revolution that resulted in the downfall of the Qing dynasty in 1912.

As a consequence, both China and India were open(ed) to Western companies that up until World War I competed relatively freely for market share. In both countries, the import goods entered the markets through harbour cities and became increasingly available in more remote parts of the countries as well. Calcutta, Bombay (Mumbai), and Karachi were the first points of entry for Western commodities in India. In China, the gramophone first entered through the safe colonies and treaty ports, especially Shanghai, and then into those areas where foreigners and Chinese had the necessary means for musical entertainment and performances generally and for gramophones and records in particular.

In India, manufacturers brought gramophones into all the bigger cities, where the typical buyers—Westerners, Indian princes and nobles, large landowners, merchants, the Parsi community mostly in Mumbai, and some so-called “Anglo-Indians” often employed in offices and on railways—resided.²⁰ Despite the large population, however, the purchasing power of most Indian consumers was relatively small. In 1915, American officials estimated that Indians on average bought foreign goods for less than US\$2 per year. For this impending, new middle-class, only inexpensive articles had a chance to sell: “It is a question of not how good but how cheap,” concluded the 1915 American consular report.²¹

India and China both had large populations and their respective “open door” policies turned them into interesting markets for Western gramophone manufacturers. In both countries, Western companies competed for the opportunity of serving a potentially huge consumer market, even if purchasing power remained low.

First Experiences in India and China

The first Western gramophone company to take a serious interest in India was the Anglo-American Gramophone Co. In July 1901, the company sent John Watson Hawd to open a branch office in Calcutta.²² While Hawd was confident that a successful business could be done, he criticized the choice of recorded music on offer. The company’s initial strategy of selling English music in India—songs and dance melodies as well as English comical pieces—failed because local consumers showed little interest in Western music. Indeed, over the next decades, witnesses repeatedly confirmed that Indian music lovers were uninterested in foreign music and often “found most Western music a chaotic and intolerable noise.”²³ Hawd shared these worries and reported back to the headquarters that “until we get native records we shall only be able to sell to Europeans and they are only 1 per 100 natives.”²⁴ Therefore, his most urgent task was to amass a larger selection of native music. The Gramophone Co.’s first recordings of Indian music had been made in London in 1899 with artists who had no previous reputation in India. Hawd pleaded for a recording session to be organized in India. “You must however send one man to make records,” he insisted in October 1901.²⁵

Sending out recording engineers to different European markets was a typical strategy to spot new talent and expand the company’s repertoire.²⁶ One of the most talented recording engineers was Fred Gaisberg (1873–1951) who had worked for the Columbia Phonograph Co. in Washington, D.C., before arriving in England in 1898. In the following years, he travelled extensively through Europe and Russia to record the most famous artists of the time for the Gramophone Co. In April 1902, he arranged the first recordings of the tenor Enrico Caruso in Milan, paying the extraordinary sum of £100 for ten songs. These records not only paved the way for Caruso’s career in England (1902) and the United States (1903), they also demonstrated the economic potential inherent in even just a single successfully-made recording.²⁷ In late September, Gaisberg, his nineteen-year-old assistant, George Dillnutt, and the businessman Thomas Dowe Addis embarked on a recording expedition to the Far East during which they visited Colombo, Calcutta, Singapore, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Tokyo, Bangkok, and Rangoon.²⁸ According to Gaisberg, the aim of this trip was “to open up new markets, establish agencies, and acquire a catalogue of native records.”²⁹

Gaisberg and his fellow travellers reached Calcutta in October 1902, where John Hawd awaited the crew. He arranged for a location for the recording sessions and got in touch with Amarendra Nath Dutt of the Classic Theatre and Jamshedi Framji Madan of the Corinthian Theatre, who established contact with local artists.

Dutt was known to be interested in the technology of sound recordings and had earlier purchased an Edison phonograph, which he used to record dialogues and songs of the plays being performed. Madan also took an interest in the newly emerging sound and motion-picture technologies and owned a motion picture projector. The theatres were the main entertainment centres for the general public at the time.³⁰

The first recordings, made on November 8, 1902, were of two so-called “nautch girls” who sang and performed a style of popular dance for the recording crew.³¹ Generally speaking, Gaisberg found it hard to understand Indian music. “We entered a new world of musical and artistic values. . . . The very foundations of my musical training were undermined,” he wrote in his travelogue.³² However, the British staff of Gramophone’s local office had even less understanding for the music, according to Gaisberg. “I soon discovered that the English, whom we contacted and who were acting as our agents and factors, might be living on another planet for all the interest they took in Indian music.”³³

Gaisberg recorded several artists, among them the renowned female singer Gauhar Jan, who at the time was a local celebrity.³⁴ Public performance of women was considered a low-status and often disreputable profession. The nautch girls performed music and dance in front of their audience accompanied by male musicians, who also acted as their teachers. Nautch girls traditionally performed at the courts and often belonged to families with a long tradition of musical performance. As this patronage declined in the early twentieth century, music was more often performed in urban centres.³⁵ While Gauhar Jan came from the tradition of nautch girls, she also represented a group of professional urban musicians who became more common after the turn of the century.³⁶

During their six-week stay in Kolkata, Gaisberg and his crew made over 500 matrices, finished records of which were manufactured in Hannover, Germany, and



Figure 1. Nautch Girl Dancing on Rug, ca 1914
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.:
LC-USZ62-133133.



Figure 2. Nautch Girl Dancing with Musicians, Calcutta, India, ca 1900
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.: LC-USZ62-35125.

shipped to India in April 1903.³⁷ The newly available recordings in combination with heavy press advertising increased the popularity of the gramophone in India significantly.³⁸ Gramophone's new agent in Kolkata, Thomas Addis, who took over from Hawd, observed the growing market closely. While he was satisfied overall, he echoed his predecessor's concern over localization: "India is a peculiar country in regard to languages as if you go 300 miles out of Calcutta you would find a different dialect altogether. . . . Each particular district has its own local and popular singers male and female."³⁹ According to Addis, the better off middle class increasingly requested recordings of these local artists. In response, Gramophone instructed him to extend the catalogue by 2,500 records in order to cover the twelve languages that were considered most popular, without further specifications for musical genre or style.⁴⁰ However, at the end of the year 1904, Addis was still dissatisfied: "We have taken records in various vernaculars, but we have not, in my opinion, gone far enough into this matter."⁴¹ Language became a proxy for the cultural and musical diversity that the Westerners could not grasp.

From India, Gaisberg and his team travelled via Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Shanghai to Japan, where they recorded about 600 titles. In early March 1903, the group arrived back in Shanghai, and Gaisberg contacted the centrally located British music house Moutrie, Robinson & Co. On March 16, he talked to the Chinese comprador George Jailing, whose task it was to select artists and repertoire. Xu Qianlin, as was his Chinese name (he was also known as C. L. Zeen), had worked since 1882 for Moutrie & Co. and was a Peking opera fan and lay actor (*piaoyou*), who was well-connected in Shanghai's entertainment world.

Two days later, recording began, challenging Gaisberg in a particular way. "Their idea of music is a tremendous clash and bang," he wrote. "On the first day, after



Figure 3. Xu Qianlin (C. L. Zeen), Music Comprador, Moutrie & Co., Shanghai *Who's Who in China*, 3rd ed. (Shanghai: 1925), 338.

making ten records, we had to stop: the din had so paralyzed my wits that I could not think.” Later, he wrote “Up to the 27th March we made 325 records, of which we paid \$4 each. To me, the difference between the tunes of any two records were too slight to detect.”⁴² From Shanghai, the team moved to Hong Kong, where it experienced similar cultural encounters. After all, Gaisberg succeeded in recording 470 matrices in China. These had been quickly sent to the pressing plant in Hannover, and by July 1903 were already advertised in Shanghai’s daily newspaper *Shenbao*.

The Gramophone Company’s internal correspondence suggests that there was a great demand for Chinese records, and the company was afraid of not being able to control the record transfer to China. Agencies in Brussels and Paris were advised to monitor the transfer and, upon being asked about the material, were told: “We can give you very little information as to the character of the records except to say they seem to be very fine reproductions of their kind.”⁴³ This answer was clearly not satisfying, because a week later it was said: “We find that nearly all enquirers have asked definitely for either the Cantonese or the Mandarin dialect records, stating particularly that they had no use for the other dialects.”⁴⁴ However, the representatives of the company were unable to distinguish between the dialects. In a letter of February 8, 1904, one correspondent confessed, “As far as we can tell there is little to distinguish one record from another, except the fact that some are instrumental and some vocal.”⁴⁵

Still eager to enter the Chinese market, in 1904 Gramophone, supported by Victor, managed to publish its first Chinese record catalogue, splitting the repertoire into sections of Cantonese and Mandarin as well as male and female voices. The catalogue,

the earliest surviving Chinese record catalogue, offered a combination of China's most popular and commercially attractive musical genres of the time: Peking opera, Cantonese opera, and teahouse songs, the latter often sung by courtesans or prostitutes.⁴⁶

Gaisberg may have been irritated, but his music-comprador Xu Qianlin had made a good selection of popular and therefore commercially attractive artists. Among the recorded "stars" singing in Mandarin were established Peking opera actors such as Zhou Fenglin (1866–1917), Wang Guifen (1860–1906), Wang Hongshou (1850–1925), and Li Chunlai (1855–1924). Most "popular" (or accessible) were Liu Yongchun (1862–1926) and Lin Buqing (1862–1918), who recorded seventeen and thirteen records respectively, and the young rising star Feng Zhihe (1888–1942), who made fifteen records on that occasion. The most popular female artists were Jin Xiaobao, Lin Guifen, and Lin Daiyu.⁴⁷ Although it is difficult to speculate about sales at this early stage, some records seemed to have sold quite well and were re-issued nearly ten years later in a Victor (His Master's Voice) catalogue.⁴⁸

In summary, Gramophone was the first Western gramophone company engaging in a recording expedition in Asia, including both India and China. As first mover, the firm quickly realized that selling English music to local consumers was unsuccessful, and the staff on the ground repeatedly recommended that more native music be recorded. Neither the recording engineers nor the Western agents, however, had the necessary insights into local music culture to make a systematic selection of different musical genres or artists. They relied heavily on their indigenous contacts, mostly recruited from theatres and other entertainment places.

Language became a first, if often inadequate and poorly understood, proxy for musical diversity. In India, making records in many different vernaculars was one way of diversifying the portfolio and responding to customer demand. Gramophone representatives by no means had the necessary skills to judge musical quality and entertainment value but bet on diverse offerings and the selection of their local intermediaries. In China, even the retrospective identification of the different languages became a major obstacle. Nevertheless, the recording selections were both successful at the time and seem well-selected in retrospect, thanks to the intermediaries on the ground. The first mover was in many regards "flying blind" in an alien environment with a diverse and sophisticated musical tradition, which the recording engineers, trained in Western music, neither understood nor appreciated. Remarkably, in both India and China, early recordings included popular artists who were socially stigmatized (courtesans). These female voices were literally moved out of socially disreputable contexts into private homes, indicating that the gramophone technology enabled the separation of music from performance, thus creating a socially unassailable consumption of different musical genres.

Western Competition: Artists, Prices, and Localization

Gramophone Co. was not the only company that realized the opportunities related to the growing business in India and China. Almost simultaneously the American

Columbia Record Co., the French company Pathé Frères, the German Beka Records, and others became active in Asia. The competitive and “colonizing” spirit of the times was captured in an interview with Charles J. Hopkins of Columbia, who remarked in 1904, “My little trip took me about 14 months from start to finish; little longer than Jules Verne’s ‘Round the World in Eighty Days,’ but then you see I was out after business and not globe-trotting for pleasure. . . . Yes, I think I may say that I opened up business for the Columbia to the ends of the earth.”⁴⁹ Upon his arrival in Hong Kong in February 1906, Heinrich Bumb (Beka Records) realized how tense the situation had become and wrote, “we met with strong American competition in Hong Kong. The Columbia Graphophone Co. had only recently finished its new recordings, people were speaking of 1,000 pieces and a honorarium of 50,000 USD. The ‘Victor’, ‘Gramophone’, together with ‘Zonophone’ and ‘Odeon’, all were there.”⁵⁰

In 1904, the firm Nicole Frère, originally founded in 1815 as a manufacturer of musical boxes in Geneva, Switzerland, sent its first recording engineer to Calcutta. The French company Société Pathé Frères, founded in 1896, also took an early interest in the Indian and Chinese market. In late 1900, Messrs Pathé Phono-Cinema-China Co. opened an office in Shanghai for the distribution of film equipment. Record production began officially with the establishment of the Compagnie Pathé-Orient in August 1907 in Shanghai. By the end of the year, another main office was opened in Calcutta in cooperation with Hemendra Bose, a local entrepreneur. Bose first represented Pathé’s interests in India, then started making home recordings and had them manufactured by Pathé in France in 1905 and 1906.⁵¹ The industry became increasingly competitive.

Both the American Talking Machine Co. and the German Beka followed in the first-mover’s footsteps and went on their first expeditions in 1905. Beka owner Heinrich Bumb himself departed Germany on October 5, 1905. Together with his wife and a small crew he travelled from Berlin via Vienna and Budapest to Constantinople, from where the recording team basically followed the Gaisberg route. One month after they returned to Berlin on June 17, 1906, the *Phonographische Zeitschrift* was proud to announce that the last of about 1,400 Asiatic records had recently left the pressing plant.⁵² German trade journals celebrated Beka as the company that introduced German gramophones to Asia and that “entertained excellent relationships with Asian countries.”⁵³

In India, Beka cooperated with the local firm Valabhdas Lakhmidas and Co., which arranged for artists to be recorded. The Beka recordings quickly became successful. “Their popularity is second to none in our territory,” reported Valabhdas in an American trade journal, and he announced that “800 to 1,000 records in all the principal dialects of our country” were to be made.⁵⁴ Valabhdas became Beka’s sole agent for India under rather favourable conditions: Beka sent large quantities of goods on consignment, allowed the Indian agent to pay for them only when they were sold, and did not expect a minimum quantity of sales in a fixed time period. Moreover, Beka guaranteed Valabhdas the sole and exclusive rights to sell Beka products throughout the British Indian Empire.⁵⁵ Unlike Gramophone, which

worked with a number of mostly British agents, Beka and Valabhdas entered an exclusive relationship. In addition to musical recordings, Beka and several local entrepreneurs also offered political speeches on record, which in the increasingly politicized environment became a hot commodity, as we will see in the next section.

Gramophone considered the new competition inferior: “The ‘Beka’ Records (Native) are . . . poor stuff. No class whatever, and not to be compared with our Records.”⁵⁶ Nevertheless, Gramophone took some countermeasures to guarantee its position as market leader. In November 1906, the London headquarters debated the option of reissuing records that had been withdrawn from the catalogue at a cheaper price “as a measure for the destruction of the Beka Agency.”⁵⁷ Gramophone later went on a third recording expedition in 1906 with the mission “to furnish records for the natives and not for Europeans.”⁵⁸

One year later, a second German competitor, the Talking Machine GmbH of Berlin, entered the Indian market. The company was known for its Odeon record label with the logo of a classical dome. Shortly after the expedition, Odeon released a South Indian catalogue and became a big importer of both machines and discs. Beka, too, dispatched another expedition to India focusing successfully on vernaculars that had not been previously recorded. By 1908, Beka had approximately 1,000 titles to offer Indian consumers.⁵⁹ Among these were recordings by famous classical singers, such as Kherati, Purshottam, and Mereilal, but also unknown singers, such as one Kolkata-based artist described mockingly in a German trade journal as an “excellent bawler.”⁶⁰

As competition increased, Gramophone struggled with its agents to assure the exclusive sale of their products. The company’s agent, Messrs Mullick Bros, was caught selling Beka records in two of their retail shops in 1907. Questioned about it, the agent claimed to keep only a few Beka records in store that were not available from Gramophone’s list, and he was reluctant to give up this business.⁶¹

The growing competition also led to price pressure. The Indian market had a large demand for cheap gramophones, whereas the high-end machines rarely sold. However, Gramophone made little attempt to penetrate the mass market and left the low-end machine business to German competitors. The bestselling gramophones in the two decades before World War I cost about 40 INR, around US\$13, which equalled two months’ wages for a skilled blacksmith or carpenter. The high-end models, in which Gramophone specialized, cost between 225 and 800 INR (72–260 USD.) The cheapest machines from Germany were available for 9.25 INR, or 3 USD.⁶² German manufacturers were able to sell cheaper machines because many inventions intended to lower the price of production originated in Germany.⁶³ Just before World War I, the intense price competition led to a situation in which gramophones were available in native bazaars for such low prices that musical instrument dealers gave up on the low-end gramophone business because the profit margins were too low, often less than 0.30 USD per machine.⁶⁴ Gramophone records sold for between 3 and 6 INR (1–2 USD). Beka and Odeon records were slightly cheaper, selling for 3 to 4 INR (1–1.3 USD). Faced with this competition, Gramophone dropped the price of its records twice, in January 1907 and again in January 1908.⁶⁵

As previously agreed upon, Victor did not interfere in the Indian market but concentrated on China, which was considered a promising though contested and unstable market that consisted primarily of the treaty ports and colonies. In contrast to India, where Gramophone established a local pressing facility in 1908, the Chinese market remained an import-export business until around 1919–20, when Pathé started to operate China's first record pressing plant in Shanghai.

Already around 1905, gramophones were used in public places to attract audiences and listeners; they were also used to advertise certain products on the streets, especially in the treaty ports. The machines had entered the homes of wealthier Chinese, and the industry was convinced that increased business lay with cheaper machines and the production of "native records."⁶⁶ The increasingly competitive discourse is reflected in the following quote from *The Talking Machine News* of September 1911:

The class of articles produced by Japan is similar to that supplied by the European industry for India, China, and other Eastern countries. The Japanese wares are cheaper than the European article, but of lower grade. Among the talking machines exhibited was one of Gramophone type called the "Nippophone," priced at about 50 [US] \$ as against 150 [US] \$, for a similar article of European origin.

From the news to hand there seems to be a large and growing market in China for talking machines, especially with records of native songs. Cheap musical toys, harmonicas, and similar articles are in demand, but are supplied at present by Japan and Europe at prices too low for American competition.⁶⁷

Despite all its potential, the Chinese market remained problematic, and China was evaluated as "still only a small buyer of talking machines" by April 1912.⁶⁸ To successfully produce "native records," however, the companies had to establish a good relationship with a Chinese comprador who was musically minded, business-oriented, and well-connected in the entertainment world.

Frederick Gaisberg had worked with Xu Qianlin, the comprador of Moutrie & Co., Shanghai's largest music house, with sub-offices in Tianjin, Hong Kong, and Singapore. Moutrie & Co. was selling musical instruments, especially pianos, yet the gramophone trade became increasingly important. The Victor Talking Machine continued this collaboration, relied on Moutrie's network, and also worked with another comprador, about whom we find a rare and extraordinary positive characterization in the *Talking Machine World* in 1906:

Mr. Yuen Sing Foong has been many years connected with the talking machine business, and has established throughout China for the Moutrie & Co. many branches, and has sold Victor talking machines and records to dealers in every city and large town in the Chinese empire. Mr. Yuen speaks good English, although he has never been out of China. He is a great scholar, and speaks most of the different dialects spoken in China. It was through his influence that Geo. K. Cheney was able to secure for the Victor Co. the best talent in China. The records taken in China turned out so satisfactory that the S. Moutrie Co. have placed orders for thousands of them. In China there are many dialects spoken and Mr. Cheney took records of all the principal dialects.⁶⁹



Figure 4. Mr. Yuen Sing Foong, Music Comprador, Moutrie & Co. and Victor *Talking Machine World* 2:6 (1906): 35.

The article underscored the importance of the Chinese comprador, whose responsibility it was to “secure the best talent in China.” In the early days, and until the late 1920s, these experts were strongly connected to the Peking opera scene and often active as *piaoyou*. The term describes “music fans,” activists who came together in clubs and organized performances and sometimes even became professionals. The “*piaoyou*-scene” was big, and they were all studying and learning the styles of their preferred actors. Musical records provided a new tool to study the original, which also explains why these students eagerly supported the new business from the beginning. They did have the expertise to discuss with the artist the selection of a “popular” two- to three-minute aria for recording, selected from a several hours-long opera.

Meanwhile, since this was a time when the overall consequences of the new business were largely unknown, the opera world and its *piaoyou* organization also provided the basis for (in today’s terms) “illegal” and rather destructive recording practices. A well-known example of the early days concerns the Peking opera actor Tan Xinpei (1847–1917), was the most highly acclaimed actor of his time, both in Beijing and Shanghai.



Figure 5. Beijing Opera Actors Wang Yaoqing and Tan Xinpei
Moutrie & Co., *Victor-Katalog*, ca 1913.

Tan was invited to perform for the Empress Dowager Cixi in the Forbidden City, and was chosen to act in China's first film production in 1905. Recording companies had eagerly asked him to sign a contract, but he hesitated because he believed that the new technology was stealing his voice, or, in other words, that with every recording he would give away a part of his voice.⁷⁰ Due to his fame, there were many *piaoyou* learning and imitating his Tan-style and singing techniques. Far away from Beijing and his "real audience," Xu Qianlin therefore asked several *piaoyou* to record Tan's famous opera pieces and later sold them under the name of the great actor. While laypersons may not have heard the difference, news that Tan Xinpei had made records quickly spread among insider circles but were finally denied by the master himself. While this practice had a strong negative impact on HMV's reputation, other record companies, like Columbia and Beka, acted similarly.⁷¹ Circulation of these recordings continued often unnoticed, but remained irritating and disturbing for professionals. China's most famous opera star of those decades, Mei Lanfang (1894–1961), criticized this as late as 1961.⁷²

Within this competitive environment of the early years, Beka left a rather obscure image of its activities. The records made by Heinrich Bumb were advertised abroad in five dialects in *The Talking Machine World* and in *The Talking Machine News* in 1906 and 1907 respectively. However, neither a catalogue was printed, nor were the records promoted in any known Chinese journal or newspaper. Despite this lack of promotion, Beka “Grand” records were obviously well received. Organizing the China business via its London agent Otto Ruehl (who also covered Hong Kong and the colonies), Beka sent its recording engineers again to China in 1907/08. This time, as we can read from Du Jun Min, the company also followed the aforementioned “bad practice” and produced lip-synched records: “For example, a few records were labelled with Tan Xinpei ... as the singer, but the recordings were in fact sung by others.”⁷³ Shortly thereafter, Beka (1911) and Odeon (1910), both active in China, merged with the Berlin based Carl Lindstroem AG. Together with the new Lindstroem Parlophon label they continued their China business until the outbreak of World War I.

In this period, however, French Pathé established itself as the most successful recording company in China. In 1907, the Compagnie Pathé-Orient officially opened its bureau in Shanghai and one year later its first recordings were advertised in the Shanghai newspaper *Shenbao*. In 1910, M. E. Labansat (?–1939) joined the company, after having established branch offices for Pathé in India, the Straits Settlements, Indo-China, and Hong Kong. Probably due to his experience, under his tutelage the company quickly introduced its new Chinese name *Baidai* and began a very fruitful cooperation with the *piaoyou* Zhang Changfu. The latter was well connected in Beijing’s opera world and, through his contacts to several amateur clubs in Peking, Tientsin (Tianjin), and Shanghai, helped Pathé to record the famous actors of the time. We can assume that he was upset when he had heard of the “fake” Tan Xinpei recordings and used all his competence to coax Tan into the recording studio. The company succeeded in producing two record sides, due to an honorarium of two pieces of opium worth fifty *liang* of silver.⁷⁴ This was a high salary to be paid on the spot, but one that followed the “blockbuster logic” of the recording business and quickly paid off. The record catalogue published in 1908–1909 not only included, as was custom, several famous “girls” (*guniang*) of its time, but also advertised Tan Xinpei’s records on its first page, together with a handwritten comment by Tan himself to prove their authenticity.

Obviously satisfied with the result, Tan recorded a second set of twelve sides in 1912. For Pathé this was a clever move, because Pathé and Victor were strong competitors in China, manifested also in the fact that people were talking about the fight between “(American) dog and (French) rooster.” Knowing that Tan Xinpei’s real voice testified to the company’s reputation, his records remained on the catalogue’s first page until the 1930s.

In an increasingly growing market, French Pathé-Orient soon became very successful. “The gramophone and phonograph, writes our representative, has made surprising headway in China and the Far East,” reported *Talking Machine News* in 1914. “Among the wealthier classes there seems to be hardly a home without its

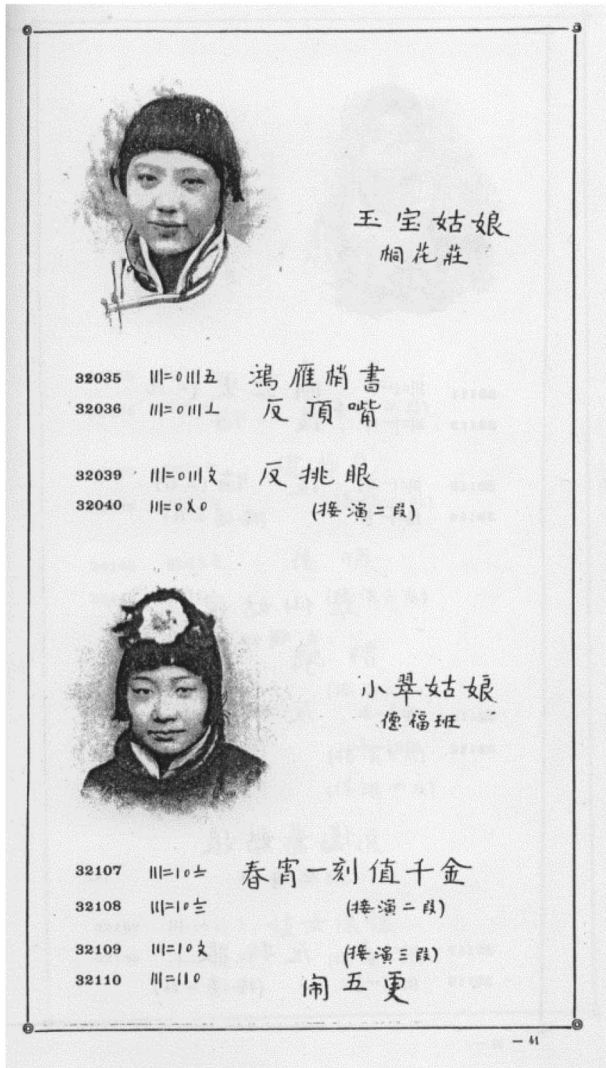


Figure 6. Female Artists “Girl Yu Bao” and “Girl Xiao Cui” Pathé-Catalogue, Shanghai, ca 1910.

‘talker.’ What, however, is wanted is the proper handling of records. Native music is much in demand.”⁷⁵

In both India and China, Western manufacturers entered into a fierce competition based on selection, cooperation with the most knowledgeable local experts, and price. The competitors imitated the basic strategy of sending recording engineers to cooperate with local entrepreneurs (compradors) and spot local talents. Learning from Gramophone’s previous experience, they paid particular attention to the challenges of localization. In India, the two German manufacturers achieved relative

success because they offered a cheaper product and put an emphasis on local responsiveness; however, Gramophone remained the market leader. In China, the French Pathé had the edge over competitors and was the first to open its bureau and maintain close contact to the opera and music scene via its comprador. Reliability, good connections, and cooperation with the most famous actor of that time added to the reputation of the company. The competent local expert and a strong continuous relationship determined success and failure in the respective market.

Political Imperatives on the Gramophone Market

Local adaptation was not restricted to finding popular artists and compradors. In addition, both the Indian and Chinese market came with distinctive political challenges, which directly affected the gramophone business.

In India, Western manufacturers initially enjoyed a competitive advantage due to their first-hand access to technology. However, Indian competitors quickly caught up. Since 1905, local entrepreneurs benefitted from an upheaval of nationalism, the so-called *swadeshi* movement, which opened up a profitable niche for them. The *swadeshi* movement—*swadeshi* meaning “from one’s own country”—called on Indians to consume indigenous goods, rather than imported ones, claiming that foreign imports stalled national economic development. *Swadeshi* ideas were known since approximately the mid-nineteenth century, but the movement experienced a major push in the wake of the anti-partition campaign in Bengal in 1905. The viceroy of India, Lord Curzon, decided to partition the province of Bengal, which he allegedly considered too large for effective governance. Lord Curzon’s plans were met with deep resentment and the partition led to a surge of Indian nationalism, during which activists called for a boycott of foreign imports.⁷⁶ “Terrible oppression has commenced . . . the remedy for this state of things lies in giving up entirely the use of foreign goods and in using country-made goods,” argued a nationalist newspaper in 1906.⁷⁷ Indian manufacturers in different industries saw that the *swadeshi* agitation increased the demand for their goods.⁷⁸ The impact of *swadeshi* was greatest in the province of Bengal and triggered the founding of a number of Bengali enterprises.⁷⁹

In this context, Bose refocused his record business. While he had previously imported blanks from Pathé Frères, by 1907 Bose manufactured his own blank cylinders in Kolkata. As a Bengali businessman, Bose advertised his records as “the only real *swadeshi* records.” He also specialized in nationalist music and speeches, which sold increasingly well. Stirring *swadeshi* sentiments among his customers, Bose declared: “The manufacture of these records . . . points out most clearly that the Indians . . . not only compete fairly with other nations, but in some cases beat them.”⁸⁰ Famous Bengali artists, such as Rabindranath Tagore and Dwijendra Lal Roy, supported Bose’s business, while declining to work with the Gramophone Co. The impact of the *swadeshi* movement on Western gramophone firms is hard to quantify because turnover and profit data is largely unavailable. Qualitative sources suggest that Indian nationalism, at least temporarily, presented an obstacle to

Gramophone in the region. In June 1906, the company stated “Bengali Trade [that is, trade in Bengali Records] is practically at a standstill. The Bengalis are boycotting us as much as possible.”⁸¹

Swadeshi activists promoted the consumption of indigenous goods over all foreign imports. However, British goods were most strongly rejected; cooperating with foreigners from other countries was a matter of pragmatism.⁸² For this reason, swadeshi posed a problem for Gramophone, the market leader, in two respects. The movement called for a boycott of Gramophone’s products and favoured not just local but all non-British alternatives. “We are boycotted practically, and our trade is entirely done by Mohommedans [sic] and a few Europeans,” Gramophone’s India office reported to London in 1906.⁸³

As country of origin developed into a competitive advantage, different strategies emerged. The French Pathé and the German Beka successfully cooperated with the local elite, even with swadeshi activists, which allowed them access to the growing market for nationalist music and speeches. Bose had a long relationship with Pathé, which became important for him when discs increasingly overtook the popularity of cylinders. Starting in 1908, Bose made his recordings available on disc by cooperating with Pathé and re-releasing earlier recordings as “Pathé/H. Bose’s Records” discs.⁸⁴ Although Bose again became partly dependent on the technology of a Western manufacturer, he managed to sustain his image as a local swadeshi businessman because his Western partner was French, not British.

Gramophone, on the other hand, did not have that option and invested instead in its first manufacturing facility in India, one mile east of the commercial centre of Kolkata. The first Indian discs were pressed there in June 1908. Gramophone also established permanent recording studios in Kolkata, Mumbai, and Chennai. The Indian facilities had a number of advantages for the company. Manufacturing and transportation costs as well as delivery times decreased. Due to the political context, it was also an advantage that Gramophone could hereafter advertise: “Our Indian, Burmese and Ceylonese records are now made at our Calcutta factory—using Indian materials—by Indian workmen,”⁸⁵ thus presenting themselves as a swadeshi-conscious business. By December 1908, the factory was pressing 1,000 discs per day.⁸⁶

In China, on the other hand, and as mentioned earlier, the gramophone companies arrived in a decade of turmoil and transition as well as anti-Manchu and anti-foreign nationalism. Karl Gerth speaks of an ethic of nationalistic consumption, which from 1905 onwards culminated in a range of anti-imperialist boycotts.⁸⁷ Influenced by European and Japanese ideas and cultural practices, these trends and sentiments were also reflected in intellectual and artistic circles. In “new plays” (*xinju*) and “new theater” (*xinxi*) a new generation of artists wrote plays with contemporary themes of political or social critical content that enjoyed popularity among young urban audiences. In this context, musical records may have been recorded with political messages, for example via anti-Manchu Peking opera plays, yet this is still a blind spot in China’s early record history. Deliberate production of records for political

messages surely thrived during the 1920s, notably the 1924 recordings of speeches by Dr Sun Yat-sen, the revolutionary first president and founding father of the Republic of China.

While there is no proof that the gramophone business was a particular target of the boycotts, one outstanding example of this period is the conflict about trademarks that Victor had to deal with regarding the logo for “His Master’s Voice,” which depicted a dog listening to a gramophone. The background to the conflict was an anti-American movement and boycott in 1905–1906. Around that time, about 100,000 Chinese were living in the mainland United States, threatened by a strong antipathy for Chinese immigrants manifested in racism, abuse, and mistreatment. The first Chinese Exclusion Act (1882) reflected this rejection, but two decades and a series of more severe exclusion acts later, China had become confident to resist. The immediate cause was the return of a Chinese with American citizenship to the United States, after he had visited his family in China. The story of his severe and inhumane treatment by immigration officials quickly reached China and escalated into a nationwide movement. Organized by the Shanghai Chamber of Commerce, the boycott is often seen as the first expression of mass nationalism in China.⁸⁸

Supported by merchants, students, and artists, popular anti-American propaganda also affected Victor’s China business, with the famous logo of the dog “Nipper” listening to the voice of his master via a gramophone coming in for special criticism. The trademark had been widely used in the United States since 1902 and it soon circulated globally. Chinese consumers, however, began to read the image as an insult, which in this politically sensitive period forced Victor to temporarily change its label for the Chinese market. As the *Washington Post* reported in late 1905,

The Chinese have peculiar ideas regarding music-box trade-marks. One quite famous trade-mark, showing a dog alert to catch his master’s voice as it came from the horn, proved distasteful, for the reason that it seemed to couple the canine with the human listeners. Therefore, such a trade-mark had to be altered so as to show an old man listening to the music instead of a little terrier.⁸⁹

With the outbreak of World War I, the market for gramophones and records fell into turmoil. The German gramophone companies completely lost their position in the Indian market and all of their assets were expropriated as “enemy property.” For the most part, American, Swiss, and Japanese competitors managed to take over the market share, but the war also created a favourable environment for local goods because it interrupted imports into the country. In 1919, the total value of the import trade was only half that before the war, and the British share had declined from 70 to 50 per cent.⁹⁰ Gramophone, freed of some of its biggest competitors and with a local production site, nevertheless remained the clear market leader in India.

In China, with the outbreak of World War I, foreign record companies started engaging in war production at home and for that reason left China. Pathé-Orient, however, grasped the chance and managed its Shanghai office during the war years.



Figure 7. Victor Record Labels, ca 1905
Courtesy of Du Junmin, Dalian, China.

The *Talking Machine News* commented in November 1915, “As showing the world-wide extent of the Pathé business, we might mention that Mr. Hunting [recording director for the Pathé interests abroad] has gone on a special recording mission into China, with which vast country the eminent Paris house does a very large business.”⁹¹ In China, Pathé was competing with Japan, whose gramophone companies used the opportunity to enlarge their business in Asia. Dr. Sun Yat-sen, who spent most of his sixteen years in exile in Japan (1895-1911), probably also realized the political potential of the recording technology during WWI, and in 1917 he proposed the establishment of a national Chinese record company with Japanese support.⁹² For the moment, however, only Pathé maintained old and established new contacts, selected and supported talents, and finally built China’s first record plant. The company had its booming years during the 1920s before it was taken over by the British Columbia in 1928 and later became part of EMI London.⁹³

In summary, nationalistic sentiments and events pushed gramophone manufacturers to further localize products and production processes in both India and China, though to different degrees. The Indian *swadeshi* movement called for a boycott of foreign products but lobbied most urgently against British imports, pragmatically accepting some cooperation with other Westerners. Chinese anti-Americanism instead forced Victor to revise its famous global trademark, which damaged the universal brand image but gave Victor more legitimacy in China, where the image of a dog listening to the gramophone was seen as a cultural, even racial insult. While direct economic results of the nationalistic protests may have been limited and are certainly hard to measure, the fear of the *potential* consequences of Indian and Chinese nationalism drove Western manufacturers towards stronger localization. In both countries, World War I served as a trigger for the fierce competition between different manufacturers to temporarily end. In both India and China one market leader emerged, albeit different ones.

Conclusion

This comparative perspective on the Chinese and Indian gramophone and record market shows many similarities between Western manufacturers' strategies for these markets. In both countries, the gramophone was a technological curiosity at first and its commercial value was uncertain. Recording engineers first explored the potential of these markets, often traveling to India and China during the same trip. Both China and India were accessible to Western manufacturers due to the political framework of imperialism or quasi-imperialism: India as a colony within the British Empire, China due to the unequal treaties that forcefully opened the country to Western trade. In both countries, gramophones first entered through selected port cities, the most important being Shanghai for China, and Calcutta and Bombay for India.

Both markets were considered promising due to their large populations and despite low purchasing power; but came with challenges, including a little-understood music culture, the urgent need for qualified intermediaries, who were in high demand, and fierce competition by a variety of Western and indigenous players. Similar images and rhetoric were used to describe the potential and challenges of the markets in both India and China, not least because Western companies relied on the same strategies for both markets until challenged to adapt to peculiarities of the specific local environment. Agents as cultural brokers started exploring strategies for the "localizing" of music. In both countries, their interaction with local partners was first shaped by curiosity and commercial interest, and later also by traditionalism and nationalism.

Most Western manufacturers pursued a general strategy for Asian markets, which included "expeditions" to record local performers, a special interest in language variety (even if the differences were little understood), and the use of intermediaries recruited from the respective entertainment scenes, in particular theatres and operas. The selection of local artists showed greater differences, in part because it was left to local intermediaries who had a better understanding of the value of individual genres and artists. In both countries, early recordings targeted the stars of the popular entertainment world, including singers from allegedly disreputable circles highlighting the new possibility of disentangling the artists and his or her social context from the consumption of music.

Curious audiences in India and China certainly listened to imported foreign records. Together with the newly produced local recordings, gramophone technology changed not only the portfolio of music consumption but also the "soundscape," that is the musical appropriation and practices on a local level, as Torp and Rempe conceptualize in their introduction to this issue. The technological innovation of the gramophone made accessible musical styles hitherto considered unfit for consumption by respectable consumers. The competitive pressure between manufacturers from different Western countries pushed them to continuously expand their musical portfolios and to lower prices, thus turning the gramophone from a technological curiosity into an "everyday technology" (Arnold) that permeated both societies.

The primary localization challenges that the gramophone industry faced in China and India were the selection of and investment in stars and political positioning in relation to local nationalism. Early on, the gramophone proved to be a “blockbuster” business, in which one successful artist or even a single recording could make or break a company. Identifying local heroes and convincing them to do recordings were thus important for business success. Related to that, local nationalism affected the business in both India and China. However, prior to World War I its impact in India was greater than in China. Indian nationalism called for a boycott of foreign products, which temporarily became an obstacle for the market leader, Gramophone, whereas competitors from France and Germany exploited their status as outsiders of the British Empire. Country-of-origin effects had a significant influence on the market and competitive dynamics and triggered cooperation with local manufacturers and advertising campaigns that highlighted political arguments. Although gramophone technology was clearly “foreign” and imported and should have been rejected by nationalists, they proved open to it because gramophones and records were complementary products that were only useful in combination. It was the recordings that could be (and were) locally adapted and that allowed consumers to not only prove their Indian identity but also allowed them to support nationalistic causes, for example when buying recordings of nationalistic music or political speeches.

In China, nationalistic protests were grounded in anti-American rather than anti-British sentiments and were less pervasive. However, they forced Victor to temporarily change its famous and globally recognized logo to appease Chinese nationalists. The project of a national Chinese record company, as envisioned by Sun Yat-sen and mentioned earlier, was only realized in the early 1920s.

In India, especially, nationalism created opportunities for indigenous competitors and for partnerships between non-British Westerners and Indians. It also triggered further localization, which made access to local knowledge a crucial advantage and arguably guaranteed the long-term success of the gramophone in India. While the gramophone was invented in the West and disseminated throughout the world through the agency of international business, colonial regimes, and cultural brokers, once transferred to China and India, the history of the gramophone was not one of extension and fulfilment of its Western form. Instead, it took on a social life, which needs to be understood in context and continuously mirrors the most pressing concerns of the society in which it was embedded.

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Notes

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popular music, the cultural industries, sound, and memory studies.

- 1 Domosh, *American Commodities*, and Arnold, *Everyday Technology*.
- 2 Schafer, *The Soundscape*.
- 3 Martland, *Recording History*; Suisman, *Selling*; Millard, *America*; Kenney, *Recorded Music*; and Gauss, *Nadel*.
- 4 Kinnear, *Gramophone*; Farrell, *Indian Music*; Parthasarathi, “Scramble”; Lubinski, “Local Responsiveness”; and Sharma and Joshi, *Bajanaamā*.
- 5 Steen, *Unterhaltung*, and Jones, *Yellow Music*.
- 6 Ge Tao, *Changpian*; Qian Nairong, *Shanghai Changpian*; and Du Jun Min, “The Development of Chinese Records to 1911.”

- 7 On the topic of network and lock-in effects see, Shapiro and Varian, *Information Rules*, 103–11, 83–86.
- 8 In the early years, “talking machine” was the neutral term while “gramophone” and “phonograph” referred to machines by a specific manufacturer. Later on, “gramophone” replaced “talking machine” as the generic term.
- 9 Thomas Edison Papers, Rutgers University, Document File Series—1877: (D-77-02) Edison, T. A.—General [D7702ZEO; TAEM 14:242]; United States Patent Office. T. A. Edison, Phonograph or Speaking Machine. No. 200,521. Patented February 19, 1878. Available online: <http://edison.rutgers.edu/patents/00200521>. PDF (accessed Sept. 18, 2015).
- 10 See Steen, *Zwischen Unterhaltung und Revolution*, 38–39.
- 11 Caso, “Berliner”; and Kittler, *Gramophone*.
- 12 See Steen, *Unterhaltung*, 122.
- 13 Arnold, *Everyday Technology*; and M. Domosh, *American Commodities*.
- 14 Ray Choudhury, *Calcutta*, 16.
- 15 E. Frazar to Edison, Aug. 14, 1890, Edison Papers, Thomas Alva Edison Documents (TAED, D9057AAV). See also A. Steen, *Unterhaltung*, 44–45.
- 16 E. Frazar to Alfred Ord Tate, Jan. 21, 1891, Edison Papers (TAED, D9150AAD) and George N. Morison, Edison United Phonograph Co., New York, to Stephen Fossa Moriarty, London, Apr. 11, 1893, Edison Papers (TAED, D9342ABO).
- 17 Great Britain India Office, *Statistical Abstract*, 1.
- 18 SAA 35. Lk232, 306-11 Promemoria betreffend die directe indo-europaeische Telegraphenlinie. Compare also Lubinski, “Siemens.”
- 19 Department of Commerce and H. D. Baker, *British India*, 9.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 14.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 13.
- 22 EMI, letter London to Hawd, Jan. 13, 1900. Letter from Gram. Co. to Hawd, Aug. 23, 1901. This and all following quotes courtesy of EMI Group Archive Trust.
- 23 Alex Aronson, a German-Jewish refugee in Kolkata, quoted in Robinson, *Ray*, 49.
- 24 EMI, letter Hawd to London, Nov. 21, 1901.
- 25 EMI, letter Hawd to London, Oct. 3, 1901.
- 26 Martland, *Records*, 44.
- 27 On Caruso’s first records, see Martland, “Caruso’s First Recordings: Myth and Reality.”
- 28 Kinnear, *Gramophone*, 9-14.
- 29 Gaisberg, *Music*, 52. Gaisberg’s autobiography was first published in the US in 1942 with the title *The Music Goes Round* (reprinted in 1977). This and following quotations are from the 1946 UK version, which is an identical reproduction of the US predecessor but includes more graphic materials.
- 30 Kinnear, *Gramophone*, 15–16.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 11-12.
- 32 Gaisberg, *Music*, 54.
- 33 *Ibid.*
- 34 *Ibid.*, 55.
- 35 Neuman, *Life*, 100.
- 36 Sampath, *Name*.
- 37 Kinnear, *Gramophone*, 12.
- 38 Ray Choudhury, *Calcutta*, 1–16.
- 39 EMI, letter Addis, Kolkata, to London Headquarter, Dec. 23, 1903.
- 40 EMI, letter London Headquarter to Addis, Dec. 6, 1904.
- 41 EMI, letter Addis to London Headquarter, Dec. 23, 1904.
- 42 Gaisberg, *Music*, 62–63; and Steen, *Unterhaltung*, 58–62.
- 43 Letter from Gramophone Co. to Cie Francaise du Gramophone, Paris, Jan. 12, 1904, EMI-Archives.
- 44 Letter from Gramophone Co. to Cie Francaise du Gramophone, Paris, Feb. 17, 1904, EMI-Archives.
- 45 Letter from Gramophone Co. to Cie Francaise du Gramophone, Paris Feb. 8, 1904, EMI-Archives.
- 46 Regarding the history and popularity of the two opera forms, see, for example, Joshua Goldstein, *Drama Kings* and Ng, *The Rise of Cantonese Opera*.
- 47 See Steen, *Unterhaltung*, 86–103, and Yeh, *Shanghai Love*, 236–41.
- 48 Already in the summer 1904, Gramophone asked the German Grammophon

- in Hannover to send the Chinese matrices to Victor in Camden, New Jersey. After Gaisberg's younger brother William Conrad Gaisberg had led the third tour to Asia in 1906–1907, Gramophone left the China business. Behind this decision was an agreement (1907) with Victor, by which Gramophone would focus on the Indian market while Victor took care of China. Steen, *Unterhaltung*, 62.
- 49 “An Ambassador of Commerce: Round the World with the Talking Machine,” 243–44.
- 50 *Phonographische Zeitschrift* 7:32 (1906): 663.
- 51 Kinnear, *Gramophone*, 35–60.
- 52 *Phonographische Zeitschrift* 7:29 (1906): 605.
- 53 *Die Sprechmaschine* 3:26 (1907): 554.
- 54 “Trade News from All Points of the Compass,” *Talking Machine World* 3 (March 1907): 37.
- 55 EMI, letter Rodkinson, Kolkata to London Headquarter, Dec. 18, 1906.
- 56 EMI, letter Kolkata to London Headquarter, June 28, 1906.
- 57 EMI, letter London Headquarter to Rodkinson, Kolkata, Nov. 28, 1906.
- 58 William C. Gaisberg, “The Romance of Recording,” *The Voice* 2:1 (Jan. 1918): 6.
- 59 “Notes from India,” *Talking Machine News* 6 (June 1908); *Talking Machine World* 3 (Feb. 15, 1907), 25–29, here, 27.
- 60 *Phonographische Zeitschrift* 9:3 (1908): 62.
- 61 EMI, letter Kolkata to London (Birnbaum), July 2, 1907.
- 62 Prices according to advertisements in *Times of India* and Department of Commerce and Labor, *Foreign Trade*. Wage calculation based on Commercial Intelligence Department, *Prices and Wages*, 243.
- 63 “Deutschland und das Ausland auf dem Sprechmaschinen-Markte,” in *Phonographische Zeitschrift* 7:44 (Jan. 11, 1906): 1.
- 64 Department of Commerce and H. D. Baker, *British India*, 299.
- 65 Das Plattengeschäft in Indien, in *Die Sprechmaschine* 4:2 (Jan. 11, 1908): 36; Gramophone Co. ad in *Times of India* Feb. 4, 1908, 2; Odeon ad in *Times of India* Oct. 3, 1907, 2.
- 66 “Wie kann die deutsche Phonographen-Industrie ihren Export nach Ostasien erhöhen?” in *Phonographische Zeitschrift* 13:38 (Sept., 19, 1912): front page, and 877–78.
- 67 “The Far East,” *Talking Machine News* 9:126 (Sept. 1911): 231.
- 68 “China,” *Talking Machine News* 10:140 (Apr. 1912): 54.
- 69 “Talking Machines in China,” *Talking Machine World* 2:6 (1906): 35.
- 70 Luo Liangsheng, *Xiqu changpian shihua*, 399.
- 71 Luo Liangsheng, *Xiqu changpian shihua*, 398; Du Jun Min, “Beka China Records”; and Steen, *Unterhaltung*, 121.
- 72 Mei Lanfang, “Xiqu changpian.”
- 73 Du Jun Min, “Beka China Records,” 86–103.
- 74 1 *liang* = 50 grams. See Su Yi, *Jingju erbai nian gaiguan* (200 Years of Beijing Opera: An Overview), 199.
- 75 “Talker in the East,” *Talking Machine News* 12:186 (March 1914): 19.
- 76 For the context, see Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903–1908*.
- 77 *Bande Mantaram* 10 Sept. 1906, in Bhattacharyya, *Swadeshi Enterprise*, 2.211.
- 78 The cotton textile industry was the prime example. See Tripathi, *The Oxford History of Indian Business*, 154–59.
- 79 Bhattacharyya, *Swadeshi Enterprise*, chap. 1.
- 80 Kinnear, *Gramophone*, 43.
- 81 EMI, letter Kolkata to London Headquarter, June 28, 1906.
- 82 Bhattacharyya, *Swadeshi Enterprise* 2.213.
- 83 EMI, letter no. 2 Kolkata to London Headquarter, June 28, 1906.
- 84 Kinnear, *Gramophone*, 43.
- 85 In *ibid.*, 30.
- 86 *Ibid.*
- 87 Gerth, *China Made*, 101ff.
- 88 For the details, see, for example Wong, “Die for the Boycott and Nation,” 565–88, and McKee, Delber, “The Chinese Boycott.”
- 89 “Phonographs in the Orient. Consul General Sammons Reports that they are

- Growing in Favor,” in *Washington Post* Dec. 29, 1905, 1.
- 90 Great Britain Trade Commissioner for India, *Trade of India*, 63.
- 91 “Pathé Frères New London Manager,” *Talking Machine News* 12:226 (Nov. 1915): 306. Russel Hunting (1864-1943), American, since 1908 Pathé chief recording director, who in 1914 established an American branch for Pathé in Manhattan, including pressing plant. He was recording director for the Pathé interests abroad.
- For details see, Gracyk, *Popular American Recording Pioneers*, 180-183.
- 92 Regarding the establishment of the Great China Record Co., see Steen, *Unterhaltung*, 220–23.
- 93 The name *Baidai* was not changed—it was well established and had such a positive connotation that it was continued when British EMI took over its premises in 1934, and when the company moved to Hong Kong after 1949.