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Cold War and Music Competitions

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Xi Li—Cold War and Music Competitions

This project reveals how big countries in Cold War used musicians to show off their cultural power through international music competitions and how participants were burdened with diplomatic pressures they did not ask for. As a pianist myself, I grew up in a country where discussing politics is sensitive, yet it is an element that affects all aspects of our lives. As a result, it took me a long time to realize that the political environment has impacts on my music. Curious about how politics might have impacted other pianists, I explore in my project how the general context of the Cold War affected three pianists who won an international music competition held by the Soviet Union. Particularly, these pianists were from the Soviet Union, the United States, and China—three countries that played significant roles during the Cold War.