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## Chinese piano music: an approach to performance

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# CHINESE PIANO MUSIC: AN APPROACH TO PERFORMANCE

A Monograph

Submitted to Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Musical Arts

In  
The School of Music

by  
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## **ABSTRACT**

Since the piano was introduced in China, in the nineteenth century, many Chinese composers have composed specifically for it. As a result of greater communication and cultural exchange between East and West, Western pianists have begun including Chinese piano pieces in their repertoire. This paper will suggest approaches for the pianist to gain a greater understanding of Chinese piano music. These approaches will include a detailed analysis of each piece, addressing cultural aspects pertinent to an understanding of the music, as well as compositional background, harmony, texture, and piano technique. In addition, each piece will be provided with suggestions intended to assist the Western performer in the achievement of a more authentic performance.

## CHAPTER ONE: THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHINESE PIANO MUSIC

During the late Ming Dynasty and the early Qing Dynasty (around A.D.1600), greater communication and cultural exchange between East and West paved the way for the introduction of Western keyboard instruments (such as the harpsichord) in China. However, the piano was not introduced in China until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the first Chinese piano pieces appeared only in the early twentieth century. Since that time, many pieces have been composed especially for it. In this chapter, a brief history of Chinese piano music will be provided, primarily discussing its development, as well as various influences from Western musical genres.

The development of Chinese piano music can be classified into four major periods:

1. The origins of Chinese piano music (before 1919)
2. The initial development of Chinese piano music (1919-1949)
3. Development in New China and during the Culture Revolution (1949-1976)
4. New developments after “Reform and Opening”<sup>1</sup> (after 1976)

### Origins

According to available historical documentation, at the end of the Ming Dynasty, Italian missionary Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) presented the Chinese Emperor, Ming Shen Zong, with a harpsichord as a gift. The emperor used it for entertainment at court.<sup>2</sup> Apart from this, there is no historical record of any other keyboard instruments being brought to China by Westerners

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1. *Reform and Opening* is a new policy in *Third Plenum of the Chinese Communist Party* which announced by Xiao-ping Deng.

2. Meng Bian, *Zhongguo Gangqin Wenhua zhi Xingcheng yu Fazhan* [Forming and Development of Chinese Piano Culture] (Beijing: Huayue Publisher, 1994), 5.

during this period.<sup>3</sup> Because the harpsichord did not become popular in China during this period, it is likely that the instrument simply remained a part of the Emperor's collection of gifts from foreign visitors.

In 1840, China was defeated by the British in the Opium War, forcing it to open several coastal cities to trade with Western countries. During this time, Western missionaries became active in Chinese society, and Christian churches were established in many places throughout China, including Shanghai, Guangzhou, Hongkong, and Macao. It was at that time, when the missionaries brought medical and educational services to China, that the piano was also introduced. Therefore, the earliest piano instruction in China was offered by the churches. Missionaries often used the piano to accompany the singing of hymns during religious services. The piano was used in Church-sponsored schools that offered elementary music study, but lessons were confined to religious songs and a variety of hymns due to the limitations of the available instructors. The famous Chinese pianist Xian-min Li, whose first piano teacher was a missionary, recalled that "I remembered that my teacher only told me how to read scores. However, since she had limited piano performance skills, she only taught me to play hymns but never told me how to hold my hands at the instrument, and how to play correctly."<sup>4</sup>

From that time on, the influence of Western musical culture continued to develop in China. During the twentieth century, the piano gradually gained more popularity after a few

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3. Ibid.

4. Ibid., 8.

Chinese musicians, among them You-mei Xiao,<sup>5</sup> Yuan-ren Zhao<sup>6</sup> and Zi Huang,<sup>7</sup> returned from musical study abroad with first-hand knowledge of Western music. In order to adapt that knowledge to the requirements of domestic piano education, as well as to encourage appreciation by Chinese audiences, a small number of Chinese piano pieces were composed by some composers, such as Yuan-ren Zhao, Zi Huang and Rong-shou Li. These compositions were very simple, combining traditional Chinese modes and melodies with Western compositional techniques, especially tonal harmony. Because printing technology in China lagged behind that in the West, piano scores were mostly preserved by hand-copying. Several pieces were published in magazines.

The first Chinese-composed piano work "*March of Peace*," composed by Yuan-ren Zhao, was published in the *Chinese Journal of Science* in 1915 (see fig. 1-1).<sup>8</sup>

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5. You-mei Xiao (1884-1940) was born in Zhongshan country in Guangdong province. He was a famous Chinese composer and educator. He studied in Japan and Germany and earned the first Chinese music Ph.D. He is the founder of the first independent professional music institution—National Conservatory of Music in Shanghai.

6. Yuan-ren Zhao (1892-1982) was born in Tianjin. He was a Chinese American linguist and amateur composer. He got the government scholarship as an honorable student in Tshihua University, studied in the United States from 1910. During nearly ten years in the United States, Mr. Zhao received the doctoral degrees in both physics and philosophy at Cornell University and Harvard University. During this period, Mr. Zhao also took elective courses of music theory and music composition, and started to compose a few pieces that combined Chinese traditional music with the western compositional techniques.

7. Zi Huang (1904-1938) was a famous Chinese musician and educator. He studied in Oberlin Conservatory of Music and Music Conservatory of Yale University. He became a faculty member of Shanghai Conservatory of Music in 1930.

8. Ji-nan Sun and Zhu-quan Zhou, *A concise course of general music history of China* (Jinan: Shandong Education Press, 1999), 340.





Figure 1-1. *March of Peace* by Yuan-ren Zhao<sup>9</sup>

Following this, Yuan-ren Zhao published his other two piano compositions *Ou Cheng* and *Children March* respectively in 1917 and 1919. The *Chinese Journal of Science* in 1921 then published another piano solo piece *Saw the Jar*, composed by Rong-shou Li (see fig. 1-2).<sup>10</sup> In this piece, as in those composed before it, the composer also used Western tonal harmony to accompany the traditional Chinese folk tunes.



Figure 1-2. *Saw the Jar* by Rong-shou Li<sup>11</sup>

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9. Le-yan Chen, "The Development of Chinese Piano Music in the First Half Period of 20th Century," *Explorations in Music* no.1 (2007): 63.

10. Sun and Zhou, *A concise course of general music history of China*, 340.

11. Le-yan Chen, "The Development of Chinese Piano Music in the First Half Period of 20th Century," *Explorations in Music* no.1 (2007): 63.

Because of political and revolutionary influences in China during the early 20th century, music composed in this period reflected traditional culture, to a certain extent. These compositions proved to be a good foundation that paved the way for development of Chinese piano music based on traditional folk music. Although these piano pieces were short and simple, they provided valuable examples for later composers of piano music to build upon.

### **Initial Development**

Following the new cultural “May Fourth” movement (1919), more and more musicians pushed for China to establish systematic music education and professional music institutions for training a large number of professional musicians in piano, voice, music theory and composition. You-mei Xiao, a famous Chinese educator and composer, is also known as the “father of modern music education in China.”<sup>12</sup> Mr. Xiao had studied piano, voice and music education in Japan since 1901. He later studied music theory, piano and composition at Leipzig University and the Leipzig Conservatory of Music in Germany. He was the first Chinese musician to earn a doctoral degree from a Western country. When Xiao returned to China in 1920, he devoted himself to establishing professional Chinese music institutes. He founded the “Beijing Women Teachers’ Institute of Music” in 1920. In 1922 and 1923 respectively, he founded the “Training Institute of Music at Beijing University” and the “Department of Music at the Beijing College of Arts”.<sup>13</sup> The curriculum at these schools included courses in piano, voice, music theory, music composition, traditional music, as well as other courses for the developing professional musicians. Meanwhile, local government in Shanghai had established three music institutions

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12. Xue Zheng, *Reminiscences of the McTyeire School: Selected Historical Recollections of Shanghai* (Shanghai: People’s Publishing House, 1988), 306-307.

13. Meng Bian, *Zhongguo Gangqin Wenhua*, 15.

there, including the “Shanghai Teachers’ Institute of Music”(1920), the “Music Department at Shanghai College of Fine Arts” and the “Music Department at Shanghai University of Arts”(1925). Early in 1927, the three music institutions in Beijing founded by Xiao, were forced to close down, but, with a permit from the local government and support from Yuan-pei Cai, president of Nanjing University, Mr. Xiao opened the first independent professional music institution, the National Conservatory of Music in Shanghai, on November 27, 1927. The National Conservatory was the first institute in China to provide professional music education at the collegiate level.

At the National Conservatory, instrumental study was limited to piano, violin, cello, and traditional Chinese instruments. Other courses offered there included Western music history, theory, harmony, counterpoint, orchestration, musical forms, music literature, and appreciation.<sup>14</sup> Piano teachers included Rui-xian Wang and En-ke Li, who both had studied in the United States.<sup>15</sup> Several Western musicians were also invited to serve on the Conservatory’s faculty<sup>16</sup>. Among them, the most influential was Russian pianist Boris Zakharoff. From 1929 until he died in 1942, he devoted his life to training Chinese pianists. Professor Zakharoff was well-respected as the master of Chinese piano pedagogy in China’s educational circles. He introduced a great deal of Western piano music to Chinese students, such as Bach’s *Well-Tempered Clavier*, Mozart’s sonatas, Beethoven’s sonatas, a variety of piano concertos, and many romantic and

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14. Rong-shen Wang, “A Study of Five Chinese Piano Piece with a Review of the Introduction and Development of The Piano in China.” (DMA diss., Ball State University, 1995), 30.

15. Meng Bian, *Zhongguo Gangqin Wenhua*, 16.

16. Le Kang, “The Development of Chinese Piano Music,” *Asian Culture and History* 1, No.2 (July 2009): 18. During the late 1920s and 1930s, many outstanding Russian and Jewish musicians moved to Shanghai in order to escape from the Russian Revolution and Nazi persecution in Europe, such as Mrs. E. Levitin, Z. Pribitkova, B. Lazareff, Alexander Tcherepnin, Boris Zakharoff, Ada Bronstein and Alfred Wittenburg.

impressionistic works. In 1933, he performed Rachmaninoff's newly published *Piano Concerto No.4* in Shanghai.<sup>17</sup> A large number of renowned Chinese pianists were his pupils, including Xian-min Li, Shan-de Ding, and Cui-zhen Li. On May 11, 1935, Shan-de Ding performed his graduate piano recital with repertoire including Beethoven's *Sonata Op.27, No.2*; Debussy's *Arabesque*; Weber's *Invitation to the Dance*; Chopin's *Etude in f minor* and *Polonaise Op.53*; Liszt's *Hungarain Rhapsody No.6*; Tcherepnin's *Two Bagatelles*; and two Chinese piano pieces composed by Lv-ting He. Professor Zakharoff not only brought the most advanced piano education to China, he also invited a large number of professional piano teachers from Russian music institutes to the Conservatory. Their influence set the stage for Western piano music to flourish in China, establishing a strong foundation for the development of Chinese pianism.

In 1934, famous Russian musician Alexander Tcherepnin sponsored a music composition competition in China, seeking Chinese-style piano music. Six pieces won the competition, including Lv-ting He's *Mu Tong Duan Di (Shepherd Boy's Flute)* and *Berceuse*, Zhi-cheng Lao's *Mu Tong Zhi Le (Happiness of Shepherd)*; Bian-min Yu's *Variations in c minor*; Tian-he Chen's *Overture*; and Ding-xian Jiang's *Berceuse*. These works were written in a native Chinese style and had a significant impact on Chinese piano music culture, inaugurating a new historical period in the creation of Chinese piano music.<sup>18</sup>

Lu-ding He's *Shepherd Boy's Flute* (see fig. 1-3), for example, is significant for its combination of Western compositional technique with Chinese folk tunes. It is pastoral in character, with melodies evoking the sound of the Chinese bamboo flute. The inspiration for this piece was a picture of a shepherd boy playing the bamboo flute on the back of a buffalo (see fig. 1-4).

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17. Ibid., 17.

18. Sun and Zhou, *A concise course of general music history of China*, 344.

舒适、自在地  
原谱有单音符波音，考虑到演奏效果，作者已将其改为三音符连奏

贺绿汀 曲  
季拓 制谱



Figure 1-3. *Shepherd Boy's Flute* by Lv-ding He<sup>19</sup>



Figure 1-4. picture of *Shepherd Boy's Flute*<sup>20</sup>

19. Chen, "The Development of Chinese Piano Music," 63.

20. *Picture of Shepherd Boy's Flute*, [http://www.chinese.cn/cn/music/article/2009-12/16/content\\_94416.htm](http://www.chinese.cn/cn/music/article/2009-12/16/content_94416.htm) (accessed August 16, 2011).

Light, simple, and elegant, the piece is written in ternary form. A pentatonic folk-like melody in G *zhi*<sup>21</sup> is joined with Western-style contrapuntal writing in the first section. The music of the second part grows faster and more active. In the final section, *Jiahua* (ornamental variation of a melody), an important technique of melodic development in Chinese folk music, is adopted. The success of *Shepherd Boy's Flute* “increased the popularity of piano music in China, and it became a monument in the development of Chinese piano music, providing a model for Chinese composers to create piano music that belonged to their own culture.”<sup>22</sup>

After 1937, China fought the Second Sino-Japanese War. During this time, there was increased demand for revolutionary songs, but composition for Western instruments like the piano stagnated. Nevertheless, musicians did not totally give up writing for the piano during the war. Although new piano music was scarce, compositional techniques evolved and very much improved. Notable piano works composed during the war included *Xunyang Old Melodies* and *Crops Variations* by Hua-bo Lu; *Flower Drum* by Wei Qu; *In That Distant Place* by Tong Sang; *Spring Tour Suite*, *Sonata in E*, *Three Overture*, and *Variations on a Theme of Chinese Folk Songs* by Sha-de Ding; *Ten Pieces of Beijing Sketch*, *Sonatina*, and *Piano Ballad: Xunyang Moonlight* by Wen-ye Jiang.

Most composers of this period received a professional music education. Compositional techniques had been mostly influenced by late-romantic, impressionist or contemporary music genres. Tong Sang, a famous Chinese composer, theorist and music educator, studied composition with the German composer Frankel at the National Conservatory of Music, after which he studied at a conservatory in Paris. In 1946, Tong Sang studied composition with the

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21. *Zhi* is one mode of Chinese traditional modes. For detail information about Chinese traditional modes, please see chapter two: Theory of Chinese traditional scales and mode.

22. Le kang, “The Development of Chinese Piano Music,” *Asian Culture and History* 1, no.2 (July 2009): 21.

Austrian composer Schloss. One year later, Mr. Sang composed his piano piece *Zai Na Yao Yuan De Di Fang* (*In That Distant Place*) (see fig. 1-5). Here, a Chinese folk tune (see fig. 1-6) was modified through the use of atonal techniques—the earliest known piano piece to do so.



Figure 1-5. *In That Distant Place* by Tong Sang<sup>23</sup>



Figure 1-6. Chinese folk song: *In That Distant Place*<sup>24</sup>

23. Chen, “The Development of Chinese Piano Music,” 67.

24. Chinese folk song: *In That Distant Place*. <http://h218779.blog.sohu.com/868350.html> (accessed August 16, 2011).

Wen-ye Jiang, a famous Taiwanese composer who studied both in China and Japan, was also interested in combining of Chinese folk tunes with contemporary Western compositional techniques. He was interested in music shaped and colored by impressionism, neo-classicism, and nationalism when he was in Japan. For instance, the influence of Béla Bartók can be found in his piano work *Taiwan Dance* (see fig. 1-7).



Figure 1-7. *Taiwan Dance* by Wen-ye Jiang

After Wen-ye Jiang returned to China in 1938, he devoted himself to exploring the national style, using traditional Chinese music theory as his creative foundation. He was inspired by traditional Chinese harmonies played on traditional instruments, such as the *qin*, *sheng*, and *pipa*, and tried to imitate the sound effects of these native instruments in his works. In his work *Sheng Yong Zuo Ji* (*The collections of Chinese hymns*), he states:

There are some disadvantages that exist in Chinese music. However, I prefer to cherish the valuable traditions that can be found there. In order to keep these meaningful traditions, I tend to refrain from using Western musical theory that I have continuously studied in the first half of my life....<sup>25</sup>

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25. Ji-ren Zhang, "Wen-ye Jiang and Chinese Modern Music," *Taiwan Weekly* 45 (2002), 25.



## Development in New China and During the Cultural Revolution

In 1949, after the founding of the People's Republic of China, more and more music schools were established alongside the National Conservatory of Music. In order to promote Chinese music education, the government sent several composers and pianists to study abroad, especially in the Soviet Union. The political environment in China offered more opportunities for musical performance and music education, so a number of outstanding composers and pianists emerged at this time. These pianists performed internationally, and the creation of piano music began to flourish in China. Composers were allowed to express themselves freely, which resulted in various styles of piano music. It was the first time Chinese composers really expanded on Western music styles, and they did so by incorporating Chinese musical language.<sup>26</sup>

Representative piano works of this period include Tong Sang's *Three Preludes* and *Seven Variations of Mongolian Folksongs*; Ming-xin Du's *Etudes*, Li-shan Wang's *Sonatine*; Pei-xun Chen's *Thunder in Dry Season* and *Longing for Love*; Wei Qu's *Drum Playing*; and Jian-er Zhu's *The Stream Flows*. It is interesting that at that time, several pianists also participated in the creation of piano works, such as Cheng-zong Ying's *Yangge Dance* and Shi-kun Liu's *White-Haired Girl Impromptu*.

Li-san Wang's *Sonatine* (1957) is a piece combining contemporary Western compositional techniques with the Chinese national style. The work has three movements: *In the Sunshine*, *After the New Rains*, and *Dance of the Sanli People*. Here, Mr. Wang uses folk tunes from Yunnan province and pan songs from Sichuan (see fig. 1-8).

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26. Kang, "The Development of Chinese Piano Music," 21.



Figure 1-8. First movement of *Sonatine* by Li-san Wang<sup>27</sup>

The development of Chinese piano music experienced a setback with the advent of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). During this period, the Chinese government banned all activities associated with Western art, except for eight traditional Chinese *yangban* shows (model revolutionary works) which consisted of six Peking operas and two Chinese ballets with strong political content.<sup>28</sup> All of these works were designed to praise Chairman Mao and the Communist Party. All music institutes were closed and virtually all pianos were either sealed or destroyed. Piano music, as a Western art, was forbidden by the government. New musical compositions were prohibited unless they were commissioned by the government. During this time, some pianists, like Cheng-zong Ying, used the piano to accompany revolutionary songs, and this type of piano performance soon became widespread. One of the most important piano

27. Ting-ge Wei, Ming-jun Li, and Min Xu, *Selection From Chinese Classical Music for Piano* Vol. 2 (China: ShiDaiWenYi Publishing House, 1999), 82.

28. Shi-gu Zhang, "Chinese and Western Influences Upon Piano Music in China" (DMA diss., University of Arizona, 1993), 41.

arrangements of this period was the famous Chinese concerto *Yellow River* which was based on an anti-Japanese cantata by Xing-hai Xian. It was finished in 1969 by a committee of six musicians. Due to its revolutionary attributes, the piano concerto was widely accepted by the Communist party. Even today, the *Yellow River* concerto remains among the most important Chinese piano works.

Later in the Cultural Revolution, with permission from the government, Chinese composers could work on creating piano arrangements from traditional Chinese music, notably *Xiao and Drum at Sunset* by Ying-hai Li and *Liuyang River* by Wang-hua Chu.

### **New Developments after “Reform and Opening”**

In 1976, the Cultural Revolution ended with Chairman Mao’s death. Many restrictions on Western art were eased and the political tensions between China and the West decreased.<sup>29</sup> In 1978, at the “Third Plenum of the Chinese Communist Party,” Xiao-ping Deng announced a new policy known as “Reform and Opening,” which spurred significant developments in the Chinese economy and culture.

Two music institutes, in Beijing and Shanghai, reopened, and a large number of talented music students were enrolled. Apart from these two conservatories, six other music institutes were established respectively in Shenyang, Tianjin, Sichuan, Xi’an, Wuhan, and Guangdong. Composers regained the freedom to compose their own works. China encouraged cultural exchange activities with Western countries, and Western musicians and educators were invited to teach and perform in China. These musicians also brought a great number of valuable music resources, like scores and theoretical materials, with them. Through cultural exchange, Chinese

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29. Kang, “The Development of Chinese Piano Music,” 24.

composers had more opportunities to familiarize themselves with the development of Western music. In the early 1980s, mainland China saw the emergence of a group of talented young composers of avant-garde music, known as the “New Wave.”<sup>30</sup> Some of them - Dun Tan, Qi-gang Chen, Bright Sheng, Yi Chen, Long Zhou and Xiao-gang Ye - went to the United States or Europe for further study. They have earned an international reputation for their successful combination of Chinese folk elements with Western avant-garde trends. A number of them have won major competitions and became famous. Their works have been performed throughout the world and have attracted the attention of Westerners. In recent years, several young Chinese pianists, including Lang Lang and Yun-di Li, have received multiple international honors.

During this period, many piano arrangements have been written by Chinese composers. The compositional styles of these works are diverse. For example, Ming-zhi Chen has combined Chinese aesthetics with twelve-tone techniques in his *Eight Piano Bagatelles* (see fig. 1-9).

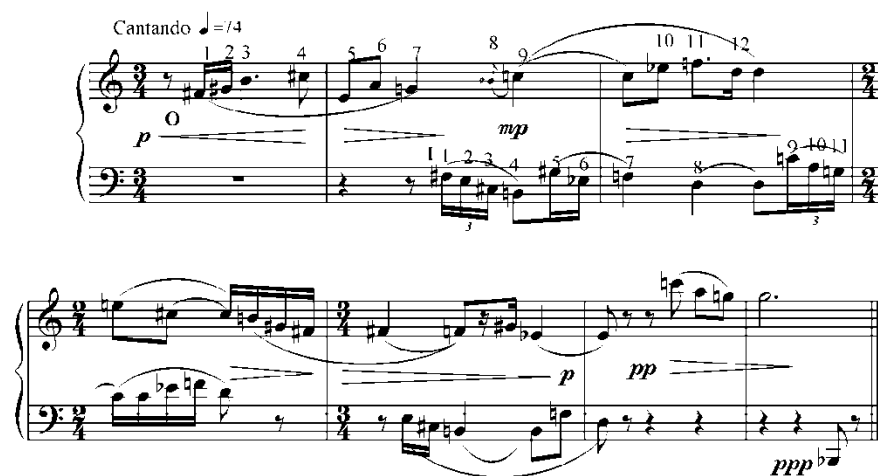


Figure 1-9. *Eight Piano Bagatelles* by Ming-zhi Chen

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30. *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*, (New York: Garland Publications, 1998-2002) s.v. “New Wave – East Asia: China, Japan, and Korea.” Benefited from China’s “Reform and Opening” policy after the Cultural Revolution, young composers got the opportunity to study and absorb various contemporary compositional techniques. Meanwhile, they explored Chinese traditional music and art, regarding folk music as the basis for developing their own music language and trying to combine these traditions with contemporary western music.

Some of these contemporary composers are even exploring their own unique compositional ideas in their piano pieces. A good example is Xiao-sheng Zhao's *Tai Ji* in which Mr. Zhao created a *Tai Ji* compositional system based on the sixty-four possible pairs of trigrams in *Tai Ji*, a concept originating from Taoism.

## **CHAPTER TWO: CLASSIFICATION OF CHINESE PIANO MUSIC, STYLES AND FEATURES OF PERTINENT CHINESE ART AND MUSIC THEORY**

Although Chinese piano music dates back less than a hundred years, it is stylistically rich and diverse. Based on different ways of utilizing folk and traditional materials, Chinese piano pieces can be divided into the following three categories:

1. Pieces that are direct transcriptions of folk tunes or other kinds of music
2. Pieces that are not transcriptions, but which use Chinese folk tunes as the most important thematic materials
3. Pieces that are based on newly-composed material, but are imbued with folk music elements.

Béla Bartók had similar ideas about the use of folk music in composition. In a lecture given at Columbia University, Bartók outlined three general approaches to folk-song arrangement:

1. writing an accompaniment to a folk melody and the accompaniment taking second place, so that it will “only serve as an ornamental setting for the precious stone: the peasant melody”
2. giving equal importance to the folk melody and the accompaniment
3. allowing the folk melody “only to be regarded as a kind of motto” on which the work is built.<sup>31</sup>

In the same lecture, Bartók noted that the originality of his music reflected the “spirit” of folk music, not the assimilation of the surface features:

You may want to ask in what way the influence of folk music appears in all such original works. First, it appears more or less in the general spirit of the style.... to discern it is largely a matter of intuitive feeling, based on some kind of experience with folk music material. Secondly, in many cases themes or turns of phrases are deliberate or

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31. Béla Bartók and Benjamin Suchhoff, *Béla Bartók Essays* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 350-352.

subconscious imitations of folk melodies or phrases.<sup>32</sup>

My classification of Chinese piano music is modeled on Bartók's three levels of incorporation of folk music into a composition. Normally, Chinese piano pieces belonging to the first category are simple and short. The composer only adds accompaniment to an existing folk melody, which is normally unchanged or slightly modified. Here, the accompaniment is of secondary importance. Jian-zhong Wang's *Five Folksongs from Yunnan* (see fig. 2-1) and Ying-hai Li's *Six Small Pieces on Folksongs* (see fig. 2-2) are good examples.



Figure 2-1. *Five Folksongs from Yunnan* by Jian-zhong Wang<sup>33</sup>

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32. Ibid., 349-350.

33. Wei, Li, and Xu, *Selection from Chinese Classical Music for Piano* vol. 3, 1.

## 民歌小曲六首

花灯

(云南民歌)

黎英海 (1956)

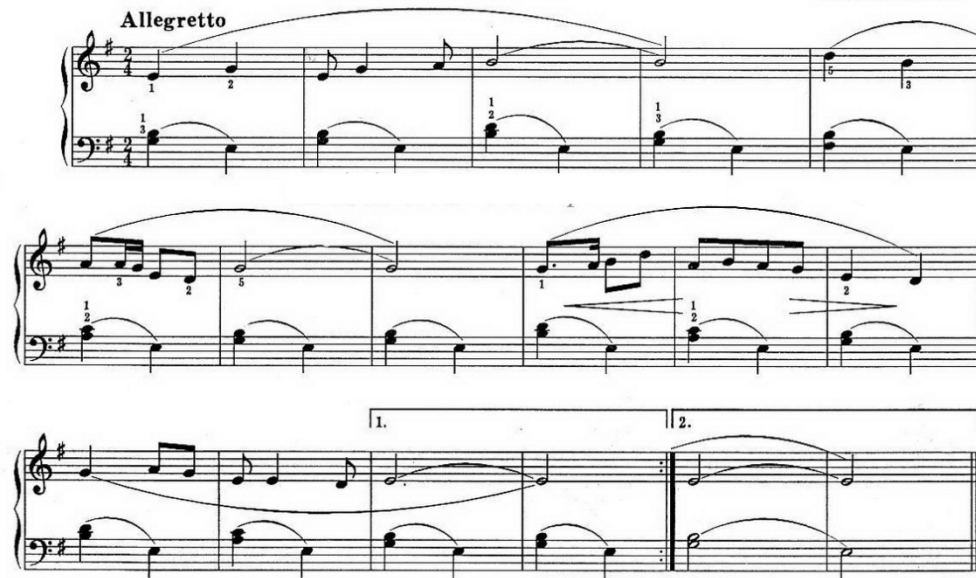


Figure 2-2. *Six Small Pieces on Folksongs* by Ying-hai Li<sup>34</sup>

Many Chinese piano pieces belong to the second category, where the folk melody or part of the folk melody is used as the main theme or motive unifying the entire work. The pieces analyzed in the third chapter of this paper belong mostly to this category.

In the third category, the composition does not directly quote any folk music, but is imbued with the spirit of folk music. In this case, a new composition with a distinctive folk music flavor is created. Lv-ding He's *Sherpherd Boy's Flute* (see fig. 1-3) and Li-san Wang's *A Series of Five Preludes and Fugues written in Chinese Modes* (see fig. 2-3) are good examples of this.

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34. Wei, Li, and Xu, *Selection From Chinese Classical Music for Piano* vol. 4, 14.



我想登上另一个山头去回顾，去瞻望。那激荡的是线条吗！那沉吟的是音韵吗！正如在古老的中国艺术里我看见上下求索的灵魂。



Figure 2-3. *A series of Five Preludes and Fugues written in Chinese Modes* by Li-san Wang<sup>35</sup>

Since most Chinese piano works belong to one of the first two categories, the creation of these works is, to a certain extent, influenced by folk songs and traditional Chinese music. Traditional Chinese music contains various types of music, including instrumental music, Chinese opera, and so on. It also has its own music theory system. Understanding the characteristics of traditional folk songs and music is very helpful to understanding Chinese piano music since the Chinese theory system is based on the characteristics of Chinese folk songs and Chinese traditional instrumental music. This chapter is an overview of the characteristics of Chinese folk songs, Chinese traditional instruments, and Chinese operas. The heterophonic style of Chinese music and theory of traditional Chinese scales and modes are also examined.

35. Wei, Li, and Xu, *Selection from Chinese Classical Music for Piano* vol. 2, 123.

## Characteristics of Chinese Folk Songs

In China, although there are 56 minority groups, over 93% of the population is of the *Han* ethnicity. Therefore, folk music culture is most closely related to *Han* culture. According to two Chinese ethnomusicologists Jing Miao and Jian-zhong Qiao, there are eleven cultural areas of *Han* Chinese folk songs: (1) Northeastern Plain; (2) Northwestern Plain; (3) Jiang Huai Plateau (northern Jiangsu and northern Anhui); (4) Jiang Zhe Plain (southern Jiangsu, southern Anhui, Zhejiang); (5) Min Tai (Fujian and Taiwan); (6) Yue (Guangdong); (7) Jiang Hang Plain (Hubei, southern Henan); (8) Xiang (Hunan); (9) Gan (Jiangxi); (10) Southwestern Plateau; and (11) Kejia (Hakka people of various place).<sup>36</sup>

Based on different types or styles of folk songs, the *Han* folk songs can also be classified into three major types which are *haozi* (work songs), *shange* (mountain songs) and *xiaodiao* (lyric songs).<sup>37</sup> This three-fold classification system will be examined in more detail in the discussion that follows since it is closely related to the creation of Chinese piano music.

***Haozi***, which means “shouting” or “roaring,” is created and used for coordinating or relieving hardship when people work. In order to unify pace, a basic rhythmic pattern is used and the call-and-response effect arises throughout the song. Melodic material in the song is limited and *ostinato* is used frequently.<sup>38</sup>

*Yellow River Boatman Song* is a *haozi*. This folk song has been used in Xing-hai Xian’s *Yellow River Cantata* and the famous Chinese piano concerto *Yellow River*. At the beginning of

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36. Except last-named group, all the above divisions are based upon geographic factors. Kuo-huang Han, “Folk Songs of The Han Chinese: Characteristics and Classifications,” *Asian Music* 20, No. 2, *Chinese Music Theory* (Spring – Summer, 1989): 107.

37. Chang-wei Xiao, *Zhongguo Minzu Yinyue Gaishu* [Overview of Chinese National Music] (Chongqing: Southwest Normal University Press, 1999), 9.

38. Han, *Asian Music* 20, No. 2, *Chinese Music Theory*, 113.

the concerto, an *ostinato*, beginning in m.17 (see fig. 2-4), reflects the call-and-response effect when boatmen are working.

Figure 2-4. *Piano concerto: Yellow River* by Cheng-zong Ying mm. 17-27

*Shange* (mountain songs) are songs sung in an open area which may be near a mountain or in an open field.<sup>39</sup> Love is the subject of most *shange*. Compared to *haozi* and *xiaodiao*, the rhythm of *shange* is freer; Due to the nature of the geographic performance space, *shange* uses

39. Ibid., 116.

higher pitches and often begins or ends with a long *fermata*-like articulation. Another important feature of *shange* is the alternating style of singing between a masculine voice (man) and a feminine voice (woman).<sup>40</sup>

An example of *shange* used in Chinese piano music is Jian-zhong Wang's *Five Folksongs from Yunnan*, no.4 *shange* (see fig. 2-5). Another good example of adapting *shange* into piano arrangements is Lu-sheng Ye's *Lan huahua*, which is analyzed in detail in Chapter 3.

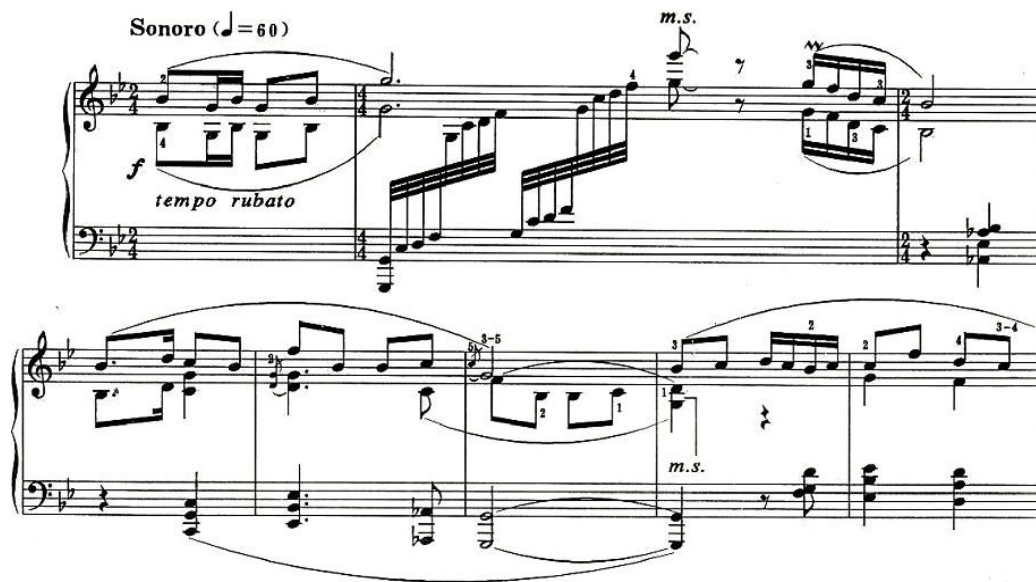


Figure 2-5. *Five Folksongs from Yunnan* by Jian-zhong Wang<sup>41</sup>

There is no exact English word for translating the term *xiaodiao*. The word literally means “little tune,” but it encompasses many genres. Da-neng Sung divides *Xiaodiao* into the following sub-types: lyric songs, humorous songs, children's songs and customs songs.<sup>42</sup> Han

40. Ibid.

41. Wei, Li, and Xu, *Selection From Chinese Classical Music for Piano* vol. 3, 1.

42. Da-neng Sung, *Minjian Gequ Gailun* [An Introduction to Folk Music] (Beijing: Renmin Yinyue, 1979), 201-245.

Kuo-huang translates *Xiaodiao* as lyric songs. Following Ming-dun Jiang's subdivision system, he also relates the sub-types of *Xiaodiao* into narrative songs, little songs and popular songs.<sup>43</sup>

Generally speaking, *Xiaodiao* is characterized by “lyrical melody, static rhythm and clear formal structure.”<sup>44</sup> Because *Xiaodiao* were artistically polished by professionals and are inextricably linked with Chinese operas and instrumental music, it has more refined details and fewer improvisatory qualities in its textures and musical phrasing. *Xiaodiao* is the most complete and mature type of *Han* folk song.

Jian-zhong Wang adopts *Xiaodiao* in his piano piece *Embroidering the Banner with Letter in Gold* (see fig. 2-6).



Figure 2-6. *Embroidering the Banner with Letter in Gold* by Jian-zhong Wang<sup>45</sup>

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43. Han, *Asian Music* 20, No. 2, *Chinese Music Theory*, 120.

44. Ibid.

45. Wei, Li, and Xu, *Selection From Chinese Classical Music for Piano* vol. 3, 35.

## Characteristics of Chinese Traditional Instruments

Traditional Chinese musical instruments have a long history that can be traced back to 6000 and 5000 BCE.<sup>46</sup> Based on the different materials used to construct these instruments, they can be classified into eight categories: silk, bamboo, wood, stone, metal, clay, gourd and hide. This classification system is called the “*bayin*” (eight tone) system.<sup>47</sup> In fact, except for several special instruments such as the *Xun*,<sup>48</sup> common-practice Chinese instruments can also be divided into three categories: stringed instruments, woodwind instruments and percussion (see table: 2-1).

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46. Alan R. Thrasher, “China, III: Muisical instruments,” Oxford Music Online [http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.libezp.lib.lsu.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/43141pg3?q=china&search=quick&pos=6&\\_start=1#firsthit](http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.libezp.lib.lsu.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/43141pg3?q=china&search=quick&pos=6&_start=1#firsthit) (accessed Aug 11, 2011).

47. The *bayin* (eight tone) system was devised by Zhou court scholars in an attempt to classify the musical instruments of the period. While most instruments were mentioned in the *Shijing* (Classic of poetry, c7th century BCE), the eight-tone system was most clearly articulated in the *Zhouli* (Rites of Zhou, c3rd century BCE). Alan R. Thrasher, “China, III: Muisical instruments,” Oxford Music Online [http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.libezp.lib.lsu.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/43141pg3?q=china&search=quick&pos=6&\\_start=1#firsthit](http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.libezp.lib.lsu.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/43141pg3?q=china&search=quick&pos=6&_start=1#firsthit) (accessed Aug 11, 2011 )

48. The *xun* is made of clay or ceramic and is one of the oldest Chinese instruments. It has a blowing hole on top and generally eight smaller finger holes.

Table 2-1. Categories of Chinese traditional instruments

Stringed instrument	Silk instruments are mostly stringed instruments. Based on different way of playing, stringed instruments can be divided into three categories: plucked, bowed, and struck.	Plucked: Gugin, Se, Guzheng, Konghou, Pipa, Sanxian, Ruan, Liuqin, Yueqin, Qinqin, Duxianqin Bowed: Huqin, Erhu, Zhonghu, Gaohu, banhu, Jinghu, Jing erhu, Erxian, Tiqin, Yehu, Daguangxian, Datong, Kezaixian, Liujiaoxian, Tiexianzai, Hexian, Huluqin, Huluhu, Maguhu, Tuhu, Jiaohu, Sihou, Sanhu, Zhuihu, Zhuiqin, Leiqin, Dihou, Dahu, Xizhonghu, Gehu, Diyinghu, Laruan, Paqin, Dixianqin, Niutuiqin, Matouqin, Xiqin, Yazheng, zhengni, Aijieke, Sataer. Struck: Yangqin, Zhu, Jiaoweiqin
Woodwind instrument	Woodwind instruments is mostly made by Bamboo and Gourd	Flutes: Dizi(bamboo flute), Xiao, Paixiao, Chi, Yue, Xindi, Dondi, Koudi Oboes: Guan, Suona Free reed pipes: Bawu, mangtong Single reed pipes: Mabu Gourd: Sheng, Yu, He, Hulusi, Hulusheng
Percussion	Percussions are mostly made by wood, stone, metal.	Wood: Zhu, Yu, Muyu, Paiban, Bangzi Stone: Bianqing, Teqing Metal: Bianzhong, Fangxiang, Nao, Bo, Luo, Yunluo, Shimianluo, Qing, Daqing, Pengling, Dangzi, Dianqing, Yunzheng, Chun, Bronze drum, Laba

Traditional Chinese instruments are played either solo or with a small ensemble. According to Jing-fang Yuan, traditional Chinese ensemble music can be divided into five categories: (1) *xuansuo* music, consisting only of several stringed instruments; (2) *sizhu* music, consisting of several stringed instruments and woodwind instruments made with bamboo; (3) *guchui* music, consisting of *suona* (shawms), *dizi* (flute), several stringed instruments and percussion instruments; (4) *chuida* music, consisting of all three types of traditional instruments; and (5) *luogu* music, consisting only of percussion instruments.<sup>49</sup>

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49. Jing-fang Yuan, *Minzu Qiyue* [National Instrumental Music] (Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 1987), 11-12.



Figure 2-7. *Qin*<sup>50</sup>

Since the analysis of two Chinese piano pieces in chapter 3 is related to two Chinese traditional instruments, the *qin* and *pipa*, they will be examined in greater detail.

One of the oldest instruments, the *Qin* or *guqin* (see fig. 2-7), is a seven-string plucked instrument. It has a history of over three thousand years. The fundamental tuning of the *qin*'s seven silk-made strings is *C–D–F–G–A–c–d*.<sup>51</sup> The instrument is constructed with two wooden boards: the upper board, which also serves as a fretless fingerboard, is usually made of *wutong* wood and is characterized by 13 small jade markers, or *hui*, inlaid along the edges. These mark

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50. Chinese traditional instrument: *Qin*.  
[http://music.chinese.cn/article/2009-12/24/content\\_96454.htm](http://music.chinese.cn/article/2009-12/24/content_96454.htm) (accessed Aug 11, 2011).

51. Ming-Yueh Liang and Joseph S.C. Lam, “Qin,” Oxford Music Online  
[http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.libezp.lib.lsu.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/47071?q=qin&search=quick&pos=1&\\_start=1#firsthit](http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.libezp.lib.lsu.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/47071?q=qin&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit) (accessed Aug 11, 2011).



the points at which harmonics and stopped notes are produced. The lower board, which is made of *zi* wood, has two rectangular sound openings to emit the sound.<sup>52</sup>

There are three different kinds of sound made by the *qin*: *fan* (harmonics), *an* (stopped sound), and *san* (scattered sounds).<sup>53</sup> The first one, *fan*, refers to the technique wherein the right hand plays the melody while the left hand lightly touches the string using one or more fingers to stop its vibration, thereby producing harmonics. *An* requires the player to press on the string using a left hand finger while the right hand plays the instrument. The last kind of sound, *san*, is produced by plucking the open strings which means that the left hand does not touch or press down on the string when the right hand is playing.<sup>54</sup>

The *qin* is a representative instrument of traditional Chinese musical culture. It is the most venerated instrument among Chinese scholars, including *Confucius* and *Laozi*. The sound of the *qin* is associated with an atmosphere of purity, peacefulness and enlightenment.<sup>55</sup> Kouwenhoven once stated that “in *qin* music, a peaceful state of mind and cosmic harmony could be achieved by those who explored the sounds of the *qin* with a pure heart and an open mind and who were able to recognize and accept the instrument’s very “mysteriousness” as the key to its greatest powers.”<sup>56</sup>

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52. Jing-fang Yuan, *Minzu Qiyue* [National Instrumental Music] (Beijing: People’s Music Publishing House, 1987), 243.

53. Ming-Yueh Liang and Joseph S.C. Lam, “Qin,” Oxford Music Online [http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.libezp.lib.lsu.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/47071?q=qin&search=quick&pos=1&\\_start=1#firsthit](http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.libezp.lib.lsu.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/47071?q=qin&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit) (accessed Aug 11, 2011 ).

54. Ibid., 276.

55. Frank Kouwenhoven, “Meaning and Structure - The Case of Chinese *qin* (zither) Music,” *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 10, no.1 (2001): 40

56. Ibid.

The *pipa* is a four-string plucked instrument also called the “Chinese lute.”(see fig. 2-8) “It is well documented from the Han dynasty onwards and widely believed to have been introduced from India or Central Asia.”<sup>57</sup> The name *pipa* may be translated from the Sanskrit term *vina*<sup>58</sup>. The two characters “*Pi*” and “*pa*” refer to two common ways of playing this instrument. *Pi* means “to play forward” (toward the player's left) with the right hand, while *pa* means “to play backward” (to the player's right). They are equivalent to the modern terms *tan* and *tiao*.<sup>59</sup>



Figure 2-8. *Pipa*<sup>60</sup>

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57. Tsun-Yuen Lui, “Pipa,” Oxford Music Online  
[http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.libezp.lib.lsu.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/45149?q=pipa&search=quick&pos=1&\\_start=1#firsthit](http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.libezp.lib.lsu.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/45149?q=pipa&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit) (accessed Aug 11, 2011).

58. John Myers, *The Way of The Pipa: Structure and Imagery in Chinese Lute Music* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1992), 8.

59. Tsun-Yuen Lui, “Pipa,” Oxford Music Online  
[http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.libezp.lib.lsu.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/45149?q=pipa&search=quick&pos=1&\\_start=1#firsthit](http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.libezp.lib.lsu.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/45149?q=pipa&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit) (accessed Aug 11, 2011).

60. Chinese traditional instrument: *Pipa*.  
[http://www.chinese.cn/music/article/2009-10/20/content\\_5481.htm](http://www.chinese.cn/music/article/2009-10/20/content_5481.htm) (accessed Aug 11, 2011).

There are three different types of plucked lutes: a half-pear-shaped sound box with a bent neck and five strings; a smaller half-pear-shaped sound box with a straight neck and five strings (wuxian); and a round sound box with a straight neck and four strings (ruanxian).<sup>61</sup>

There are up to 30 frets extending onto the sound board, which span the instrument's range chromatically for three and a half octaves. Today, the strings of the *pipa* are made with metal instead of twisted silk, with or without nylon coiling. The *pipa*'s sound is clean, bright, and short. Extensively played by folk musicians and in folk ensembles, especially *sizhu* ensembles, the *pipa* has retained its popularity from the Tang (618 – 907 CE) and Song (960 – 1279 CE) periods to the present day.

### **Characteristics of Chinese Opera**

**Chinese opera** is a form of drama and musical theatre with numerous regional styles, including Beijing opera (also called Peking Opera), Yuju opera, Pingju, Yueju, Chuanju, Cantonese opera, and so on. Among them, Peking opera is one of the most highly developed and best known of the Chinese opera forms. It is a harmonious combination of music, vocal performance, dance, colorful costumes, make-up, acrobats, jesters, storytellers, acting, poetry and martial arts. It is believed that Peking opera gradually came into being after 1790, when the four famous Anhui opera troupes came to Beijing to celebrate the Qianlong Emperor's 80th birthday.<sup>62</sup> Arising in the late 18th century, Peking opera found its audience and developed quickly during the 19th century. The early decades of the 20th century may be considered Peking

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61. Alan R. Thrasher, "China, III: Muisical instruments," Oxford Music Online [http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.libezp.lib.lsu.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/43141pg3?q=china&search=quick&pos=6&\\_start=1#firsthit](http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.libezp.lib.lsu.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/43141pg3?q=china&search=quick&pos=6&_start=1#firsthit) (accessed Aug 11, 2011).

62. Nancy Guy, "Beijing Opera," Oxford Music Online, [http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.libezp.lib.lsu.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/51764?q=beijing+opera&search=quick&pos=1&\\_start=1#firsthit](http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.libezp.lib.lsu.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/51764?q=beijing+opera&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit)

opera's golden age, when it became one of the most pervasive and popular forms of entertainment in China.<sup>63</sup>



Figure 2-9. Facial makeup of characters in Peking opera<sup>64</sup>

Peking opera features four main types of characters: *Sheng*, *Dan*, *Jing* and *Chou* (see fig. 2-9).<sup>65</sup> They utilize four main skills: song, speech, dance or pantomime, and combat. These roles

63. Ibid.

64. Facial makeup of characters in Peking opera.  
<http://www.aitupian.com/show/3/24/a92baa0ab7e8e79f.html> (accessed Aug 11, 2011 ).

65. Nancy Guy, "Beijing Opera," Oxford Music Online,  
[http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.libezp.lib.lsu.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/51764?q=beijing+opera&search=quick&pos=1&\\_start=1#firsthit](http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.libezp.lib.lsu.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/51764?q=beijing+opera&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit) (accessed Aug 11, 2011).

are characterized by age, gender, and social status. The **Sheng** is the principal male role in Peking opera. This role has numerous subtypes which include *Lao Sheng* (an old man with a beard: dignified, polished, official, scholar); *Xiao Sheng* (a young man: shrill voice, young warrior, young man of society, stature, elaborate dress); and *Wu Sheng* (an acrobatic male: extremely agile and physically skilled). The **Dan** refers to any female role. Dan roles were originally divided into five subtypes: *Qing Yi* (modest, virtuous), *Hua Dan* (flirtatious, playful), *Gui Men Dan* (young, married girl), *Dao Ma Dan* (strong woman, female general), *Wu Dan* (female acrobat), and *Lao Dan* (old woman). Depending on the repertoire of a particular troupe, the **Jing** is a painted face male who can play either primary or secondary roles. Facial colors symbolize the various types of characters: red represents uprightness and loyalty, white represents evil or craftiness, and black denotes soundness and integrity. The **Chou** is a male clown usually playing secondary roles in a troupe. Chou roles can be divided into *Wen Chou*, civilian roles such as merchants and jailers, and *Wu Chou*, minor military roles. Beyond particular roles though, facial painting and stage costumes are worth appreciating for both their artistic value and colorful representations of each character.

The traditional orchestra of the Peking opera is comprised of two main sections, the *wenchang* (peaceful scene) and the *wuchang* (battle scene). The main instruments of *wenchang* are the *jinghu*, *jing erhu* (The *jinghu* and the *jing erhu* are two-string bowed string instruments in the *huqin* family), and *yueqin* (a plucked short-neck lute having a large round and hollowed wooden body with two to four strings). Other instruments include the *suona* (a conical double-reed shawm) and *sanxian* (a three-string plucked lute), among others. The main instruments of *wuchang* include drums (one of which is called a *danpigu*—a small, single-headed drum played with bamboo sticks), clappers, gongs (small and large), cymbals and bells, etc. One person

usually plays the clappers and drums simultaneously. This person is also responsible for leading and conducting the entire ensemble.

The music of Peking opera belongs to either the *xipi* or *erhuang* tune families.<sup>66</sup> Its main melodies originated in Anhui and Hubei respectively. Over time, music from many other regional operas was also incorporated, including melodies from *kunqu* and clapper opera. Even though the two tune families share the same basic modal scale and large structural features, they are different in terms of metrical structure, tempo, melodic detail and specific dramatic or emotional association. *Erhuang* is typically serious, melancholy or tranquil, while *xipi* is livelier, more positive and active.<sup>67</sup> Purely percussive music is also an important component of Peking opera music. Percussive music accompanies the actors' speech and action, providing sound effects and marking the opera's structural divisions.<sup>68</sup>

## **Heterophony**

Chinese music is generally thought to be homophonic to some degree. Instruments typically provide accompaniment in parallel fourths and fifths and often double the voice in vocal music. However, heterophony is also common in China. The heterophonic style is a type of texture created through simultaneous variation in a melodic line. Robert T. Monk described the Chinese heterophonic music as follows:

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66. Ibid.

67. Ibid.

68. Ibid.

In many types of Chinese folk music, one finds that the players or singers do not adhere strictly to unison but vary their parts in juxtaposition and in relay....<sup>69</sup>

In China, when a group of singers sings or plays instruments, it is found that the parts, to a great extent, extemporize according to the general pattern of the principle melody. There is a great deal of interplay, rhythmic variation, and imitative figuration in the parts.<sup>70</sup> In many instances, other voices depart from the pattern of the principal melodic line and become independent of it.



Figure 2-10. Chinese folk song: *Chang gong ku*<sup>71</sup>

Fig. 2-10 shows an excerpt from *chang gong ku* (pain of the labor). It illustrates an independent pattern of voices forming intervals of a third, a fourth, and a fifth with the principal vocal melody. The interval of a second is incidental. The following excerpt from an ancient

69. Robert T. Monk, "Heterophony in Chinese Folk Music," *Journal of the International Folk Music Council* 18, (1966): 14.

70. Ibid., 18.

71. Xiao, *Zhongguo Minzu Yinyue Gaishu*, 137.

instrumental ensemble piece, *Qin Yinyue Er Gao* (moon rising through the sound of *qin*) (see fig. 2-11) illustrates how each part represents extemporization upon a melodic pattern.



Figure 2-11. Chinese instrumental ensemble piece: *Qin Yinyue Er Gao*<sup>72</sup>

To enhance the effects of music, dissonant intervals are sometimes used, as in the following excerpt from a folk opera based on the famous Chinese story "Dream of the Red Chamber." (see fig. 2-12) It is a tale depicting the ill heroine Lin Dai-yu who is visited by her lover Jia Bao-yu. The use of a minor second here is to convey the feeling of weakness or despair.<sup>73</sup>

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72. Suxian Yu, *Zhongguo Chuantong Fudiao Yinyue* [Chinese Traditional Polyphony] (Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 2006), 235.

73. Monk, *Journal of the International Folk Music Council* 18, 18.





Figure 2-12. Excerpt from a folk opera: *Dream of the Red Chamber*<sup>74</sup>

### Theory of Chinese Traditional Scales and Modes

When mentioning Chinese music, Europeans always think in terms of the pentatonic scale. It is true that most Chinese music uses a pentatonic scale, but it is different from Western music in that a special name is assigned to each note of the scale—*gong*, *shang*, *jiao*, *zhi*, *yu*—corresponding similarly to *do*, *re*, *mi*, *sol*, and *la* of Western solfège (see fig. 2-13). The Pitch names are used for identification purposes.<sup>75</sup> Each of the five fundamental tones can be the center of a pentatonic mode. There are five pentatonic modes derived from rotating the fundamental note or pitch center without changing key: *gong* modes, *shang* modes, *jiao* modes, *zhi* modes and *yu* modes (see fig. 2-13). In fact, like the diatonic scale in western music, Chinese music also uses the heptatonic scale. Normally, there are three heptatonic scales that can be viewed as pentatonic scales with added tones extensively used in Chinese music: *Yayue* scale (with F# and B added), *Qingyue* scale (with F and B added) and *Yanyue* (with F and Bb added) scale. Special names are assigned to these added notes. *bianzi* represents F#; *biangong* represents

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74. Ibid.

75. all the information of Chinese Scales and modes I mentioned here are base on the Ho Lu-Ting and Han Kuo-huang, "On Chinese Scales and National Modes," *Asian Music* 14, no. 1 (1982): 133.

B; *qingjiao* represents F; *run* represents Bb (see fig. 2-14). These added notes are considered borrowed pitches from closely related keys and are treated as ornamental functions within a pentatonic framework.<sup>76</sup>

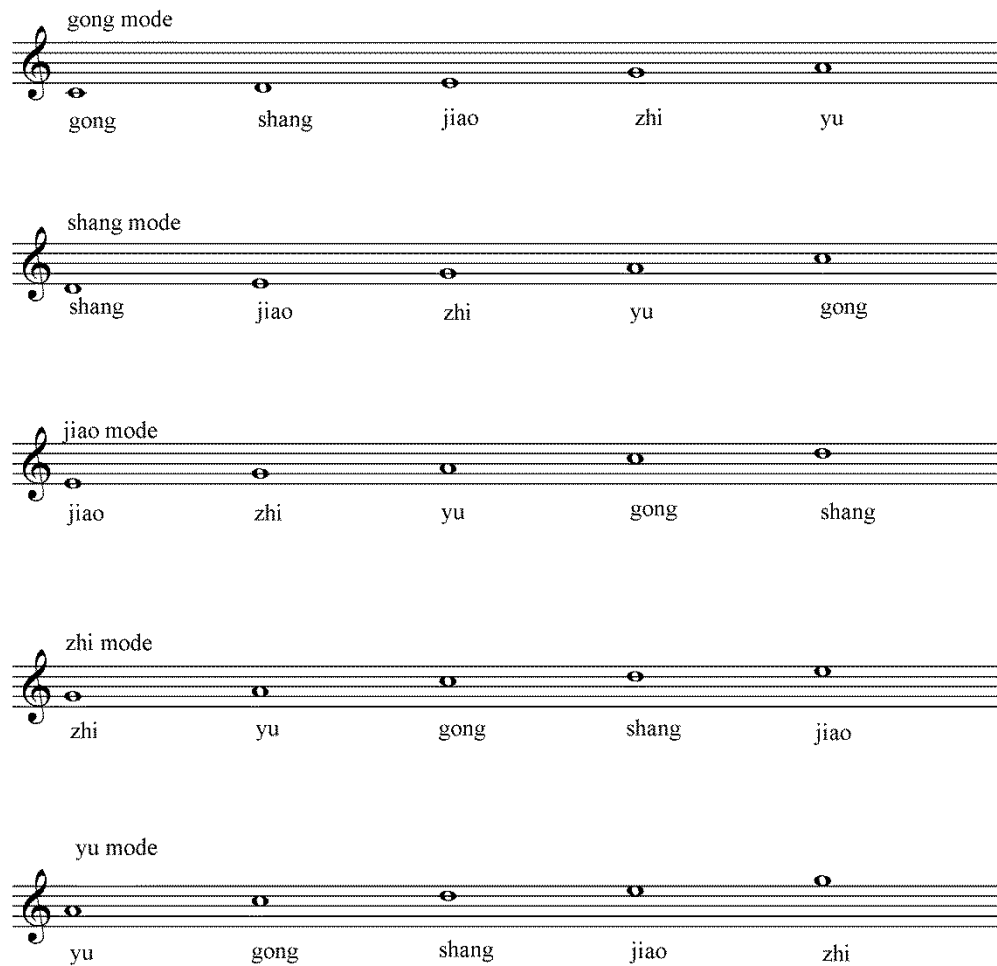


Figure 2-13. Chinese pentatonic modes

76. Ibid., 136.



Figure 2-14. Chinese heptatonic scales

Furthermore, there are many non-pentatonic scales and modes to be found in folk music of China, such as the folk mode of northern Shanxi, Hunan *huagu*, and the Honghe area in Yunnan. The hexatonic scale, a pentatonic scale with one added note mentioned above, can also be found in Chinese music.

Some concrete examples will illustrate the points. A Shanxi folk song “*San Shi Li Pu*” (Village of Thirty Miles) (see fig. 2-15) is written in a hexatonic scale, the *gong* mode based on C with a *qingjiao* F added. According to Lu-Ting Ho, since the folk mode of northern Shanxi and the local theatre of that area normally uses the pitches *biangong* and *qingjiao*,<sup>77</sup> the F pitch in m.13 cannot be interpreted as an ornamental tone.

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77. Ibid., 137-138.



Figure 2-15. Chinese folk song: *San Shi Li Pu*<sup>78</sup>

The Following example is chosen from a *Hunan huagu xi* (Flower- Drum Drama) (see fig. 2-16). It is written in the *yu* mode based on G with F# and C# added. It creates the semitone from F-sharp to G and from C# to D which is not found in the pentatonic scale. According to Lu-Ting Ho, the local color of the *huagu diao* mode is due to the raised third and seventh, so they cannot be treated as ornamental.<sup>79</sup>



Figure 2-16. Chinese Folk Song: *Hunan huagu xi*<sup>80</sup>

78. Ibid., 139.

79. Ibid., 144.

80. Ibid., 144.

In Example 2-17, the C# and G replace the B and F of the ordinary *zhi* mode, which results in a semitone between C# and D and a tritone between G and C# in this mode. Lu-Ting Ho notes that these two intervals are characteristic of the particular mode used by *Yi* people living in the Honghe area of Yunnan (see fig. 2-17).<sup>81</sup>

**Andante dolce**

Folk song mode of the *Yi* people in *Yunnan*

Ordinary *zhi* mode

zhi yu gong shang jiao zhi

Figure 2-17. Chinese Mountain song of *Yi* people<sup>82</sup>

81. Ibid., 150.

82. Ibid.

In sum, pentatonic scales and many non-pentatonic scales (like the hexatonic scale and heptatonic scale) exist in China. Chinese folk scales and modes are quite complex, as contemporary Chinese composer Bright Sheng explains: “Chinese music has never been only pentatonic, because in practice, each fundamental tone (pentatonic) is often modified and embellished by its adjacent semitones.”<sup>83</sup>

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83. Bright Sheng, “Bartok, the Chinese Composer,” *News and Essays of Bright Sheng*, [http://www.brightsheng.com/Sheng\\_essay/BARTOK.pdf](http://www.brightsheng.com/Sheng_essay/BARTOK.pdf) (accessed Aug 11, 2011).

### CHAPTER THREE

#### PERFORMANCE SUGGESTIONS FOR SEVEN CHINESE PIANO PIECES

##### **Jian-zhong Wang and *Mei Hua San Nong (Three Zhe of the Plum Blossom Melody)***

Jian-zhong Wang was born in Shanghai in 1933, and began to study piano when he was ten years old. In 1950, he was admitted to the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, where he received systematic training in composition and piano. Mr. Wang graduated and served on the faculty of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music in 1958. He also served as composer-in-residence for the Central Philharmonic of China in the 1970s. In China, Jian-zhong Wang is famous for his piano music. Most of his arrangements combine Western compositional techniques with elements of traditional Chinese music. In China, Mr. Wang's piano pieces are used not only as teaching material, but are also part of the standard Chinese piano repertoire. Representative works include *Hundreds of Birds Praise the Phoenix*, *Colorful Clouds Chasing the Moon*, *Rejoicing Freedom*, *Three Zhe of the Plum Blossom Melody*, *Liuyang River*, and *Embroidering the Banner with Letters in Gold*.

Jian-zhong Wang composed *Mei Hua San Nong (Three Zhe of the Plum Blossom Melody)* in 1972, during the Cultural Revolution, when the government restricted musical compositions to arrangements of traditional Chinese music or revolutionary songs. *Mei Hua San Nong* is an ancient piece for *qin* (or *guqin*), a seven-string plucked musical instrument of the zither family.<sup>84</sup> It is one of the earliest and the most famous *qin* pieces in China. *Mei Hua San Nong* for *qin* dates from the Tang dynasty (A.D. 618-907) Shi-gu Yan's transcription of a bamboo flute piece by

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84. For detail information about *qin*, please see chapter II.

Huan Yi from the Eastern Jin (A.D.317-420) Dynasty.<sup>85</sup> *Mei Hua* means plum blossom, a type of Chinese flower that only blossoms in winter. *San Nong* means repeating the same melody three times with “*fan*” (harmonics) at three different positions of the same string on the *qin*.

The melody and the formal structure of the piano piece *Mei Hua San Nong* are all derived from the original piece for *qin*. The piece is comprised of ten sections which can be divided into two primary parts. The first part uses a five-part rondo which expresses the meaning of “*san nong*” with two episodes inserted into three iterations of the main melody. The second part uses a binary form. The main melody of *Mei Hua San Nong* recurs in the coda. Functioning as a unifying device, the fragments of main melody recurs throughout the piece, giving the composition a strong sense of cohesion. The formal structure of this piece is as follows (see fig. 3-1):

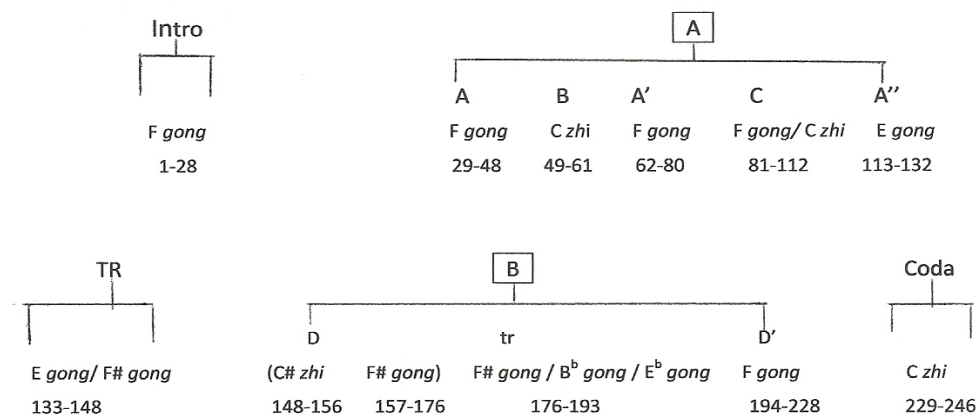


Figure 3-1. The formal structure of *Mei Hua San Nong*

Multiple uses of the *F gong* and its perfect fifth key relationships in *Mei Hua San Nong* for piano solo are identical with that found in the piece for *qin*. However, unlike the original

85. Dong-pan Wu, “A comparison Between Piano Composition *Mei Hua San Nong* and *Qin Qu Mei Hua San Nong* – Analysis of Ethnic Musical Characteristic of Piano Composition *Mei Hua San Nong*,” *Computer – Aided Industrial Design and Conceptual Design* (2008): 1145.



version, there are several changes of gong system that happen in the second part,<sup>86</sup> emphasizing the minor or major second key relationship. The harmonic languages of the piano piece are derived from the traditional pentatonic modes. However, influences from the late-Romantic and Impressionist style are also apparent—for instance, the use of quartal and quintal chords,<sup>87</sup> the use of tertian chords with added notes, the use of seventh and ninth chords, and parallel movement of the chords. Heterophonic<sup>88</sup> and canonic writing are also used in this piece.

Since there are several important Chinese aesthetic elements and philosophies reflected in *Mei Hua San Nong*, the understanding of these cultural influences is helpful to achieve a more authentic performance of the piece. Because the piece is an arrangement of *qin* music, the culture of the *qin* and the philosophies associated with it should be mentioned.

The culture of the *Qin* is closely connected to Confucianism and Taoism, the two major philosophical currents in China that represent different ways of recognizing the cosmos, human society, and the relationship between them. Confucianism is a direct outgrowth of the rituals of the Shang (1600 BC - 1046 BC) and Zhou (1046 BC – AD 256) dynasties, and is essentially a social philosophy for a harmonious society. Confucius was the intellectual leader of Confucianism. His ideas on the arts were embedded in the concepts of *zhongyong* (equilibrium) and harmony. Taoism, also known as Lao–Zhuang philosophy, (Lao means *Laozi*, the founder of Taoism and Zhuang means *Zhuangzi*, another leader of Taoism) is a mystical philosophy seeking harmony between the individual and the cosmos. The core concepts of Taoism include *dao* (the

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86. One gong system contains five different modes. For example: C gong system contains C gong mode, D shang mode, E jiao mode, G zhi mode, and A yu mode.

87. Stefan Kostka, *Materials and Techniques of Twentieth – Century Music*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed, (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2006), 55. Quartal and quintal Chord: Chords built from 4ths and 5ths.

88. For more information about heterophonic please see Chapter II.

way that all things move between the two poles of *Yin* and *Yang*), *Yin-Yang* (two poles, as represented by the pairing of positive and negative, or male and female), *ba gua* (the eight trigrams of the *Yijing*--the Book of Change), *qi* (unseen energy in nature), and *he* (harmony). Lao-Zhuang aesthetics emphasize “beauty in nature, spontaneous expression in harmony with nature and free imagination in expression.”<sup>89</sup>

For over three thousand years, the *qin* has been viewed as an emblem of the elite culture. The instrument serves as “a bridge to the non-human world, a presumed realm of immortality, eternal peace and transcendental fulfillment.”<sup>90</sup> Chinese scholars strive to seek spiritual communication with nature through *qin* or other forms of art like poetry and Chinese calligraphy.<sup>91</sup> Kenneth De Woskin offers a good description of *qin* cultures:

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89. Xiao-le Li, “Chen Yi’s piano music: Chinese Aesthetics and western models” (PhD diss., University of Hawaii at Manoa, 2003), 40. For more information about Chinese philosophies, please see Wang Bangxiong, Yang Hanzu, Qin Yicheng, and Gao Baiyuan, *Zhongguo zhe xue shi* [A History of Chinese philosophy] (Taibei:Kong Zhong Da Xue Press [Air University Press], 1995), 157-165.

90. Frank Kouwenhoven, *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 10, No.1: 40

91. Calligraphy is a highly regarded art in China. It is much more than stylized writing in the western sense of calligraphy and is more akin to painting, just black and white, line and space. Normally, there are three primary tools: brush, ink, and paper. The shape, size, stretch and type of hair in the brush, the color and density of the ink, as well as the absorptive speed and surface texture of the paper are the main physical parameters influencing the final result. The calligrapher also influences the result by the quantity of ink/water he lets the brush take up, then by the pressure, inclination, and direction he gives to the brush. Eventually, the speed, acceleration and deceleration of the writer's moves, turns, and crochets, and the stroke order give the “spirit” to the characters that greatly influence their final shape. Chinese calligraphy also reflects the spiritual and artistic qualities *qi* and *yun* in changing momentum and control of the flow of ink. For over three thousand years, calligraphy has been cultivated as an emblem of the elite culture. Like *qin*, the calligraphy creates ideograms with inner vitality and spontaneity. For more information about calligraphy, please see Robert W. Gunn, “Intimacy, Psyche, and Spirit in the Experience of Chinese and Japanese Calligraphy,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 40, No. 1, Memorial Issue for Barry Ulanov (Spring 2001): 129-166. and Xiaole Li, “Chen Yi’s piano music: Chinese Aesthetics and western models,” 76-77.

They tend to think of the *qin* as a "sympathetic resonator", a medium which offers access to the deeper "sounds" of nature - that is, the metaphysical truths of existence... In this context, words like "sound" and "hearing" are used in a similar way to "vision" and "seeing" in the West: they do not refer to the ordinary senses, but imply an ability to grasp the inner essence of things... More than just a musical instrument, the *qin* becomes a "hearing aid", a tool in the communication with cosmic powers. One might argue - as some philosophically minded *qin* adepts do - that the music of the *qin* is not created by its players: it consists of messages received from nature.<sup>92</sup>

De Woskin's statement reflects an aesthetic concept called *qiyun*. *Qiyun* is the basic aesthetic principle in many Chinese art-forms like *qin* and calligraphy which reflect the widely known concepts of *yin* and *yang*. *Qi* in Taoism refers to an unseen energy existing in nature with the power to transmit force to sustain a motion and to communicate between realms. It is also a way of breathing that transmits sound and energy, resulting in an inner power from the human body.<sup>93</sup> *Yun* refers to the spiritual quality and implicit characteristics of an artistic work. According to Edward Ho, *yun* is "resonance, residual feeling, melodic motion or musical expression" in music. The literal meaning of *yun* refers to the continuing effect that occurs after striking a bell, the lasting resonance with its characteristic enchantment in the air.<sup>94</sup> Playing the *qin* requires a great emphasis on the buildup and control of *qiyun*.

An estimated three thousand *qin* pieces survive in written/notated form, but there are only about six hundred different written compositions, because many pieces are variants of the same composition.<sup>95</sup> Notation for *qin* music is mostly in tablature form, which indicates pitches, fingerings, playing techniques, melodic phrases, and formal structures, but which contains few

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92. Frank Kouwenhoven, *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 10, no.1: 41.

93. Edward Ho, "Aesthetic Considerations in Understanding Chinese Literati Musical Behaviour," *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 6 (1997): 37.

94. Ibid., 38.

95. Frank Kouwenhoven, *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 10, no.1: 46.

indications of rhythm or meter.<sup>96</sup> This being the case, Frank Kauwenhoven also points out that “the principle of rhythmical flexibility in qin music is roughly comparable to that of any music in parlando-rubato style.”<sup>97</sup>

Chinese philosophy and *qin* cultures provide the performer with clues regarding the proper performance of the piano piece *Mei Hua San Nong*. First, there is a freedom in dealing with rhythm and tempo. Since the piano piece *Mei Hua San Nong* is an arrangement of the same piece for *qin*, the performer should consider major features of *qin* music when he or she performs the piece. The following figure (see fig. 3-2) displays two different choices of tempo when two famous *qin* players, *Zi-qian Zhang* and *Jing-lue Wu*, played *Mei Hua San Nong*.<sup>98</sup>

Mr. Wu (7:05)		Mr. Zhang (7:57)	
1、	♩ = 50		♩ = 42
2、	♩ = 76		♩ = 50
3、	♩ = 96		♩ = 80
4、	♩ = 96		♩ = 50
5、	♩ = 96	♩ = 104 →	♩ = 66
6、	♩ = 104		♩ = 60
7、	♩ = 112		♩ = 66
8、	♩ = 116	♩ = 60 →	♩ = 80
9、	♩ = 116	♩ = 72 →	♩ = 120 → ♩ = 104
10、	♩ = 76		♩ = 80    ♩ = 50

Figure 3-2. Two different tempos from two *qin* players<sup>99</sup>

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96. Ibid., 46-47.

97. Ibid., 67.

98. Jing Yang, “Gangqinqu <Mei Hua San Nong> Yanzou Zhi Quanshi,” *Zhongguo Yinyue [Chinese Music]* 4, (2002): 72.

99. Ibid.

Although different performers can choose different tempos, they do not do so randomly. Titles are a significant factor in extra-musical association because they can stimulate the feeling and imagination of the performer. Before a performance, the pianist must carefully read explanations in the handbooks where each part of a *qin* piece receives a subtitle. These explanations describe the mood and content of that particular section of the music. After understanding the correct mood or literary meaning of a passage, they can shape and mold the tempo to fit their own personal tastes and emotions.

*Mei Hua San Nong* is composed to depict the plum blossom's purity, whiteness, elegance, peacefulness, and hardness in the face of severe cold. It depicts the loneliness and extraordinary self-admiration of ancient Chinese scholars. According to Yang jing, there are twelve different notations of *Mei Hua San Nong* for *qin*.<sup>100</sup> Therefore, the pianist should at least know what a plum blossom is and what attributes it has before performing the piece. Only then can the performer appropriately spread the wings of his or her imagination to give every section or part literal meaning, playing the music to fit their own personal tastes and emotions. This reflects the *qi* of the piece. For example, the two primary parts of *Mei Hua San Nong*, depict different characteristics of the plum blossom. The first part (see fig. 3-3) might reflect its purity, whiteness, elegance, and peacefulness. When the performer plays this part, the music should be tranquil and peaceful. The second part (see fig. 3-4) reflects the vast ambitious momentum behind the plum blossom's struggle in the face of severe cold. This second part should be performed with more agitation and power.

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100. Ibid., 71.



Figure 3-3. *Mei Hua San Nong* mm 29 – 38 <sup>101</sup>



Figure 3-4. *Mei Hua San Nong* mm 163 – 173 <sup>102</sup>

In *Mei Hua San Nong*, although the composer provides metronome markings, the performer should not mechanically follow the tempo. Moreover, there are many different ways of playing the same melody. These variations mirror the *yun* of the piece. The *rubato*-like nature

101. Wei, Li, and Xu, *Selection From Chinese Classical Music for Piano* vol. 3, 26.

102. Ibid.

of the melodic flow in a *qin* piece can be used here. Some notes can be held longer than the notated time-value while other notes can be played shorter than the notated time-value. However, a good command of this *rubato*-like nature depends on familiarity with *qin* music. The performer should listen to *qin* music beforehand and imitate the *rubato*-like feel on the piano. This principle can also be applied to the performance of grace notes at the beginning of the piece (see fig. 3-5). Use of grace notes in the piece imitates the effect of *portamento* or wide *vibrato* in *qin* music.



Figure 3-5. *Mei Hua San Nong* mm. 1-11<sup>103</sup>

In addition, in *Mei Hua San Nong* for *qin*, different performing techniques are used to obtain the different colors in different sections. For example, the “*san*” (open string) and “*fan*” (harmonics) are used in sections one and two respectively (see fig 3-5 and fig 3-3). This characteristic might be applied to the piano performance. Through different performing techniques on the piano, the color contrast can be created.

In short, as a pianist, an understanding of the *qiyun* will yield a more authentic performance. As Laozi advises in *Daodejing* (the book central to Taoism) “the way that can be

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103. Ibid.

spoken of, is not the constant way; The name that can be names, is not the constant name.”<sup>104</sup>

### **Ying-hai Li and *Xi Yang Xiao Gu* (*Xiao and Drum at Sunset*)**

Ying-hai Li, a theorist and composer, was born in Sichuan in 1927, and died on 5 January 2007. He began his training in composition and piano at Chongqing National Conservatory of Music at the age of sixteen, and graduated from the Nanjing National Conservatory of Music in 1948. After teaching at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music (1952-64), Li joined the faculty of the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing. Taking Kodaly and Bartok as his models, Li committed himself to the study of Chinese folk music while teaching at the Conservatory.<sup>105</sup> He was the first Chinese musician to publish a book about Chinese music theory,<sup>106</sup> *Han Zhu Diao Shi Ji Qi He Sheng* (The Modes and Harmony in Chinese Music) (1959), which systematically describes the theory of Chinese modes and modal harmony. His notable piano works are *Xiao and Drum at Sunset* and *Farewell at Yangguan Pass*. His many distinguished pupils include Tan Dun and Wen-jing Guo.

*Xi Yang Xiao Gu* (Xiao and Drums at Sunset), also referred to as “*Xun Yang Pipa*” and “*Moon Night of Xun Yang*,” was originally a solo piece for *pipa* (a plucked four-string Chinese lute), by an unknown composer. *Xiao Gu* is an ancient musical genre from the Han Dynasty (140 BC) that features *pipas* and *drums* and is usually played outdoors.<sup>107</sup> *Xiao* refers to a kind of *pipa*, and *Gu* means *drum*. According to Ren-ge Huang, there are several different notated versions of

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104. Tsu Lao (Laozi), *Tao Te Ching, (Dao De Jing)*. Trans. D.C.Lau (Hongkong: Chinese University Press, 2001), 3.

105. Rong-shen Wang, “A Study of Five Chinese Piano Piece” 78.

106. Kang, “The Development of Chinese Piano Music” 23.

107. Ibid.



*Xi Yang Xiao Gu* for *pipa*.<sup>108</sup> The title “*Chun Jiang Hua Yue Ye (The Flowery Moon Night of Spring River)*” was given by Jin-wen Zhen and Rao-zhang Liu to an arrangement of this piece for a Chinese instrumental ensemble in the 1920s.<sup>109</sup> From that point on, the title *Chun Jiang Hua Yue Ye* has been used when the piece has been performed. The music describes a charming landscape of boats sailing on the Yangzi River at sunset under the light of the moon.

*Xi Yang Xiao Gu* for solo piano was composed by Ying-hai Li in 1972. Like *Mei Hua San Nong*, this work was composed during the Cultural Revolution. In this piece, the composer uses the piano to imitate various sounds characteristic of the Chinese instruments used in the ensemble version, such as the *pipa* (see fig. 3-6), *drums* (see fig. 3-6) and *guzheng* (see fig 3-7).



Figure 3-6. *Xi Yang Xiao Gu* (pipa and drums)<sup>110</sup>

108. Ren-ge Huang, “On Piano Music *Xi Yang Xiao Gu* and Chinese culture,” *Canadian Social Science* 2, No.3 (September 2006): 94.

109. Ibid.

110. Wei, Li, and Xu, *Selection From Chinese Classical Music for Piano* vol. 1, 99.

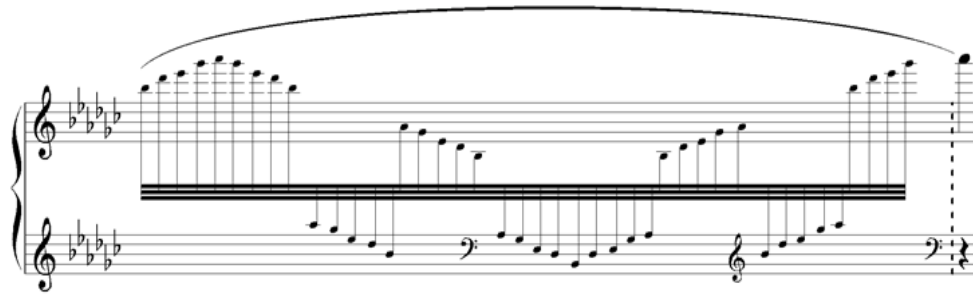


Figure 3-7. *Xi Yang Xiao Gu* (guzheng)<sup>111</sup>

Apart from the introduction and the coda, the piece consists of eight variations on the main melody. The theme and almost all the variations are written in Ab *shang* mode. The “*pipa* chord,”<sup>112</sup> along with quartal and quintal chords, are the primary harmonic materials in this piece.

Like *Mei Hua San Nong*, Chinese philosophies and *pipa* cultures have an influence on the authentic performance of *Xi Yang Xiao Gu*. The ancient notation system for *pipa* is “less precise in terms of rhythm, and is therefore even more dependent on interpretation.”<sup>113</sup> The classical *pipa* repertoire is generally divided into two thematic categories: the serene *wen* and military *wu*. According to Myers, *wen* pieces emphasize smaller gestures and slower tempi, while *wu* pieces typically involve acrobatics, percussive texture, and faster tempi.<sup>114</sup> *Xi Yang Xiao Gu* is a *wen* piece in that it expresses the harmony and union between humans and nature. It reflects the aesthetic concept of Taoism.

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111. Ibid.

112. “*Pipa* chord” is a chord span of an octave with a major second in the middle and the outer pitches a perfect fourth away (in opposite directions) from the inner ones. This type of chord can be related to the open strings of a *pipa* which are tuned as A D E A.

113. John E. Myers, *The way of the pipa: structure and imagery in Chinese lute music* (Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1992), 17.

114. Ibid., 32.

Based on the philosophical and cultural similarity between the *qin* and *pipa*, the suggestions for performing *Mei Hua San Nong* can also be applied to the performance of *Xi Yang Xiao Gu* – freedom of rhythm and tempo, the understanding and application of *qiyun*, and so on.

The introduction of *Xi Yang Xiao Gu* starts off with the free tempo of a Chinese folk rhythm called *San Ban*.<sup>115</sup> In the piano score, the composer marks “*Tempo a piacere*” to represent the same meaning. It is possible that the notation of the introduction may be inaccurate, as suggested by a comparison of the original score with the new score.

First, the concept of *yun* influences the notation. In m. 1, there should be a *ritardando* following the *accelerando* (see fig. 3-8). This same principle can be applied to several places throughout the introduction. In m.3, the duration of the second chord (a quarter note) has been changed to an eighth note with a repetition in the new score. The two subsequent eighth notes in the original score have been changed to two quarter notes in the new score (see fig. 3-9). This correction might be a better choice in relation to *yun*. Moreover, in m.4 and m.8, an *accelerando* and a *ritardando* should be marked (see fig. 3-10).<sup>116</sup>

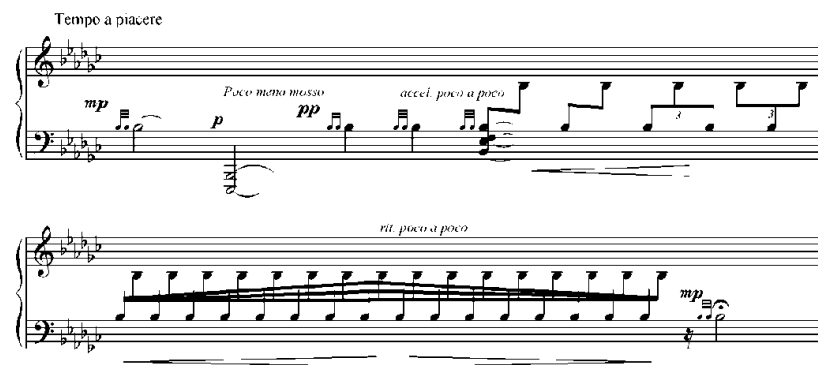


Figure 3-8. *Xi Yang Xiao Gu* m.1

115. Kang, the development of Chinese Piano Music, 23. *Mei Hua San Nong* has the same characteristics.

116. Zhongguo Shida Jingdian Guqu Xinshang, “Xi Yang Xiao Gu,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZoXXyiPa4Rg>



Figure 3-9. *Xi Yang Xiao Gu* m.3

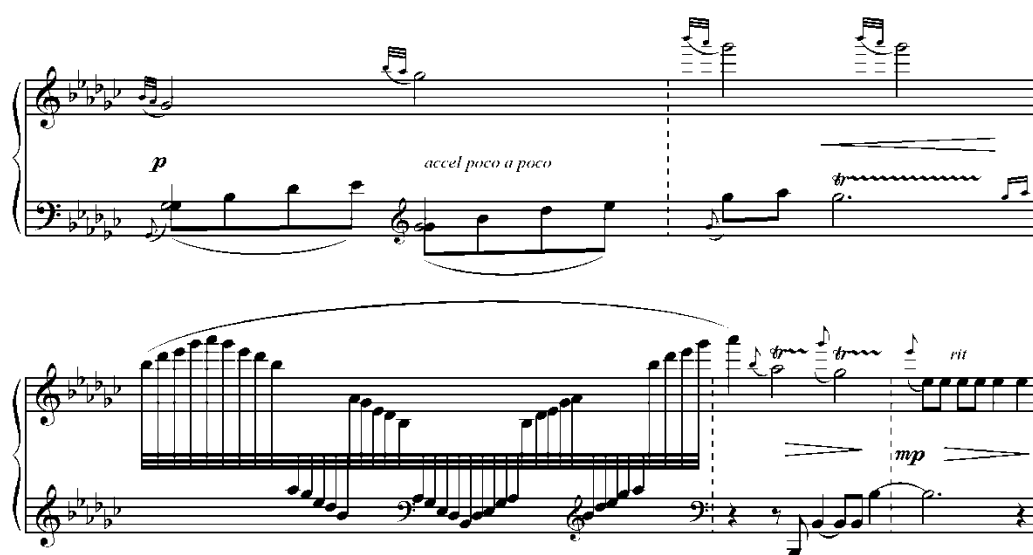


Figure 3-10. *Xi Yang Xiao Gu* m.4-8

Second, the concept of silence influences the notation. In traditional Chinese music, silence is extraordinarily important. It is one of the characteristics of *qi*. The famous Taoist *Zhuangzi* recommended that the best music of all is silence. In it, the enlightened person can hear the music of nature. Regarding the concept of silence in traditional Chinese music, Frank Kouwenhoven states:

Silence in Chinese traditional music is the imaginary continuation of sounds beyond what the normal human ear can detect; it is not only pauses and interruptions but also the dying away of audible sounds, supported by hand and finger movements that may

continue for a while after any audible pitch has disappeared - another way to suggest deep, spiritual listening.<sup>117</sup>

Based on the concept of silence and the resonance of the *pipa*, there should be a quarter rest (or possibly an even longer rest) after the last half note of m. 3 (see fig 3-11). The same principle can be applied to several other places in the piece. For example, in the *Ad lib* section, a short rest can be used between the different phrases (see fig 3-12). As with *Mei Hua San Nong*, an understanding of the *qiyun* will result in a more authentic-sounding performance of the work.

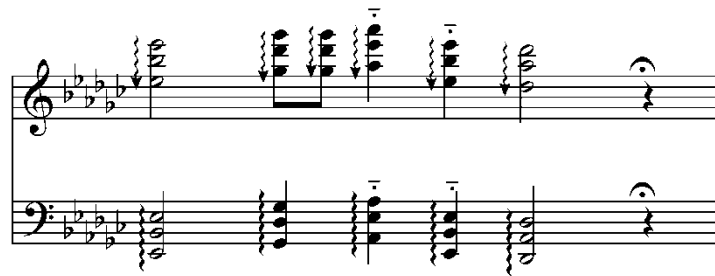


Figure 3-11. *Xi Yang Xiao Gu* m.3



Figure 3-12. *Xi Yang Xiao Gu*

117. Frank Kouwenhoven, "Meaning and Structure," 42

### Qi-gang Chen and *Instants d'un opera de Pekin*

Qi-gang Chen was born in Shanghai in 1955. He received his early music training at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing with Zhong-rong Luo (1978-1983). Moving in 1984 to Paris, he received a state grant to study with Ivo Malec, Claude Ballif and Betsy Jolas, and most influentially, Olivier Messiaen.<sup>118</sup> He obtained a doctorate in musicology at the Sorbonne (1989) and now lives and works as a composer in Paris. Mr. Chen has been a prizewinner in several international competitions, including the 27th International Contest of Symphony Composition of Citta di Trieste (Buffet Crampon) for clarinet and string quartet in Paris, the Hervé Dugardin prize of the SACEM (Society of Composers and Publishers), the Prize Villa Medici Hors les Murs, among others. His works are published by Gérard Billaudot Editeur and Boosey & Hawkes, and have been widely performed throughout the world.

Mr. Chen's works possess a distinct French impressionist flavor, but he also unites Western tradition with the grandiosity characteristic of contemporary China's ambitions, as well as strong influences from Chinese traditional music and folk tunes.

Qi-gang Chen's *Instants d'un Opera de Pekin* (2000), for piano solo, was commissioned by Musique Nouvelle en Liberté as the prescribed piece for the 2000 Olivier Messiaen Contest of the Concours Internationaux de la Ville de Paris. The piece makes explicit reference to Chinese Peking Opera, with two main themes derived from *xingxuan* and *erhuang* of Peking opera<sup>119</sup>. When writing this piece, Mr. Chen used material from his ballet *Raise the Red Lantern*, written

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118. Frank Kouwenhoven, "Chen Qigang," Oxford Music Online, [http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.libezp.lib.lsu.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/49468?q=chen+qigang&search=quick&pos=1&\\_start=1#firsthit](http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.libezp.lib.lsu.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/49468?q=chen+qigang&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit) (accessed Aug 11, 2011).

119. Dong-mei Zhao, "Chen Qi-gang Zuixin Gangqin Zuopin <Jingju Shunjian> de Yishu Chuangzao," *Zhongguo Yinyue* [Chinese Music] no. 4 (2003): 26.

that same year.<sup>120</sup>

The formal structure of *Instants d'un Opera de Pekin* can be characterized as variations. Two main themes (see fig. 3-13), presented at the beginning of the piece, form the basis of all subsequent musical events.



Figure 3-13. Two themes of Qi-gang Chen's *Instants d'un Opera de Pekin* mm. 9-11<sup>121</sup>

Theme I (*thème*) comes from *xingxian* (walking strings), which is usually used as the background music when a Peking Opera character, *Chou*, makes a speech and moves around the stage.<sup>122</sup> *Xingxian* has no given characteristic and tempo in Peking Opera, thus it can be used and varied quite freely.<sup>123</sup> Theme II (*contre thème*), although with no explicit quotations, might have a connection with the introduction of *erhuang* (see fig 3-14).<sup>124</sup>

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120. Ibid.

121. Qi-gang Chen, *Instants d'un Opera de Pekin*. (Paris: Gérard Billaudot Editeur SA, 2005), 4.

122. Dong-mei Zhao, "Chen Qi-gang Zuixin Gangqin Zuopin <Jingju Shunjian> de Yishu Chuangzao," *Zhongguo Yinyue* [Chinese Music] no. 4 (2003): 27.

123. Ibid.

124. Ibid.



Figure 3-14. Introduction of *erhuang*

In addition, the first four notes of theme I are the retrograde of the first four notes of theme II. Both themes are written using the *Yayue* scale.<sup>125</sup> After a two-bar Prologue, fragmentations from themes I and II appear simultaneously in m.3. The full version of the two themes appears in mm.9-10. After m.11, seven variations follow. Throughout the arrangement, fragments from both themes overlap or juxtapose with each other, serving as transitions linking one section with another. The following graph represents the formal structure of this piece (see table 3-1):

Table 3-1. Structure of Qi-gang Chen's *Instants d'un Opera de Pekin*

	Intro	T	C	V <sub>1</sub>	C	V <sub>2</sub>	C	V <sub>3</sub>	C
mm.	1-8	9-11	12-18	18-38	38-50	51-66	66-73	73-88	88-102
T	1,2	1,2	1	1	1,2	1,2	1	1,2	1
	V <sub>4</sub>	C	V <sub>5</sub>	V <sub>6</sub>	V <sub>7</sub>	C	CS		
mm.	103-119	120-130	131-157	158-182	183- 189	190-191-	192-end		
T	1	1,2	2,1	1,2	2,1	1	1,2		

(T= theme, V= variation, C= connection or transition, CS=conclusion)

125. See chapter II, Theory of Chinese Traditional Scales and Modes.



Apart from Qi-gang Chen's frequent use of the pentatonic system in *Instants d'un Opera de Pekin*, some of the harmonic sonorities and keyboard textures are reminiscent of music by Debussy and Messiaen: the use of harmonies derived from both the whole-tone scale and pentatonic scales; ninth and thirteenth chords; quartal and quintal chords; bitonality or polytonalities; parallel movement of chords; and layering of textures. However, Chen's music remains informed by his special treatment of the modes and themes. The origin of the harmonic design in *Instants d'un Opera de Pekin* can be found in the melodic contour of the two themes. Throughout the piece, the harmonic materials, includes three tetrachord set classes (0358), (0247), (0257), two trichord set classes (025), (027) and dyads set class (05) appear most often. They all come from the pentatonic scale. However, the most important harmonic material of this piece is what Chinese people call the “*pipa* chord,”<sup>126</sup> which is heard very often in this piece. The first four notes of the two themes form the basis for the application of “*pipa chords*,” so that the horizontal lines to a certain extent determine the vertical sonorities in this piece. Mr. Chen often uses the “*pipa*” chord with the outer voices playing the two themes. Meanwhile, the use of bitonality or polytonality, and the displacement of main melodic tones in different registers, offers color. An excellent example can be found in m.4 (see fig 3-14). As to the piano techniques, what the composer said offers the best description:

Since it is a commissioned work for a piano competition, I must consider three questions: first, the piano techniques. Because it is a commissioned work for a piano competition, it has no meaning if it is not difficult. This difficulty has two meanings: one is the difficulty of the sound, and another one is the difficulty of the techniques. I try to put them together in such a short piece...<sup>127</sup>

The above-mentioned compositional characteristics of this piece give some clues as to how the piece should be performed. First, like other Chinese piano pieces, the pentatonic scales that

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126. See Xi Yang Xiao Gu.

127. You-dan Zhang, ““Xi’wei Shizu de <Jingju Shunjian>,” *Profile of Musicians*, 39.

alternate quickly between white keys and black keys on the piano call for the pianist to continuously adjust the position of his or her hands and fingers—something that requires time to get accustomed to, especially for Westerners. Second, the juxtaposition or overlapping of the two main themes always requires the pianist to play the different musical lines simultaneously. The application of counterpoint techniques in this piece not only demands firm control of the fingers and pedals, it requires the pianist to become familiar with Peking opera themes, paying close attention to recognition of different melodic lines before the performance. The phrasing in mm.3-5 is a good example that exemplifies this. As described above, in m.4, many pianists usually pay attention to the two themes written in the bitonality G *gong* and Gb *gong*. However, another entrance of theme II in the bass line is usually neglected. It is a rhythmic prolongation of the second theme which begins from in m.3. Here, the layering of textures causes difficulty in performance. Thus, different ways of touching the keys and careful use of pedals are quite important. The contrast of timbre among the various layers more clearly expresses the different melodic lines (see fig 3-15).

The musical score for Figure 3-15 consists of three staves. The top staff is in treble clef, the middle staff is in alto clef, and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The time signature is 4/4. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings (p, ppp). The score is labeled with 'theme I' and 'theme II' and includes a '8va' marking. The score is written in a bitonal style, with G *gong* and Gb *gong* indicated by the notes and accidentals.

Figure 3-15. Qi-gang Chen's *Instants d'un Opera de Peking* mm. 3-6<sup>128</sup>

128. Qi-gang Chen, *Instants d'un Opera de Peking*. (Paris: Gérard Billaudot Editeur SA, 2005), 3.

Third, in *Instantes d'un Opera de Pekin*, octave displacement appears in several places, such as mm.16-18 (see fig 3-16) and m.194 (see fig 3-17). This can cause the pianist to focus on a variety of tone colors produced by displacement of the main melodic tones through disjunct motion, thereby neglecting the contour of the melody. Because both elements are important, the pianist should show both aspects.

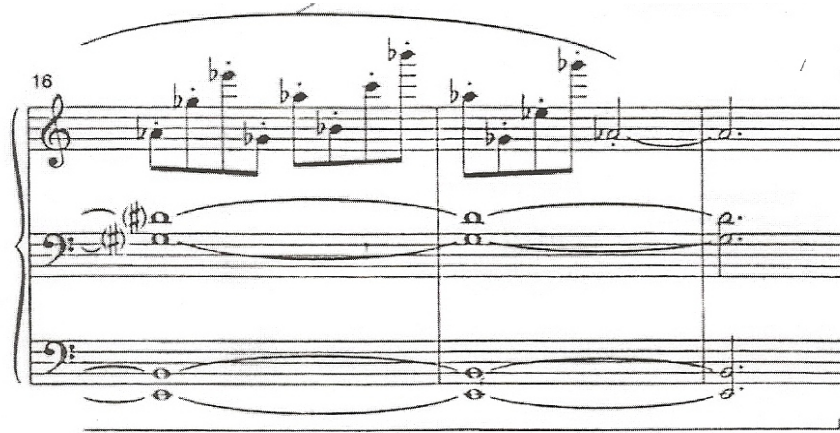


Figure 3-16. Qi-gang Chen's *Instantes d'un Opera de Pekin* m.16-18<sup>129</sup>

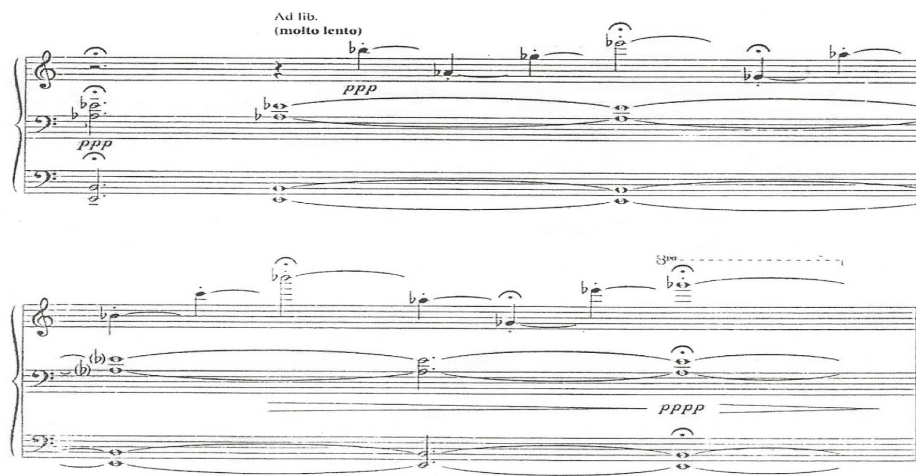


Figure 3-17. Qi-gang Chen's *Instantes d'un Opera de Pekin* m. 194<sup>130</sup>

129. Qi-gang Chen, *Instantes d'un Opera de Pekin*. (Paris: Gérard Billaudot Editeur SA, 2005), 4.

130. Ibid., 20.

Finally, the pianist should listen to Peking opera beforehand, learning how the opera is supposed to sound and understanding the *qiyun* of Peking opera, such as the *rubato*-like nature of melody and *sanban*, which are very important to achieving a more idiomatic performance of the piece.<sup>131</sup> For example, at the beginning of this piece, the composer offers the tempo marking “*Lento, discreto, Ad lib*” to represent the underlying meaning of *Sanban*. When the performer plays the main themes in mm.9-10, an *accelerando* and *ritardando* can be applied. Furthermore, a dotted rhythm can be added to the highest note of the melody, D#, which is the most colorful note of the *yayue* scale (see fig 3-18).<sup>132</sup> This is likely to approach the rubato-like nature of Peking Opera melody.



Figure 3-18. Qi-gang Chen’s *Instant d’un opera de Pekin* mm. 9-10<sup>133</sup>

131. Elizabeth Wichmann, *Listening to Theatre: the Aural Dimension of Beijing Opera* (Hawaii: University of Hawaii press, 1991), 67. According to Elizabeth Wichmann, *Sanban* in Peking Opera means “dispersed or loosed or scattered accented beat, which is the basic free metrical type. It is generally sung at moderate tempos...; Lyrics with rather ten or seven written-characters per line may be sung in dispersed-meter...”

132. There is an augmented fourth between the *gong* A and the *Bianzhi* D#, which is also the most colorful interval in the melody of Peking Opera.

133. Qi-gang Chen, *Instant d’un Opera de Pekin*. (Paris: Gérard Billaudot Editeur SA, 2005), 4.

Apart from this, since the piece makes explicit reference to the materials of Chinese Peking Opera, different musical characters and dramatic feelings are suggested by the different ways the themes unfold throughout the work. These features of the piece give the pianist much more imaginative space when he or she performs this piece. For example, in mm.95 – 102 (see fig 3-19), the percussive chords can be imagined as the noisy banging of gongs and cymbals used in Peking Opera. This imagination is likely to influence the manner of touching the keys and the pedals.



Figure 3-19. Qi-gang Chen's *Instants d'un opera de Pekin* mm. 95-102<sup>134</sup>

### Bright Sheng and *My Song*

Bright Sheng, a Chinese-American composer, conductor, and pianist, was born in Shanghai on December 6<sup>th</sup> 1955, and began studying piano with his mother at the age of four. During the Cultural Revolution, Sheng was sent out to work in a folk music and dance troupe in Qinghai province near the Tibetan border, where he studied and collected folk music. This period

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134. Qi-gang Chen, *Instants d'un Opera de Pekin*. (Paris: Gérard Billaudot Editeur SA, 2005), 8.

in Qing Hai served as the foundation for Sheng's later compositions and inspirations. In 1978, he entered the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, where he earned his undergraduate degree in music composition. In 1982, he moved to the United States, where he first studied at Queens College in New York City under George Perle and Hugo Weisgall. Later, Sheng studied at Columbia University, where he earned a D.M.A. in composition with Chou Wen-Chung, Jack Beeson, and Mario Davidovsky. In 1985, Sheng studied privately with Leonard Bernstein, who encouraged Sheng to develop his compositional approach, fusing Eastern and Western musical elements in his works.<sup>135</sup> In 1995, he joined the composition faculty at the University of Michigan. He has received numerous awards and prizes, from organizations such as the National Endowment for the Arts, the Naumburg Foundation, and the Guggenheim Foundation.. In November 2001, he received the coveted MacArthur Foundation Fellowship — the so-called "Genius Award". Mr. Sheng's compositions have been commissioned and performed by many orchestras, such as the New York Philharmonic, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Boston Symphony, and the Philadelphia Orchestra.

Mr. Sheng has described “his biggest compositional challenge as integrating Asian and Western cultures without compromising the integrity of either.”<sup>136</sup> Fusing music materials from both East and West, his works reflect his own cross-cultural experience. Mr. Sheng admires Bela

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135. Mark Swed, “A Long Musical March From China,” from "Musical March," 2. Sheng said that when he asked Bernstein if it would be possible to fuse the Chinese and Western musical traditions, "Bernstein answered with surprise and said, 'what do you mean fusion?' 'Everything is fusion. Stravinsky is fusion. Shostakovich is fusion. Debussy is fusion. Brahms is fusion with folk music. I am fusion. Of course it's possible.' "

136. Wei-hua Zhang, “Sheng Bright [Zong Liang],” Oxford Music Online [http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.libezp.lib.lsu.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/42546?q=bright+sheng&search=quick&pos=1&\\_start=1#firsthit](http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.libezp.lib.lsu.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/42546?q=bright+sheng&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit) (accessed Aug 11, 2011).

Bartok as his model, especially the ways Bartók fused folk music with Western music.<sup>137</sup>

*My Song* is a four-movement piece composed in 1988. It was commissioned and premiered by the pianist Peter Serkin on November 11, 1989, in New York. The inspiration of *My Song* was twofold: “First, Peter Serkin's musicality and virtuosity, and second, my attachment to Chinese folk music.”<sup>138</sup> In this piece, Sheng combined Western compositional techniques with elements that draw from his own musical heritage, especially Chinese traditional folk music and dance. According to the composer, *My Song* might represent his early compositional style:

At the time [1980s-90s], my primary compositional concentration was to develop a melodic and harmonic style within the boundaries of Chinese folk music, which are mostly in pentatonic modes, and contemporary Western Classical music.<sup>139</sup>

*My Song* may be the best example of the classifications of Chinese piano pieces mentioned in Chapter Two. The three categories of Chinese pieces were fused together by Sheng in *My Song*, creating a piece that fully reflects his cultural and musical identity, rooted in both East and West. As described by Mr. Sheng, pentatonicism pervades *My Song*.<sup>140</sup> The five-note pentatonic collection (02479) and its subsets, does not contain any semitones or tritones. Similar to Qi-gang Chen in his *Instants d'un Opera de Pekin*, in *My Song*, the musical tension is generated by the use of bitonalities and polytonalities which juxtapose two pentatonic collections a half step, a major third, or a tritone apart. The juxtaposition of different pentatonic collections occurs frequently in the second, third, and fourth movements, but not in the first. Moreover,

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137. Ann McCuchan, *The Muse That Sings* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 209.

138. Bright Sheng, *Composer's notes for My Song* (New York: Schirmer, 1989).

139. Ibid.

140. Ibid.

Sheng also uses set theory and cyclicism in *My Song*. The set class (0257), a highly symmetrical pentatonic subset, is used as the primary motive that appears in each movement and functions as a unifying device, giving the piece a strong sense of cohesion.

“The prelude-like first movement, in folklore style, is constructed through the development of heterophony, a typical device in Oriental music.”<sup>141</sup> This movement may not directly quote any folk music tunes, but it is imbued with the spirit of folk music. The main theme introduced at the beginning is based on the set class (0257) (see fig. 3-20). Each voice plays the melody simultaneously with variation, either in different rhythms or pitches, or with various embellishments and elaborations. In this movement, the musical tension increases and releases through the gradual thickening and thinning of the texture.

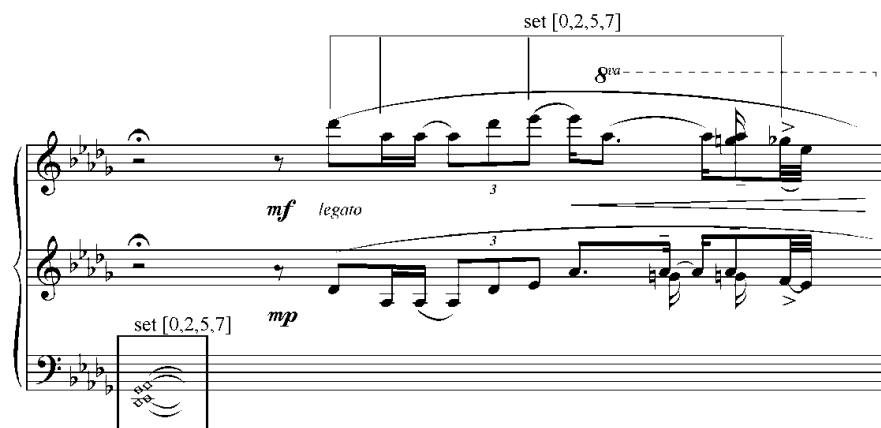


Figure 3-20. Example of set (0257)<sup>142</sup>

The humorous and joyful second movement is inspired by a folk tune, *Tai Yang Chu Lai Xi Yang Yang* (Happiness of the Sunrise), from Sichuan province in southwest China (see fig. 3-21). The lyrics of this song express the optimistic and joyful spirit of labor. The original tune is

141. Bright Sheng, *Composer's notes for My Song* (New York: Schirmer, 1989).

142. Bright Sheng's *My Song I*, mm. 1. Copyright ©1989 by G. Schirmer, Inc. (ASCAP), International Copyright Secured. All Rights Reserved. Used by Permission.



written in D *shang* mode. Here, the composer writes it in F *shang* at the beginning. The pitch class set (0257) used throughout the movement also can be extracted from the original tune. Doing this, Mr. Sheng integrates it into complex polyphonic writing in various rhythms, textures, and harmonic intensities. The formal structure of this movement appears as a set of variations. Musical tensions are generated through use of the bitonality, which juxtaposes two pentatonic collections with a major third, and a major or minor second apart.



Figure 3-21. Chinese folk song: *Tai Yang Chu Lai Xi Yang Yang*

As with the first movement, the third movement may not directly quote any folk tune. It is a savage dance in which the melody grows through a series of "Chinese sequences." This is a term, invented by Mr. Sheng, which describes a type of melodic development in Chinese instrumental music wherein each repetition of the initial motive increases the number of notes, duration, and tessitura.<sup>143</sup> The beginning of the movement best exemplifies the term (see fig. 3-22). Accompanied by the left hand's *ostinato*-like figure, the right hand repeats the initial motive by increasing the number of notes until the whole melody appears. From m.1 to m.12, the Fibonacci sequence<sup>144</sup> is used. The composer also uses bitonality in this movement to juxtapose

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143. Ibid.

144. In mathematics, the "Fibonacci sequence" are the numbers in the following integer sequence: 0,1,1,2,3,5,8,13,21,34,55,89,144,..... By definition, the first two Fibonacci numbers are 0 and 1, and each subsequent number is the sum of the previous two. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fibonacci\\_number](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fibonacci_number) (accessed Aug 11, 2011).

two pentatonic collections with a minor second apart. In addition, the motivic set class (0257) permeates the entire movement.

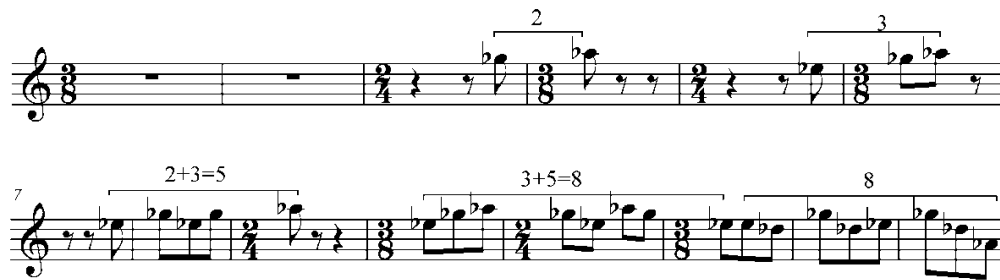


Figure 3-22. “Chinese sequences” and “Fibonacci sequence”<sup>145</sup>

Mr. Sheng names the fourth movement “Nostalgia”, and adopts a famous Chinese folk song from northern Shanxi in China – “*San Shi Li Pu*” (“Village of Thirty Miles”) (see fig. 2-15) in its entirety.<sup>146</sup> However, the composer changes a pitch F to E from the original melody. According to Lu-Ting Ho, the pitch E added here can be viewed as *ku yin* (feelings of sadness) that “comes from an old theatre genre in northwest China called the *qin giang* of Shanxi, whose music is very colorful and dramatic.”<sup>147</sup> The folk song depicts a love story between a pair of youths, and the music is slow and quiet. The pitch-class set (0257) functions as the core motivic material for the folk tune and the counter-melody. The bitonality used throughout this movement juxtaposes two pentatonic collections of the two hands with a tritone apart: C *gong*/F# *gong* (see fig. 3-23).

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145. Bright Sheng’s *My Song III*, mm.1-14. Copyright ©1989 by G. Schirmer, Inc. (ASCAP), International Copyright Secured. All Rights Reserved. Used by Permission.

146. The original tune has been analyzed in Chinese scales and modes in Chapter II, see fig. 2-15.

147. Lu-Ting Ho and Kuo-huang Han, “On Chinese Scales and National Modes,” *Asian Music* 14, No. 1 (1982): 140.



Figure 3-23. Bright Sheng's *My Song IV*, mm. 1-4<sup>148</sup>

In *My Song*, three special piano techniques are used: (1) depressing keys silently and using sostenuto pedal to sustain the notes until the end of the movement; (2) using the fingertip to tap the string inside the piano; and (3) pressing down both the sustain pedal and *una corda* pedal by the left foot. These techniques reflect Mr. Sheng's interest in color, as well as the influence of several twentieth-century Western composers. The first technique, whose purpose is to exploit sympathetic vibration, can also be found in Schoenberg's *Three Piano Pieces*, op.11, and Aaron Copland's *Piano Variations*. The second technique can be found in Cowell's *Aeolian Harp*.<sup>149</sup>

When performing *My Song*, the pianist should pay attention to several things. First, as with Qi-gang Chen's *Instants d'un Opera de Pekin*, contrapuntal writing is one of Sheng's favorite compositional techniques. Thus, familiarity with the quoted folk songs and recognition of different melodic lines in different voices is essential. For example, the heterophony in the

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148. Bright Sheng's *My Song IV*, mm.1-4. Copyright ©1989 by G. Schirmer, Inc. (ASCAP), International Copyright Secured. All Rights Reserved. Used by Permission.

149. In 1919 Henry Cowell wrote and published *New Musical Resources*, a widely read work on the variety techniques used in his own music. Shortly thereafter he began to tour as a pianist, playing his own experimental works. *Aeolian Harp* (1923) is one of his first pieces for what is termed the "string piano" - rather than using the keys to play the instrument, the pianist reaches inside the instrument and plucks and scrapes the strings directly.

first movement asks each voice to play the melody simultaneously. The pianist plays three to four independent melodic lines to imitate the effects of heterophonic singing or playing in traditional Chinese music. Furthermore, the complexity of the notated rhythmic relationships, especially rhythmic counterpoint and frequent subdivisions of larger values, can pose a real challenge in performance. The fluency and integrity of the various melodic lines are not easy to project.. Second, in order to the imitate the *glissando*-like effect in traditional Chinese folk singing, the composer uses a notation wherein different durations and dynamics are applied to two different notes of the minor second.<sup>150</sup> As mentioned in the discussion on *Mei Hua San Nong*, many decorations or embellishments in Chinese music occupy a very significant role, and are a part of the melodic line rather than subordinate to it. A lack of awareness of the *glissando* in Chinese folk singing makes imitating the effect difficult. Third, there is the extraordinary importance attached to silence in *My Song*. As with *Mei Hua San Nong* and other Chinese piano pieces, silence is one characteristic of *qi* in Chinese music. There are a number of rests or blank measures at the end of each movement in *My Song*. Use of the rest and the blank measures is quite similar to the concept of “blank leaving” in Chinese calligraphy or paintings. Feeling these rests rather than simply relying on counting the beats is quite important.

### **Chen Yi and *Duo Ye***

Chen Yi, born in Guangzhou on 4 April 1953, is probably the best-known female Chinese composer. She began to study violin and the piano as a child, but was sent to the countryside as a laborer for two years during the Cultural Revolution. At the age of seventeen, she served as leader and composer for the local Beijing opera troupe in Guangzhou. She was admitted to the

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150. In the performing notes, Bright Sheng asks that “the duration of the shorter note should be played exactly, and the dynamics of the longer note should be slightly louder than the shorter note.”

Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing in 1978. Studying composition with Wu Zuqiang and Alexander Goehr, she earned her Master's degree in composition in 1986. After this, Chen Yi traveled to the United States to study primarily with Chou Wen-chung and Mario Davidovsky at Columbia University in New York City in 1986. She earned her DMA in 1993, then served as composer-in-residence with the Women's Philharmonic and the Aptos Creative Arts program in San Francisco. After teaching at the Peabody Conservatory (1996–8), she accepted an endowed professorship in the Conservatory of Music at the University of Missouri in Kansas City since 1998. Chen Yi's works have been performed by orchestras, such as the National Symphony, the American Composers Orchestra, the Austrian Radio Symphony Orchestra, and the BBC Philharmonic. She has been the recipient of several awards and fellowships, including the Ives Living Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the ASCAP Concert Music Award, the Guggenheim Fellowship, the Goddard Lieberman Fellowship from the AAAL, the CalArts Alpert Award, the NYU Sorel Medal, and the UT Eddie Medora King Composition Prize. Chen Yi's works are published by Theodore Presser Company. Deeply rooted in the Chinese traditional music and folk songs, Chen Yi has developed a personal style that successfully combines Western compositional techniques with elements of Chinese musical culture.

*Duo Ye* (1984) was composed when Chen Yi was still studying in China. The piece clearly demonstrates the composer's synthesis of Chinese and Western elements in her music. The piece won the first prize at the Fourth National Composition Competition in 1985. The composer drew inspiration from an old traditional dance music form of the *Dong*, a minority ethnic group in Guangxi, southwest China. This work became one of her most frequently performed work and the composer arranged and transcribed it into several instrumental forms,

such as *Duo Ye* for chamber orchestra (1985), *Duo Ye No. 2* for full orchestra (1987), and *Duo Ye* for *pipa* solo (1995).

Throughout *Duo Ye*, Chen Yi explores the possibilities of combining Chinese folk music elements with modern Western composition techniques. As an example, she integrates the original *Dong* tune with set theory and compound rhythms to represent the primitive local style. Another exploration involves juxtaposing the Chinese characteristic rhythm *yu-he-ba* (Sum of Eight) and *jin-gan-lan* (Golden Olive) from “*Shifan luogu* (*Shifan* Drum)” with homophonic and polyphonic writing to represent the improvisatory local singing style. Finally, she mixes the twelve-tone technique and the Peking Opera melodies to create a contrast between different musical characters.

The formal structure of the piece is somewhat controversial. Several writers, like Jian-ping Tang, say this work possesses musical elements closely resembling the single-movement sonata form.<sup>151</sup> However, Ying Xu, a Chinese critic, suggests looking at *Duo Ye*’s form in various ways, taking a flexible and open-minded approach.<sup>152</sup> In general though, the ternary formal structure is quite clear (see fig. 3-24):

A	tr	B	A'	Coda
Largo-Allegro mm.1-67	Adagio 67	Andante 68-105	Allegro, meno mosso 109-134	Vivo con animato 128 - end

Figure 3-24. Structure of *Duo Ye*

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151. Jian-ping Tang, “Tradition is Alive: a Study of the Chamber Music Compositions *Duo Ye* and *Sparkle* by Chen Yi,” *Journal of Music In China* Vol. 1 (October, 1999): 139. Jian-ping Tang, associate Professor at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, finds similarity between *Duo Ye* and the late-Romanticist single-movement cyclic form and uses pitch class theory to illustrate the inner relationship between the themes and sections.

152. Ying Xu, “Wang jin zhi qi, can gu ding fa – qing nian zuo qu jia Chen Yi yin yue hui ting hou [Creating Wonders from Contemporary, Setting Rules from Ancient Tradition—a review of young composer Chen Yi’s concert], *Zhongguo Qing Nian Bao* [China Youth Daily], 22 June 1986, 3.

Two principal themes are used in this piece: the Dong folk tune and a melody in the style of Peking Opera.<sup>153</sup> *Duo Ye* is “an old traditional dance music form of the Dong minority from the Guangxi Province in China. The leader singer sings impromptu in music, words, and tempo, while others dance slowly and harmoniously in a circle, with a bonfire in the middle.”<sup>154</sup> The following example is chosen from a *Dong* folksong *Houlu* [Throat Path] (see fig. 3-25). The melody is written in the *yu* mode, which is similar to the theme I of Chen Yi’s *Duo Ye*.



Figure 3-25. Dong folksong from Hunan “Hou Lu”<sup>155</sup>

*Duo Ye* begins with the three motivic notes: E, C# and F# (see fig. 3-26). The notes form the melodic cell of the folk tune from *Dong*. Chen Yi used this motivic set class (025) as the main melodic material, developing it throughout the piece.<sup>156</sup> At the beginning, and unlike in homophonic and polyphonic composition, the polytonal treatment of folksongs and the

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153. Chen Yi’s letter (#2, 1989) to Lei Vai-Meng, in Vai-Meng Lei, “Three Pieces by Contemporary Chinese Composer: Lam Bun-Ching, Chne Yi, and Zhou Long” (PhD.diss., University of Illinios at Urbana-Champaign, 1990), 121.

154. Yi Cheng’s notes for *Duo Ye*.

155. Xiaole Li, “Chen Yi’s Piano Music: Chinese Aesthetics and Western Models” (PhD diss. University of Hawai’s, 2003), 195.

156. Yi Chen’s notes for *Duo Ye*, 1999 and also Wendy Wan-Ki Lee, “Chinese Musical Influences, Western Structural Techniques: The Compositional Design of Chen Yi’s *Duo Ye*, 2,” *iSCI: The Composer’s Prospective*.

contrasting of registers and tempos are used to capture the vocal call-and-response element of the folk tune.



Figure 3-26. Motivic notes of *Duo Ye*

After a slow and short transition, the B section begins with the statement of theme II, borrowed from a tune from Peking Opera (see fig. 3-27). The twelve-tone technique is applied at the beginning of this section, in which the left hand plays a twelve-tone *ostinato* while the right hand plays a quiet and lyrical melodic line derived from the Peking Opera. The uneven grouping of eighth notes in the twelve-tone *ostinato* (3+2+3) shows the influence of Bartok. The *Duo Ye* motive recurs and develops in the brief A' section and the coda. A reminiscence of the slow Peking Opera tune echoes briefly in the penultimate measure. The entire piece finishes with the first two notes of the motive E – C#.

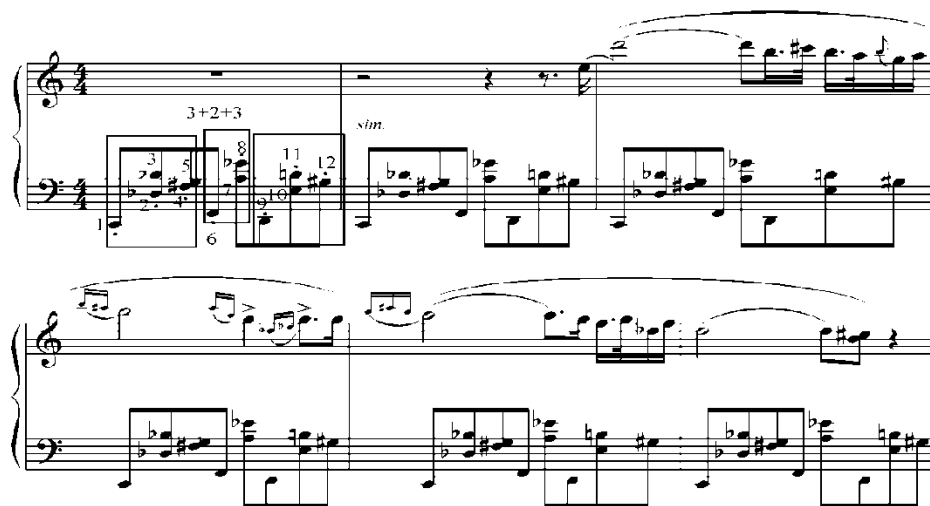


Figure 3-27. Chen Yi's *Duo Ye* section B



Regarding the rhythmic organization of *Duo Ye*, Chen Yi explains: “the combinations and the contrasts between parts, the meters designed, and the numbers of note groupings, are inspired by the original rhythmic organizations called *yu-he-ba* (Sum of Eight) and *jin-gan-lan* (Golden Olive) from folk music.”<sup>157</sup> These two rhythmic patterns derive from “*Shifan-luogu* (Shifan Drum)” music. *Shifan* Drum is a type of traditional percussion ensemble music that is common in Southeast China. The bamboo flute, gong and drum are the leading instruments in this genre.<sup>158</sup> The typical rhythmic pattern for *yu-he-ba* (Sum of Eight) is: in a pair of things, while the number of one element decreases, another increases. When both parts are put together, the sum total is eight (See fig. 3-28). It can be seen as a reflection of the *yin-yang* emblem of Taoism.

A:	7	5	3	1
	+	+	+	+
B:	1	3	5	7
-----				
Sum:	8	8	8	8

Figure 3-28. Sum of Eight

In *Duo Ye*, a similar rhythmic organization can be observed in many passages. For example, at the beginning of the piece, the sum of each pair of call-and -response phrasings in the opening measures is 11 beats (instead of 8). The upper voice begins with a solo leading singer singing a quarter note, followed by a half note. In its second appearance (m.5), the three-beat group in m.1 is expanded to a six-beat group, and then expands respectively to seven beats in m.8 and eight beats in m.11. In the lower voice, the responding chorus respectively decreases its number of beats from eight, to five, to four, to three in mm.2-5, 6-7, 9-11, and 12-13. The

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157. Ibid.

158. Ibid.

following figure shows the number of beats changes between the voices of the leading singer and responding chorus from measure 1 to 13 (see fig. 3-29).<sup>159</sup>

Leading solo voice increases:	3 – 6 – 7 – 8
Chorus decreases:	8 – 5 – 4 – 3
-----	
Sum	11 11 11 11

Figure 3-29. Sum of eleven from *Duo Ye* mm. 1-13

At the climax of the piece, the Sum of Eight is again used between upper and lower voices (see fig. 3-30).



Figure 3-30. Example of “sum of eight” from Chen Yi’s *Duo Ye*, mm. 110-113<sup>160</sup>

In addition to this, the rhythms in the A’ section feature a cross-rhythm, wherein the right hand’s melody is in a 4/4, while accents articulated by the left hand evoke the feeling of a 3/8 (see fig 3-31).

159. Xiao-le Li, “Chen Yi’s Piano Music: Chinese Aesthetics and Western Models” (PhD diss. University of Hawai’i, 2003), 195.

160. Ji-hao Quan, Yi Chen, and Jian-zhong Wang, *Assigned for The 1994 China International Piano Competition* (People’s Music Publishing House, 1994), 19.



Figure 3-31. Example of “hemiola” from Chen Yi’s *Duo ye*

In general, *Duo Ye*’s rhythmic scheme is quite complex. Apart from the Chinese rhythmic patterns of *yu-he-ba* (Sum of Eight) and *jin-gan-lan* (Golden Olive), the design of its rhythmic organization is heavily influenced by Stravinsky in its use of asymmetrical note groupings, extensive use of *ostinato*, and frequent changes in meter. Such rhythmic complexity can easily become problematic when performing this piece. In order to achieve a more authentic performance, the pianist must acquire a comprehensive understanding of all characteristics of the old traditional dance music form *Duo Ye*, such as the characteristic of the melodies, the vocal call – and – response effects, the improvisational style in words, music and tempo. Following this, pianists should use their own imagination and musicality in performing the work. For instance, at the beginning of the work, there are frequent changes of tempo. The alternation between a slow leader’s song (*Largo*) and fast group dance (*Allegro*) is derived from *Duo Ye*, the age-old dance form, but the original chorus dance starts out in a slow tempo rather than in *Allegro*. Even though the composer provides metronome markings, the performer should not play mechanically. The expression and effect of the call-and-response singing and the feeling of the dance are more important than the maintenance of strict time. Portraying the folk spirit is central to performance

of this piece.

### **Li-san Wang, Lu-sheng Ye and Two Different Editions of *Lan Hua Hua (Beautiful Orchid)***

Lu-sheng Ye was born in Guangxi in July 1930. He graduated from Huanan Institute of Arts in 1953 and has worked in the mass art hall of Qianjiang in Hubei Province since 1972. His major piano work is titled *Lan Huahua (Beautiful Orchid)*.

Li-san Wang, born in Wuhan, China in 1933, is a well-known composer, music educator and music theorist. In his works, “the timbre of traditional Chinese instruments, as well as the application of calligraphy, stand out and constitute an important element in Wang’s creative fusion of both Western and Chinese cultures.”<sup>161</sup> Mr. Wang began his systematic musical training in 1948 when he studied at the Sichuan Academy of Arts.<sup>162</sup> Beginning in 1951, he studied composition with Tong Shang, Shan-de Ding, Yu-shi Yang, and Russian composer F. G. Azarmonov at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. During this period, Mr. Wang composed a piano piece called *Lan Huahua (Beautiful Orchid)*, which represented his personal fusion of Chinese folk tunes with Western compositional techniques. The piece was received very well and became a part of the regular concert repertoire throughout China. Another remarkable composition by Li-san Wang is his *Sonatina* for solo piano, written around the same time under the direction of Tong Sang. It won the first prize in composition at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music in 1957.

In 1963, Mr. Wang was assigned to the Harbin Art Institute's Music Department to teach music theory and composition. During the Cultural Revolution, he was sent to the countryside as

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161. Rong-jie Xu, “Innovation and Tradition in Lisan Wang’s Piano Suite *Other Hill*” (DMA diss., University of Nebraska, 2010), 5-6.

162. Sichuan Academy of Arts is the precursor of Sichuan Conservatory of Music.

a laborer, which offered him an opportunity to study and extensively collect folk music. In 1972, Mr. Wang was reassigned to teach at Harbin. His music composed after the Cultural Revolution is considered to be pioneering, revealing his fusion of new traditional Chinese and contemporary Western compositional style and techniques. His important piano works in this period included *Brother and Sister Reclaim Wasteland*, *Impressions of Paintings by Higashiyama Kaii*, *Tashan Collection –A Series of Five Preludes and Fugues Written in Chinese Modes*.

*Lan Huahua (Beautiful Orchid)* is a popular folksong from Shanxi province in the mid-northern region of China, and is one of the most famous Chinese folksongs. Those folksongs found in the Northwest and North region of China have special names like *xintianyou*, a type of *shange* (mountain song).<sup>163</sup> The source of the song *Lan Huahua* is uncertain, but it is believed to be a song passed down through the generations via oral transmission. Like most mountain songs, this piece is a lyrical love song. However, the lyrics of the song are quite narrative. They tell the story of a country girl, Lan Huahua, escaping from an arranged marriage and trying to seek her true love.<sup>164</sup> The story ends with love's passion cut tragically short. Ding Mai offers a translation of the lyrics as follows:

Threads of black and threads of blue, bluer than the sky.  
Sewed for baby Lan Huahua, apple of her mother's eye.  
Shooting up like the sorghum tall, beauty brings her fame.  
In every village in the land, everybody knows her name.  
New Year brought the matchmaker, fixed the bridegroom's price.  
After the payments made in March, in April she'll become his wife.  
Wedding music fills the air, drums and whistles sound.  
She is torn from her own true love and carried to the Zhou compound.

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163. For detail information of *Shange*, please see the characteristics of folk songs in the second chapter.

164. The song's lyrics reflected social, economic and political circumstances relevant to the old China. At that time, many marriages were arranged by the eldership in the family. The youth have no right to decide their marriage. Right now, the arranged marriage becomes outdated in China.

Lan Huahua steps from the wedding chair, there espies the groom.  
Old and wizened, eye half-blind, one foot already in the tomb.  
You don't have long to live, old man! You'll soon meet your end.  
When you're dead and gone, old man, I'll leave this cursed house again.  
Gifts of meat still in my hand, cake tucked in my blouse.  
I have risked my life and soul to flee here to my lover's house.  
When I saw my lover there, words flowed from my heart.  
Living, dying, come what may, we'll ne'er again be torn apart.<sup>165</sup>

Two versions of *Lan Huahua* are offered here. One was composed by Li-san Wang in 1953 (see fig 3-33) and another one was composed by Lu-sheng Ye in 1959 (see fig 3-32). Even though these are two different pieces composed by different composers, they share some characteristics. First, both pieces are arranged in the manner of a theme and variations. Second, the main theme of both pieces is a direct transcription of the folk tune. The melody is written in the D *yu* mode. Third, the two composers attempt to use different music textures to represent different scenes of the story. The music and the change of texture closely follow the evolution of the story.

The differences between these two scores are also apparent. In Lu-sheng Ye's *Lan Huahua*, the composer gives different sections a subtitle through which the literary meaning of each section becomes clear. These subtitles are: *Lan Huahua*, *antiphonal singing*, *matchmaker*, *forced marriage*, *Zhou compound*, *revolt* and *freedom*. However, in Li-shan Wang's piece, the composer does not provide any subtitle to each variation. In addition, in Lu-sheng Ye's *Lan Huahua*, the main melody is written in the D *yu* mode. However, the use of E, *kuyin* (sad pitch), instead of G at the beginning of the main melody makes the music colorful. There is almost no

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165. English text from Mai Ding, *Chinese Folk Songs: An Anthology of 25 Favorites with Piano Accompaniment* (Beijing: New World Press. 1984), 19-20.

change of tonality throughout the piece.<sup>166</sup> In Li-shan Wang's piece, the main melody is also stated in the D *yu* mode at the beginning. Several modulations occur in both the middle and the final part of the piece.



Figure 3-32. *Lan Huahua* by Lu-sheng Ye<sup>167</sup>



Figure 3-33. *Lan Huahua* by Li-san Wang<sup>168</sup>

166. The composer adds a pitch E to this tune, making the structure of the scale the same as the heptatonic *zhi* mode of Shanxi. According to Ho Lu-Ting, the pitch E added here can be viewed as Ku yin (feelings of sadness) that comes from an old theatre genre in northwest China called the qin giang of Shanxi whose music is very colorful and dramatic.

167. Wei, Li, and Xu, *Selection From Chinese Classical Music for Piano* vol. 4, 54.

168. Wei, Li, and Xu, *Selection From Chinese Classical Music for Piano* vol. 2, 79.

Generally speaking, no matter the piano techniques used or the compositional craft, these two pieces are simple. However, if the pianist tries to perform it in a more authentically – sounding way, two things need to be paid attention. First, the pianist should have a thorough knowledge of the story of *Lan Huahua* before the performing it because it is clearly the main focus of the two pieces. *Lan Huahua* is a person, not an orchid. Therefore, the misunderstanding of the meaning of the title will influence the way of the performance. Moreover, based on the literary meaning and narrative structure of the lyrics in the original songs, the performer should not merely treat the piece as a variation. The music should be played to sound more like a narrative piece or even a Ballade. When the pianist plays these pieces, words like "sound" and "hearing" should be used in a similar way to "vision" and "seeing." In that moment, the performer should imagine the different scenes of the story and closely connect them with the different sections of the music. The various characteristics of differing sections will to some extent help the pianist decide what tempo, mood and timbres is most apt. Throughout the performance, the pianist should be a storyteller; the piano should function as a medium. The music should tell the story. Second, due to *Lan Huahua* being a *shangge* (mountain song), the performer should understand its unique characteristics. For instance, a *shange* may begin and end with a long fermata, it can also be quite free in rhythm. In Lu-sheng Ye's *Lan Huahua*, the notation clearly reflects these characteristics of *shange*, especially in its use of the fermata at the beginning and the end. In Li-shan Wang's *Lan Huahua*, the composer only provides the tempo markings "tempo rubato." However, understanding the word "*rubato*" is quite important. For example, as in Ye's version, a long fermata could be notated above the pitch D and the chord above it at the beginning. Here, the "high cry" pitch G in m.2 can also be prolonged for a while. This may be the real meaning behind the "*tempo rubato*" notation.



## CONCLUSION

The proper performance of Chinese piano music requires a knowledge of traditional Chinese aesthetics and performance practices, as well as familiarity with Chinese musical culture past and present. The styles of Chinese musical works are diverse, and their composition was influenced by traditional Chinese folk songs, instrumental music, opera, and other genres. The use of the various musical materials in Chinese piano pieces is quite different from that of Western music, and an understanding of the different styles and characteristics of traditional music is very important for understanding Chinese piano music. In addition, since Chinese compositions are also, to some extent, influenced by different Chinese philosophical ideas, understanding them is helpful in achieving a creative and imaginative performance. The performer should be familiar with certain concepts central to various Chinese philosophies, for instance, *yinyang*, *qi*, *yun*, and so on. These ideas provide clues regarding tempo, acceleration and deceleration of musical flow, divisions between the different phrases, and so on.

The pieces analyzed in this dissertation are a small part of the Chinese piano repertoire. These pieces represent only certain aspects of Chinese music, but they are representative of the broad range of subjects in Chinese music. Through examination of these pieces, some suggestions emerge that can assist the Western performer in the achievement of a more authentic-sounding performance. These suggestions focus on the following aspects: (1) the importance of understanding the title and the historical or cultural background of each piece; (2) the importance of understanding differences between the notation and an authentic-sounding performance, since, as with Western music, inaccurate or unclear notation is sometimes found in Chinese piano music; and (3) the importance of understanding the different philosophical ideas influencing Chinese music in order to achieve a more creative and imaginative performance.

As Kouwenhoven notes, “In nearly all Chinese traditional music, much importance is attached to the programmatic and the aesthetical purport of musical pieces, while in practice, one is frequently confronted with an abundance of different and sometimes conflicting interpretations.”<sup>169</sup> If the pianist thoroughly understands the character of each piece played, and the main ideas behind Chinese philosophy, this knowledge will tend to translate the performance of that piece into something more authentic-sounding. Therefore, before pianists use their own imagination and musicality in performing a Chinese piano work, they must acquire an understanding of Chinese musical elements central to that piece.

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169. Kouwenhoven, *Meanings and Structure: The Case of Chinese Qin*, 53.

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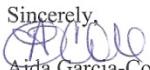
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Aida Garcia-Cole  
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## **VITA**

Xi Chen began studying piano at age five. She had her first piano performance when she was eight years old, and got the highest level of national piano performance at age eleven. She earned both the Bachelor and Master degree at the Music School of Southwest University in China. After graduating from Southwest University in China, she came to the U.S. in 2006. In August 2007, she entered School of Music in Louisiana State University. Xi Chen is Currently a doctoral candidate in piano performance at Louisiana State University where she is study with Professor Michael Gurt and plans to graduate in May 2012. Xi Chen has been a frequent prizewinner in national competition in China, such as golden apple piano competition, China Golden Bell piano competition and so on. As an active performer, she has broadly performed in China and USA.