A Pedagogical and Performance Approach to a Selection of Piano Solo Pieces Written by Chen Yi and Zhou Long

Weiying Tang
weiyingtang0518@gmail.com

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A PEDAGOGICAL AND PERFORMANCE APPROACH TO A
SELECTION OF PIANO SOLO PIECES WRITTEN BY CHEN YI AND
ZHOU LONG

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
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in

The School of Music

by
Weijing Tang
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M.M., Louisiana State University, 2016
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Weiying Tang

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To my loving parents Yonghuang Tang and Xiaoqing He
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Abstract

This dissertation will focus on the performance and pedagogical features of six piano solos composed by Chen Yi and Zhou Long. Both composers are Chinese-American who earned their Bachelor degrees in music from the Central Conservatory in Beijing, and came to United States in 1985-1986 to pursue doctoral studies in composition at Columbia University. Because of the composers’ personal experience, they were not only familiar with Chinese regional folk elements, but also trained in the Western classical music tradition. Their works tend to blend and expand both Chinese and Western cultural traditions, musical ideas and techniques.

The six piano solo pieces that will be discussed are Singing in The Mountain, Two Chinese Bagatelles: Yu Diao and Small Beijing Gong, Bamboo Dance, Guessing, Mongolian Folk-tune Variations and Northern Scenes. Inspiration for composition, formal structure, and unique musical aspects will be discussed in the chapter of performance analysis. Moreover, each piece will be analyzed sequentially based on its level of difficulty, using Dr. Jane Magrath’s leveling system. Musical demands, technical demands and reading demands will be addressed for each piece in the chapter of pedagogical analysis. In conclusion, these six piano solo compositions by Chen Yi and Zhou Long maintain various and high performance and pedagogical values for pianists in different levels and ages.
Chapter I
A Brief Historical Background and Composers Biographical Sketches

Years before and during the Cultural Revolution

The development of music since the foundation of People’s Republic of China in 1949 has been highly influenced by the national political values. The most controversial period is the Culture Revolution from 1966 to 1976. In order to achieve the highest concentration of power, Mao Zedong (1893-1976), the chairman of the People’s Republic of China, led to a decision with the instigation of the Gang of Four1 to ban all forms of music except the works that glorified his achievements and victories. Anything related to capitalism and the western world was forbidden and isolated from the Chinese population. The annual college entrance examination was ordered to discontinue. The radical political movements deeply shocked the values and general appreciation of civilized cultures. It was a national belief that everything should serve the working class, the peasantry and the military class.2 And this national belief strictly drove a new limited creativity in music. As western music being considered as mind pollution to Chinese people, musicians who had been studying western music were no longer allowed to play any western compositions. They were sent to the distant rural areas in China in order to be reeducated.

Chen Yi3 and Zhou Long4, two Chinese-American composers who were both born in 1953, experienced the entirety of the Culture Revolution when they were teenagers. Both Chen

1 The Gang of Four, a political faction formed by four Communist Party Officials: Jiang Qing (Mao Zedong’s Last wife), Yao Wenyuan, Zhang Chenqiao and Wang Hongwen.
3 Chen (陈) is her family name, which according to Chinese culture should go before her given name Yi (怡)。
4 Zhou (周) is his family name, which according to Chinese culture should go before his given name Long (龙)
Yi and Zhou Long were brought up studying classical western instruments when they were children. Chen Yi, born into a family of medical doctors who adored classical music, started piano lessons when she was three years old and added violin lessons when she was four. Both of Chen Yi’s siblings also studied classical instruments. Chen’s older sister, Chen Min, was even a renowned piano prodigy in China during the 1960s. The classical music education in the Chen family was considered as a necessary extra curricular activity. Moreover, the understanding and accepting family atmosphere fed Chen Yi’s interest in music. Ever since she picked up the violin when she was four, her enthusiasm for music never died. Zhou Long, on the other hand, who was born into a family of an artist (father) and a musician (mother), was exposed to classical music by listening to recordings during his childhood. Even though Zhou Long did not enjoy practicing piano when he started his lessons at the age of five, he remembered that his mother always wanted him to become a composer. And he later on developed an interest in instrumental playing during the Cultural Revolution.

However, instead of having the regular music education at school, these two composers were sent to the rural areas to do labor services. The Culture Revolution was the darkest period of time for culture in China since 1949. Labor work was incredibly heavy for these sent-down youth. Fortunately, both composers did not lose faith and waste their time in complete misery. According to the record of communication between Chen Yi and Songwen Li, Chen Yi played

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7 Educated young people, willingly or under coercion, left the cities to live and work in the distant rural areas in China.
8 Dr. Songwen Li is the current active Chair of the Piano Department in Xinghai Conservatory of Music of China (the only high education music conservatory in Southern China).
violin for her fellow village workers after a long day of hard labor, and she was able to obtain the first hand information in order to understand “the pureness of folk culture and the sincerity of regional characters and styles” during her time of reeducation.9 After two years of reeducation in the rural areas, Chen Yi went back to Guangzhou10, her birth place, and served as the concertmaster of the Guangzhou Beijing Opera Troupe Orchestra for eight years. The Guangzhou Beijing Opera Troupe Orchestra was built with a mixture of Chinese and Western musical instruments. Being the concertmaster offered Chen Yi a chance to not only play Chinese tunes but also learn about how the traditional Chinese instruments worked and how they blended with the western instruments in sound. As she recalled in “He Said, She Said”, Chen Yi’s roommate during that period of time was a pipa11 player who played music through Chinese notation instead of Western notation. While Chen Yi helped her to translate the pipa part into Chinese notation, Chen learned all the pipa fingering, the symbols and the techniques.12 As for Zhou Long, he was sent to a state farm in Northeastern China for five years after middle school. During that period of time, he worked to grow wheat, beans, corn and even drove a tractor.13 Later on, Zhou Long worked with a song-and dance troupe in Zhang Jia Kou,14 when he had the opportunities to go to the countryside and collect folk songs. And his interest and fondness for folk songs grew ever since.

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10 Guangzhou is the capital of Guangdong Province, and one of China’s three largest cities.
11 Pipa is a four-string Chinese wooden instrument in pear shaped; also called the Chinese lute.
13 Ibid.
14 A small city of Hebei Province, bordering Beijing, inner Mongolia and Shanxi.
Years at the Central Conservatory of Music

Following Mao Zedong’s death and the downfall of the Gang of Four in 1976, the political turmoil of the Cultural Revolution ended. After 10 years without college entrance examinations nationwide, the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing reopened for entering students in 1977. Chen Yi and Zhou Long were among the first group of music students who were accepted into the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, where they fell in love with each other. That year, only 32 students were admitted into this top conservatory of music. Another famous and active Chinese composer, Tan Dun, was one of them. During the years of studying composition at the Central Conservatory of Music, it was strictly mandatory for composition students to study Western classical music composition technique as Chen Yi recalled in her interview with Michael Murphy. Moreover, all the composition students also went through systematic research and analysis of Chinese traditional music. The subject matter included: theory of folk songs, theatre, musical story-telling, traditional instrumental music and folk-song collecting during field trip. With the systematic training at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, both composers obtained a deeper appreciation of the artistic values of Chinese folk music. After both composers received their Bachelor of Arts degrees in 1983, Chen Yi and Zhou Long got married. Zhou Long was appointed composer-in-residence with the

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16 Tan Dun, Chinese classical music composer, conductor and Grammy Award and Academy Award winner, famous for his movie scores Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon and Hero.
18 Ibid.
National Broadcasting Symphony Orchestra of China,\(^{19}\) while Chen Yi continued her Master of Arts in composition at the Central Conservatory of Music.\(^{20}\)

During the 1980s, the Chinese government leader, Deng Xiaoping, started to realize the importance of importing advance technologies and civilized cultures from the Western world. Deng Xiaoping, leading the second generation of the Chinese communist party, started the Chinese Economic Reformation by opening up four coastal cities as special economic zones\(^{21}\) to attract capitalistic investments. Due to this opening to the Western world, the composition professor from Columbia University, Dr. Chou Wenchung paid an important visit to China and brought an abundance of western musical materials with him, including books, scores and recordings. It was the first time that Chinese music students were exposed to contemporary Western classical compositions of the past 30 years. Highly influenced by Dr. Chou Wenchung and his introduction of contemporary Western classical music, Chen Yi, Zhou Long and their classmates abandoned the traditional ways of developing Chinese classical music, which comprised editing and composing Chinese folk tunes with techniques from the classical and romantic eras. They started to absorb and apply techniques from 20\(^{th}\) century western music to their works. New harmonies and sounds were incorporated into these young Chinese composers’ works in order to show the essence of Chinese folk music and its national ethos.

With the contribution of Chen Yi, Zhou Long and several other professional composers, such as Tan Dun, Zhai Xiaosong and Ye Xiaogang, Chinese classical music underwent the New Wave Music movement. Chen Yi’s *Duo Ye* (1984) for solo piano and Zhou Long’s *Valley


\(^{21}\) Four Special Economic Zones: Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Xiamen, Shantou, to reduce or exempt the tariff for foreign capitalistic investments.
Stream (1982), for flute, Chinese pipe, Chinese zheng and percussion instruments, were considered two representative compositions for the New Wave Music in China. Nonetheless, the avant-garde sound, rhythms and harmonies in the New Wave Music were not quite accessible for Chinese audience who had not had high-end classical music training during the 1980s. But the New Wave Music composers were not ready to give up what they had started. In order to pursue their original creative idealism, the New Wave Music composers like Chen Yi and Zhou Long decided to follow their paths in the western world. Chen Yi and Zhou Long, along with their fellow colleagues, such as Zhai Xiaosong, Tan Dun, Ye Xiaogang, Chen Xiaoyong and Chen Qigang became known as the fifth generation of Chinese composers in the 20th century.22

Years in United States

After Chen Yi obtained her Master degree in composition from the Central Conservatory of China in Beijing23 and Zhou Long completed his time with the National Broadcasting Symphony Orchestra of China, the two composers came to the United States for further education. Both composers were accepted into the Doctoral composition program of Columbia University under the guidance of Dr. Chou Wenchung and Mario Davidovsky. According to Jiayi Sun’s description in her book Chen Yi’s Aesthetics in Music Composition, the composition techniques, which were the focus of study during the years at Columbia University, concentrated on twelve-tone technique and atonal compositional technique.24 Compositions of Bela Bartok,

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22 Jiayi Sun, Chen Yi’s Aesthetics in Music Composition. (Culture and Art Publishing House: 2015), 15-16.
23 Chen Yi was the first woman who obtained the Chinese University authorized Master Degree in composition.
24 Sun, 9.
Igor Stravinsky, Arnold Schoenberg, Isang Yun\textsuperscript{25} and Witold Lutoslawski\textsuperscript{26} were studied in detail.\textsuperscript{27} Bartok’s incorporation of folk elements, Stravinsky’s revolution in rhythm, Schoenberg’s atonal and twelve-tone compositions, and Isang Yun’s attempt in creating Asian instrumental sound through Western musical instruments greatly influenced Chen Yi and Zhou Long.\textsuperscript{28}

Moreover, at this point of their musical exploration, Chen Yi and Zhou Long started to maturely develop clear and unique compositional paths. Chen Yi and Zhou Long each highly valued the aspects of aesthetics and individuality in their writing. Although both composers based their creativity on Chinese cultural and musical elements, Chen Yi was attracted to Chinese folk songs and dances while Zhou Long was more interested in the traditional ritual music of Chinese religions.\textsuperscript{29} The decision whether to highlight the individuality of Chinese musical elements and Western musical instruments when they collide, or to blend the Chinese elements and the Western instruments into a new sound, affected both composers. And their styles become more clearly distinguished from one another. Zhou Long believed that Chinese instrumental techniques can highlight the performance of Western instruments in order to create a new musical language. He focused on the performance techniques of both Chinese and Western instruments, and relied on his creativity to highlight their uniqueness. When Chinese musical elements are performed by Western instruments, it is not Zhou Long’s intention to have the Western instruments to serve as the Chinese instruments. Instead he intended to exaggerate

\textsuperscript{25} Isang Yun (1917-1955), A Korean-born composer who made his later career in Germany; famous for his post serialistic sound composition.
\textsuperscript{26} Witold Lutoslawski (1913-1994), A Polish composer and conductor who incorporated folk elements, twelve-tone serialism, atonal counterpoint and controlled improvisation into his compositions as his musical language.
\textsuperscript{27} Sun, 13.
\textsuperscript{28} Sun, 15.
\textsuperscript{29} Sun, 17.
the collision of both the Chinese musical elements and the Western instrumental sounds in order to highlight the uniqueness and individuality of each one of them. On the other hand, Chen Yi believed that Chinese folk musical elements should be presented with her own musical language. She admitted that this musical language was not only deeply rooted in the Chinese culture, but also highly influenced by her formal education in the Western Classical music. Chen Yi was also aiming for the unification of sensibility and rationality in her compositions; that each musical composition should have its specific meaning to convey with abundant emotions presented in order. Moreover, Chen Yi will always incorporate Chinese elements as well as the 20th century western compositional techniques that can be understood internationally.

Ever since Chen Yi and Zhou Long finished their Doctoral of Musical Arts degrees at Columbia University in 1993, both composers have been living in United States. In the year of 1998, both composers joined the faculty of the University of Missouri-Kansas City Conservatory of Music and Dance and became United States citizens in the following year. Since then both composers never stopped being active in the musical field and each established a successful professional career. Chen Yi, being a prolific composer, received numerous fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation (1996), the National Endowment for Arts (1994) and the Lieberson Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letter (1996). Moreover, she was also the recipient of the Charles Ives Living award from the American Academy of Arts and Letter in 2001, among others such as the Lili Boulanger Award (93), the NYU Sorel Medal Award (96)

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30 Sun, 18.
31 Sun, 32.
and the Elise Stoeger Award (02)\textsuperscript{32} from Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center.\textsuperscript{33} Later on in 2006, she was nominated as a finalist for the 2006 Pulitzer Prize for her composition \textit{Si Ji} (Four Seasons).\textsuperscript{34} Her compositions are published by Theodore Presser Company. Besides being commissioned to compose for various competitions, Chen Yi continuously receives commissions from renown performers such as Yo-Yo Ma, Yehudi Menuhin and Evelyn Glennie, and professional orchestras such as the BBC, the Cleveland, Seattle, Pacific and Singapore orchestras, the Brooklyn, New York and LA Philharmonics, and Sächsische Staatskapelle Dresden, and St. Paul Chamber Orchestra.\textsuperscript{35}

Zhou Long, as active and productive as Chen Yi, has received numerous fellowship and grants as well from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Guggenheim and Rockefeller Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts, and among others.\textsuperscript{36} His compositions have received international awards in Germany, France and beyond. In 2011, Zhou Long became the first Chinese-American composer to receive the Pulitzer Prize in music for his opera \textit{Madame White Snake}.\textsuperscript{37} Zhou Long became world renowned ever since for his skills of embedding elements of the two cultures in a consistent, seamless, and original musical language. In 2012-

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item The largest prize devoted to chamber music composition and is presented every two years in recognition of significant contributions to the field according to Oxford University Press Academic Website, https://global.oup.com/academic/category/arts-and-humanities/sheet-music/composers/zhoulong/?cc=us&lang=en& (access Dec 26, 2018).
\item \textit{Madame White Snake} is based on a Chinese traditional legend which portrays a moving and sad love story between a white snake spirit and a human being.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
2013, Zhou Long also received the Elise Stoeger Prize from the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center following his wife’s award did in 2002.

Currently, both composers serve as distinguished professors of composition at the Conservatory of Music and Dance at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. Other than being active, composers both devote themselves enthusiastically to teaching and to their students. They state in an interview with the *Southern Daily* newspaper in China that, “Music is our child; our students are our children. We offer our full support for young musicians’ music education. We hope young musicians study music in order to learn and build their well rounded knowledge of civilization and culture; but not for the purpose of being successful or for worshiping any physical icon.” With Chen Yi’s and Zhou Long’s works being more valued, analyzed and performed, both composers have become generous with their time to share their thoughts with musicians who are either writing about or performing their works. First hand information such as quotes from interviews between young professional musicians and both Chen Yi and Zhou Long can easily be found in musical theses and dissertations written in recent years.

Chapter II
Performance Analysis

Singing in the Mountain

Singing in the Mountain by Chen Yi is a commissioned composition for the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, for the piano collection Spectrum 4 in 2005. According to Chen Yi’s program note for this piece, the motivic materials for Singing in the Mountain are based on the pitch material in some Southern Chinese mountain songs. In the Chinese folk culture, mountain songs are often sung by commoners who work, travel or rest among the endless mountain range to express their emotions. The performance form of mountain songs often happens in a dialogue between two individual person or two groups of people. Dialects are a strong influence on the lyrics, rhythms and melodies of the Chinese mountain songs. But in general, tempo and rhythmic materials are free; and melodies often rise and fall in call and response forms. Singing in the Mountain can be divided into two sections, A and A\textsuperscript{1}. Each section maintains 16 measures. Phrasing of both A and A\textsuperscript{1} sections is listed in the following Figure 2.1,

![Singing in the Mountain---Formal Structure](image)

Figure 2.1. Singing in the Mountain---Formal Structure

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As the figure of formal structure shows, there are three main musical phrases in *Singing in the Mountain*. All three of them are played in the high register of the piano in a *forte* dynamic. The interludes are marked *mezzo piano*. The phrasing structure of *Singing in the Mountain* reflects the call and echo sound effect. Furthermore, the C-flats in Phrase 1 (C-flat and G-flat in Phrase 1’) yearns for the performers’ attention (see Figure 2.2 and Figure 2.3). Since C-natural is expected at the end of this phrase, the surprising C-flat make an unusual bend in the melodic statement.\(^{40}\) Moreover, the composer marks specific long damper pedal on the score. This notation leads to and evokes a surreal, echoing effect of the mountain singing sound.

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{Figure 2.2. Chen Yi, *Singing in the Mountain*, mm.1-4.} \\
&\text{Figure 2.3. Chen Yi, *Singing in the Mountain*, mm.17-20.}
\end{align*}
\]

*Singing in the Mountain* is a short composition filled with octaves, fourths and fifths. However, the spatial layout of the music, the specific dynamic markings of call and echo, the long use of the damper pedal, and the bending pitch of the opening phrases in each section make

this composition musically interesting. It will be a pleasant introduction to performers who are in their earlier stages of piano study. And it will create an abundance of possibilities for performers to explore on the keyboard.

**Two Chinese Bagatelles: Yu Diao**

*Yu Diao* (1984) is one of Chen Yi’s works during her years in the Central Conservatory of China. This composition was inspired by the local opera of Henan Province.\(^4\)\(^1\) Yu (豫) is the abbreviation of Henan Province; and Diao (调) means tune in Chinese. The musical characteristics of *Yu Diao* closely resemble the musical elements of Henan’s local operas, such as the sense of singing dialogues and the use of Chinese pentatonic scales.

*Yu Diao* is composed in ABA\(^1\) form (see Figure 2.4 below), using D major as its tonal center. However, with the C sharp lower to C natural frequently in the A and A\(^1\) sections, the music has the sound of D Mixolydian mode. The A section of *Yu Diao* covers the first 13 measures of the composition. The primary statement presents itself at the beginning and develops within the first eight measures (see Figure 2.5). The sense of dialogue shows up in measures 6-7. Then what follows is with an interlude that is based on the beginning musical pattern of the primary statement. With the short musical phrases and staccato articulations representing the percussive instrumental sound, the A section portrays a festive and upbeat musical atmosphere.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A section</th>
<th>B section</th>
<th>A(^1) section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mm.</td>
<td>1-13</td>
<td>14-29</td>
<td>30-40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2.4. *Yu Diao*-Formal Structure.

\(^4\)\(^1\) Henan is a province of China, locating in the central part of the country. It also maintains more than 3000 years of record history.
The B section is (mm. 14-29) a cantabile musical statement. A pentatonic scale D-B-A-G-E is the main pitch material for this section (see Figure 2.6). The musical pattern that is based on this pentatonic scale is the secondary statement of Yu Diao. The sense of dialogue appears right at the beginning of the B section and gradually develops into a unison singing ensemble from measure 24 until the end of the B section (see Figure 2.7).
A\textsuperscript{1} section comes back an octave lower than the A section. Instead of having the left hand being the “interruption” of the melody, the left hand plays the unison primary statement with the right hand. While doubling the primary statement might indicate reinforcement, Chen Yi puts \textit{piano} at the beginning of the A\textsuperscript{1} section whereas \textit{mezzo forte} in the A section. Performers should be aware of both the texture changes and the dynamic changes. And performers should understand that playing softly may call for more attention from the audience than playing loudly all the time.

\textit{Two Chinese Bagatelles: Small Beijing Gong}

\textit{Small Beijing Gong} is a one-page composition written in 1993. Its musical style is inspired by the traditional Beijing Opera. Chen Yi dedicated this composition to her childhood piano teacher, Li Su-Xin, on the occasion of her 70\textsuperscript{th} birthday.\textsuperscript{42} Gong, also known as luó (锣) in Chinese, is a metallic percussive instrument. It is usually made by bronze in a round shape. Gong player often strike the Gong with a wooden stick. The sound of the Gong is deep and resonated. In \textit{Small Beijing Gong}, the sound of Gong is represented by the accented harmonic sevenths (F and E-flat) that appear in measures 7-9 and measures 12-16.

Small Beijing Gong can be divided into two sections. The continuous usage of the ostinato bass differentiates the A section from B section. In A section, upon the ostinato bass accompaniment, the composer starts the composition by imitating the singing style of the Beijing operatic performer. The time signature of Small Beijing Gong starts with an irregular 7/8; the notation of the beginning melody obscures the sense of beats even more. In order to show this rhythmic freedom, performers need to be precise with the rhythmic execution. The placement of the “beats” has already been obscured. Performers do not need to add more freedom in taking time, but are required to stay attentive and true to the music itself.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Small Beijing Gong-Formal Structure</th>
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<tr>
<td>A section: mm. 1-12</td>
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<tr>
<td>B section: mm.13-20</td>
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Figure 2.8. Small Beijing Gong-Formal Structure

As the B section starts, the percussive sound of Gong continues in the right hand. The left hand, instead of being the ostinato bass, becomes a melodic passage. The ending of the composition is a passage of even sixteenth notes. This is the first time that sixteenth notes appear in the piece. Even though the composer does not clearly mention anything in her program note of the piece, it is possible that this sixteenth note passage represents the quick pacing of the Beijing operatic performer on stage. With this image in mind, performers will play this sixteenth note passage in the articulated way, imitating the sound of quick pacing.

Bamboo Dance

Bamboo Dance is composed in 2013, inspired by the village Bamboo Dance from southern China. This version is published by Chen Yi’s publisher Theodore Presser Company. It is necessary to note that there is another version of Bamboo Dance called Bamboo Dance II. It

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Bamboo dance is a traditional folk dance that involves pairs of people holding the end of long bamboo bars and clapping the bars steadily and loudly, both onto the floor and between the bars themselves. This traditional folk dance takes place mostly for ritual ceremonies and harvest celebration throughout history. Since the original form of bamboo dance is festive and lively, *Bamboo Dance* also corporates this particular characteristic in the music. The main motivic material, that appears throughout the piece, is a descending 7th. According to Chen Yi’s program note, the motivic idea of the descending 7th is taken from one of Li People’s folk songs. Since the pitch material of the composition is simple and straightforward, it is the articulation and the dynamic changes that make the music vividly resemble the traditional bamboo dance.

Figure 2.9. Bamboo Dance performed by Li People in their traditional costume

*Bamboo Dance* is 4 pages long. Since the composition requires hand crossing and the sudden dynamic changes under the tempo of a quarter note equals 132, it will create some

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44 Chen Yi, Email interview to author, Feb 19th, 2019.
45 Li People, the first group habitants who lived in Hainan Island.
technical hurdles for performers to go through. Furthermore, in order to keep the performance in style, performers should not take time when the dynamic changes abruptly. Since the music moves in a rapid pacing, performers should not only economize their movements to achieve precision in playing, but also focus on finding a softer sound in the piano dynamics rather than playing a louder sound in the forte dynamics. Moreover, a minimum (next to non) usage of pedal is advised.

**Guessing**

*Guessing* is a commissioned composition for the 1990 Renée B. Fisher Awards Competition. It was a required repertoire for the Senior Division for pianist between ages of 14 and 18.\(^{47}\) This composition is inspired by a Chinese folk song called “Guessing”. The composer took a fragmented tune from this song and developed upon it. In this composition, performers will encounter a diverse range of pitches, dynamics, rhythms and specific pedaling. These diverse musical elements form stylistic musical patterns. While the thematic material is taken from a traditional Chinese folk song, the composition also sheds influences from Belá Bartok’s and Igor Stravinsky’s styles.

The traditional Chinese folk song “Guessing” is written for children. The lyrics are humorous and playful, written in the form of questions and answers. The music that set to the lyrics is antiphonal as well. There are repeating verses of this children’s folk song. Each repeating verse is sixteen-measure long (See Figure 2.10).

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Figure 2.10. One Verse of the Folk Song “Guessing”\textsuperscript{48}

Chen Yi adopted the antiphonal style from the original song to *Guessing*. So dialogues appear bits and pieces throughout the piece. Sometimes the dialogues in between two parts are interruptive; and sometimes they are continuous. Different type of dialogues requires unique interpretation. The dialogue at the beginning of *Guessing* is more interruptive than continuous. The playful interaction between two hands should appear as two distinctive layers. However, as the music develops further into the middle (mm.82-93), the dialogue becomes more continuous (See Figure 2.11).

Figure 2.11. Chen Yi, *Guessing*, mm.80-94.

Furthermore, the precision of rhythm highly influences the interpretation of this composition. The rhythmic materials in *Guessing* are challenging. There are constant meter

\textsuperscript{48} Notated by the author by listening to recording sung by Weiwen Yan from Evergrande Music.
changes and abundant obscuration of beats throughout the composition. These difficult rhythmic patterns create a sense of unsettlement. Moreover, along with all these complicated rhythmic changes, there are also detailed dynamic changes. In general, performers might want to take time to achieve the sudden dynamic changes. However, the situation in playing *Guessing* varies. In order to fully interpret this composition, performers might experience two methods to execute the sudden dynamic changes in the challenging rhythmic passages. One method is time taking in between dynamic changes; the other is playing the music as is without any time taking. When the obscuration of beats occurs in the melodic passages (see Figure 2.12), performers are advised to play the rhythmic material straightforward without any time taking. There are quite an amount of layers and ideas for performers to convey in the melodic passages. Time taking will confuse the clarity of these musical ideas. So playing the music as written will achieve the best effect. However, if the obscuration of beats shows in the percussive passages with less musical ideas (see Figure 2.13), performers can choose to take time in order to make the dynamic changes most effectively. However, if the composer has already written out the *ritardando* by making the note values longer (see Figure 2.14), there will be no need for time taking even though the musical phrase is coming to an end.

![Figure 2.12. Chen Yi, Guessing, mm.1-14.](image)
To interpret *Guessing* to its full musical expressiveness, the usage of pedal needs to be specific. As the usage of *sostenuto* pedal will be addressed in the Chapter III-Pedagogical Analysis, the usage of damper pedal will be discussed in detail in this segment. The specific usage of damper pedal shows more in the last two pages of the piece. Ending from measure 144 and starting from measure 145, Chen Yi makes a sudden shift in rhythm from the half-note triplets to the quarter-note quadruplets in 4/4. While the half-note triplets are instructed to play legato by the composer, the quarter-note quadruplets will be more articulated. Although the rhythm and articulation change abruptly, musically, the segment of measures 145-150 serves as a transition. In order to change the musical characters in these two different sections organically,
special usage of damper pedal can assist the progress. When the passage is written in the high register, longer usage of damper pedal, such as one pedal for one measure, is applicable. However, when the harmonies changes more often and the moving notes are written in the middle register, quicker pedal change is advised.

*Mongolian Folk-tune Variations*

*Mongolian Folk-tune Variations* is composed by Zhou Long during his years at the Central Conservatory of Music. The composer could not remember the exact year of composing this piece because the manuscript was tattered.⁴⁹ This composition never published in China; it was collected by Oxford University Press and published as an intermediate solo piano piece in 2009. According to Zhou Long’s interview with Wei Jiao, he believed that this composition is accessible for almost anybody.⁵⁰ After studying this composition, it is to believe that the majority of the composition is playable for pianists who are at the appropriate level. However, *Variation 8* maintains some technical challenge for pianists who have smaller size hands (This aspect will be addressed in Chapter III-Pedagogical Analysis).

According to the composer, *Mongolian Folk-tune Variations* is developed upon a lyrical eight-measure folk tune called *Mongolian Xiao Diao*.⁵¹ Mongolian folk songs are often categorized in either *Chang* (长) *Diao* (调) or *Duan* (短) *Diao* (调). *Chang Diao*, also known as long tune, is characterized by the rise and fall rhythmically free melodies, which are often pastoral song and praise songs; whereas *Duan Diao*, known as short tune, is marked by its tight

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⁵⁰ Ibid.
⁵¹ Wei, 28.
structure and cheerful melodies, which are mostly hunting songs, folk dances and ballads. The *Theme* of *Mongolian Folk-tune Variations* portrays a melancholy and cantabile musical atmosphere. The composer stated that *Mongolian Xiao Diao*, the inspiration of *Mongolian Folk-tune Variations*, falls into the category of *Chang Diao* (long tune) or *Zhong Chang Diao* (medium long tune). The *Theme* and the first two variations are written in the contrapuntal style. Although the composition is inspired by a Chinese folk tune; there are a lot of western compositional techniques involved in this piece. After the two contrapuntal variations, *Variation III* shows influence from the French impressionistic style. From *Variation III* and on, the rest of the composition except the coda is quite varied from the thematic material. So it can also be categorized as more a through-composed piece due to how *Variations III, IV, V, VI, VII* and *VIII* are written.

*Northern Scenes*

*Northern Scenes* was dedicated for pianist Susan Chan in 2013. According to the composer’s program note, this composition is imaginative and expressive. It is composed with passionate and lyrical layers in vertical soundscapes and space. Chen Yi also noted that the images showed by the following lines inspired her to compose this composition.

> In the north, the vast and magnificent blue mountains, Boundless, desolate, and indistinct…

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53 Wei, 28.
54 Wei, 38.
56 These lines are written by Chen Yi herself.
Later on, the composer uses *Northern Scenes* as the second movement of her piano concerto *Four Spirits*, which was written in 2016. There are four movements in this piano concerto. And *Northern Scenes* is renamed as *The Black Xuanwu in the North*.\(^{57}\) Xuanwu (玄武), is a spiritual animal of the north. It appears itself as a black turtle, a black snake or the figure of both animals combined. This spiritual animal also represents winter. In the program note of *Four Spirits*, Chen Yi states that the second movement is dark and mysterious.\(^{58}\) Pianists who study and perform this composition should also take these two factors into their interpretation.

Although *Northern Scenes* is an atonal composition and clear melodic lines are not obvious to be found, it is a composition that attracts attention with the richness of color and inspires vivid imagination of nature. Main musical elements include steady held notes, flowing sixteenth notes and thirty-second notes in irregular groupings, polyrhythmic musical layers, and ostinato figures. These musical elements portray a scenic picture of the Northern China. The steady held notes resemble the boundless grand mountains. The flowing sixteenth notes and thirty-second notes portray the flowing clouds, running streams and rivers. The polyrhythmic musical layers show the intertwining of both the still and moving natural objects. And the ostinato figures imitate the blowing of strong wind.\(^{59}\) Furthermore, *Northern Scenes* is composed in a Rondo form. The composition can be roughly divided into five sections (see Figure 2.4.1).

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<th>Northern Scenes-Formal Structure</th>
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<td>A section</td>
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<td>mm.1-37</td>
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Figure 2.15. *Northern Scenes*-Formal Structure

\(^{57}\) Chen Yi, Email Interview by author, Feb 19, 2019.
\(^{58}\) Ibid.
\(^{59}\) It is the author’s personal interpretation, approved by the composer through email interview.
Chapter III
Pedagogical Analysis

Singing in the Mountain

- Musical Demands

*Singing in the Mountain* is composed of the pitch materials of mountain songs sung in the Southern China. The musical atmosphere imitates the mountain singing which is distant and ethereal. In order to portray this atmosphere and sound, Chen Yi keeps almost all the notes of the melodies in the C5 register and higher, while the bass accompaniment is notated much lower within the C2 to C3 register. The general arrangement of the notation gives the impression of great distance; there is space between the melody and the accompaniment with the melody singing high up on the piano. Moreover, the usage of the damper pedal should be quite generous in this piece of music. The composer indicates that the damper pedal should be applied from the first note of the piece. The first pedal change happens after the first 10 measures, where the first phrase ends. Furthermore, the damper pedal is held through each of the four phrases that make up this composition.

Although the musical character of *Singing in the Mountain* is rather distant and ethereal, Chen Yi was not reluctant to apply louder dynamics such as *mezzo forte* and *forte*. In fact, the softest dynamic is mezzo piano. Throughout the composition, all the legato melodic passages that are written in unison in both hands are labelled with a forte dynamic; whereas the short staccato melodic passages are written in a mezzo piano dynamic. The bass accompaniment has been specifically labelled as *mezzo forte* in both the first and third phrases. Since all the *forte* passages are played in the highest registers of the keyboard, while the ethereal and cantabile musical character is maintained, piano pedagogues should help students to avoid vertical and rapid attacks on the keys. Instead, singing the high legato melodies in the *forte* dynamic before
actualizing the sound on the piano is recommended in order to help students to hear, understand and maintain an ideal singing tone. Even when the short staccato passages take place, the musical notation very specifically indicates the continuity of sound by showing a small slur after the staccato note (See Figure 3.1).

![Figure 3.1. Chen Yi, Singing in the Mountain, mm.5-8.](image)

Furthermore, the subtlety of dynamics between the bass accompaniment (mezzo forte) and the melody (forte and mezzo piano) should be carefully observed and executed. Students should be able to understand that the bass accompaniment resides in the low register of the piano, which can easily overpower melodies in the higher registers. In order to maintain a nice musical balance between the melody and accompaniment, which is specifically indicated by the composer, piano pedagogues will work in detail on applying appropriate arm weight into the keyboard with their students when working on this kind of subtle effect.

With regard to the tempo, Chen Yi gives a specific tempo marking of a quarter note equals 54. It is a slow tempo, which eliminates some technical difficulties, such as fast finger movements or rapid arm movements when changing registers. However, the slow tempo challenges students to hear and play continuous sound on the keyboard because the piano sound decays soon after the piano keys are depressed. So, singing along with the melodies and matching the singing tone of the voice to his/her playing while practicing this composition is recommended. When students encounter the dotted eighth–sixteenth note rhythmic pattern, it is
crucial that the sixteenth note not be accented. Its tone should be carefully matched with the decayed sound of the previous dotted-eighth note.

- **Technical Demands**

  The technical demands of *Singing in the Mountain* consist mostly of changes of rhythmic patterns, legato playing of double fourths and fifths, and the large leaps across the keyboard. Other than the regular dotted rhythmic pattern, a syncopated rhythmic pattern appears in each of the four phrases in *Singing in the Mountain* (See Figure 3.2 using the example as phrase no.1). In order to play the rhythm precisely, students should count the sixteenth-note subdivision for rhythmic precision. Ultimately students will feel the larger pulse.

![Figure 3.2. Chen Yi, Singing in the Mountain, mm.1-4.](image)

The musical motif starts out with an octave unison at the beginning, then it progresses with a stream of double fourths and fifths into the third phrase (See Figure 3.3). Although the tempo marking is relatively slow, performers must aim for even tone and legato phrasing. In order to play the double fourths and fifths passages and maintain the long legato line, using arm weight and horizontal arm and finger movements should be a part of the student-teacher discussion in lessons. Moreover, encouraging students to come up with their own fingerings to achieve a smooth legato line in the double fourths and fifths passages is advised. At this stage, lessons will be filled with listening, experimenting and discovering. Based on the level of
difficulty of Singing in the Mountain, students who explore and learn this composition should be at about a level 3-4 learning stage based on Magrath’s leveling system.  

![Figure 3.3. Chen Yi, Singing in the Mountain, mm. 29-32.](image)

Additionally, when learning this composition, students have an opportunity to explore the widest range of the piano. Other than feeling the physical space between the extreme registers, students will learn how to travel across the keyboard gracefully and effectively without unwanted accents. Singing in the Mountain does not appear to be a technically demanding piece for students to learn; but the expressive musical demands embedded in this composition require the students’ keen attention. In order to convey the full expressive power of the music, students will develop a nuanced sense of timing and delicate use of arm weight to achieve the performance goal.

- **Reading Demands**

As the composition is constructed with four clear phrases, the structure of the music is straightforward for students. Since the left hand often maintains sustained notes across six or seven measures, students can focus on the right-hand notation. Thus, students should have an enjoyable experience reading Singing in the Mountain. After students first read the music, they should recognize that a lot of the melodic passages are in unison in both hands. Therefore, it is

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not too demanding to read. The only aspect that might need students’ attention is playing the unison parts in their correct registers.

**Two Chinese Bagatelles: Yu Diao and Small Beijing Gong**

- **Yu Diao-Musical Demands**

  *Yu Diao*\(^{61}\) is composed based on the pitch material that is taken from the local opera in Henan Province.\(^{62}\) It is written in ABA\(^1\) form so the musical materials are presented clearly and straightforward for students to read. The musical motifs in the A and A\(^1\) sections are rather short. Shorter legato lines followed immediately by staccato articulations indicate jolliness and playfulness. Moreover, as the musical motif in the A section develops, students should understand the hierarchal balance between both hands in order to play the canonic passage in mm. 6-7 musically (See Figure 3.4).

![Figure 3.4. Chen Yi, *Yu Diao*, mm.4-9](image)

A new musical character is introduced in the B section and is marked “*Frescamente*” right at the opening. Not only has the right-hand melody has been moved up an octave, the

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\(^{62}\) Henan Province is in the north of China near Beijing, the capital.
canonic passages between both hands progress further in the B section with a new musical motif. With the change of articulation to play more legato differentiating the sound hierarchy and balance intensifies (See Figure 3.5).

![Musical notation](image)

Figure 3.5. Chen Yi, *Yu Diao*, mm. 10-18.

Articulation and voicing influence the musical expressiveness, with musical elements like accents and dynamics marked throughout *Yu Diao*. Since Yu opera is sung in a clanging and articulated way, *Yu Diao* adopts this musical character on the piano through accents. Two different kinds of accents are notated; one is in the right-hand melody; the other is in the left hand accompaniment. Accents are often marked on the highest note of the melody in order to highlight the climax of the phrase. Whereas the accents in the accompaniment serve as an imitation of a percussive instrument call Henan Bangzi. Executing the accents attentively and precisely will portray the appropriate Yu opera atmosphere indicated in this composition. Furthermore, dynamic markings in *Yu Diao* function as a guide for how to phrase the musical motifs. Often, a short crescendo is marked within the range of a slur in the A and A¹ section musical motifs. (See Figure 3.6 and 3.7) Besides, the composer marks subtle dynamic changes

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63 Henan Bangzi is a percussive instrument that is used in Henan opera (Yu opera) as a rhythmic accompaniment to the music.
such as mezzo forte to forte and mezzo piano to mezzo forte in the music. In this case, students must develop a delicate control over the keyboard in order to achieve the full musical expressiveness.

Figure 3.6. Chen Yi, Yu Diao, mm.7-9.

Figure 3.7. Chen Yi, Yu Diao, mm.34-36.

The tempo of Yu Diao is marked as Allegretto Scherzando. And the musical motifs in the A and A¹ sections are short and well-articulated. Therefore, a careful application of pedal is required when playing this composition. Chen Yi does not indicate any pedal markings on the score. Playing the A and A¹ section without pedal is suggested in order to keep the music clean and clear. Nonetheless, the application of pedal in the B section is more open to achieve a smoothness of legato that the composer requires performers to create.

- **Yu Diao**-Technical Demands

The technical demands of Yu Diao appear in the rapid succession through articulations, precise execution of accents, rapid change in hand positions and a sustained four-measure long sixteenth notes passage appearing in the B section.
Although *Yu Diao* is a short, the tempo marking *Allegretto scherzando* present technical difficulties for students to execute the rapid changes in articulations throughout the piece. The fast changes are often notated with a short slur or a two-note slur, followed by a few staccato notes. This kind of change in articulations repeatedly appears throughout the composition.

Moreover, even though the rhythmic patterns in *Yu Diao* are quite straightforward, the markings of specific accents enhance the difficulty for performance.

*Yu Diao* also involves fast change in hand positions. Changing of clefs in the left hand are notated throughout the piece. Additionally, the greatest technical challenge appears in the A section (A\(^1\) section has a similar change), where the left hand jumps from D3 to a passage of thirds starting with G4 and B-flat4 (See Figure 3.8).

![Figure 3.8](image)

Figure 3.8. Chen Yi, *Yu Diao*, mm.4-6.

At the climatic moment of the piece, the composer decided to put in a four-measure passage of sixteenth notes to build the musical excitement. Although this sixteenth-note passage is written in unison in both hands, the intertwining movement of notes requires clean finger actions, effective fingering and flexible arm movements (See Figure 3.9).
**Yu Diao—Reading Demands**

The notation of *Yu Diao* includes multiple notated accidentals, some ornamentation, occasional change of time signature, and constant changes in clefs in the left hand. Since *Yu Diao* bases its tonal center in D major, the key signature shows F# and C#. There are many written-in accidentals in the music. The accidentals even appear where there is thicker texture, like the double third passages in the A and A¹ sections, and this increase the level of reading difficulty. For students who are in the intermediate stage of piano learning, reading this piece is challenging. There is also some ornamentation in the A and A¹ sections, which require the students’ attention in playing. Furthermore, the constant change of time signature requires some time and repetition for students to get used to. Nonetheless, if a student can keep a steady beat for the quarter note, the changing of meter can be executed eventually within a reasonable amount of practice time. Furthermore, the most demanding element of reading in *Yu Diao* is the constant change of clefs in the left hand. Considering all the musical, technical and reading
demands, students who may learn this composition should be at about a level 7-8 learning stage based on Magrath’s leveling system.64

- **Small Beijing Gong-Musical Demands**

  *Small Beijing Gong* is based on a style of Beijing opera that is animated and cheery.65 The composition starts with an ostinato of 7/8 meter in the bass and carries through to the middle point of the piece. Chen Yi notates that the ostinato passage should be played legato, even though it starts and ends with an interval of a major 7th. Students with smaller hands should avoid holding tension in the left hand. Furthermore, the dynamic for the ostinato passage is mostly in *forte* and *fortissimo*. The melody is thin in texture and high up in the register, imitating the sound of a Beijing Gong. Student should listen carefully for balance of sound.

  While the dynamics throughout the composition are mostly in the *forte* range, along with accents marks throughout, it is good pedagogical material for students to learn how to use the loose arm weight and focused fingertips to produce a ringing, percussive, and even explosive sound from the piano.

- **Small Beijing Gong-Technical Demands**

  *Small Beijing Gong* presents technical difficulties in playing large intervals in both hands, double-note accents at the end of short slurs, quick movements on the keyboard, production of a big sound, and constant changes of time signatures.

  The interval of a 7th is featured throughout this composition not only in the left hand and also in the right hand. While the left hand plays a melodic major 7th in an ostinato passage as accompaniment, the right hand maintains the harmonic minor 7th as the percussive melody. Since the musical notation requires students to play the left-hand ostinato in a legato style, students

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should learn how to transfer arm weight when shifting from the pinky to the thumb. Furthermore, students should use this study to develop the skill of playing larger intervals without tension in their hands.

In the middle section, accented double notes at the end of two short slurs occur (See Figure 3.10). The most technically challenging part of this composition appears. In order to overcome this technical problem, students should practice the left hand, on its own, in a slower tempo. Moreover, students must come up with their own convenient fingerings to help achieve efficient movements. After the effective fingerings are found and the left hand can play its part smoothly under tempo, students are encouraged to add the right-hand part.

Figure 3.10. Chen Yi, Small Beijing Gong, mm.9-12.

Quick movements across the keyboard are required of the right hand (See Figure 3.10). While the left hand moves within the interval of major 7th, the right hand moves instantly from the middle register to the high F6 and E-flat7. Even though students can throw their right hands to aim for the higher notes, the precision of playing remains a challenge. In order to solve this technical difficulty, students should try playing the pinky notes “B” and “E-flat” first. This exercise gives students a chance to feel the distance of where the pinky positions should be. After mastering the traveling of these two single notes, students can put the “F” back with the “E-flat” and play the passage as written.
Even though *Small Beijing Gong* is a one-page piece, students are required to play with strong dynamics for almost all of the piece. However, students should learn not to “hammer” each note when playing strong dynamics. Each phrase should still have its own dynamic direction, which is generated by both finger actions and arm movements.

Last but not the least, the second half of *Small Beijing Gong* contains constant changes of time signature (See Figure 3.10). Although the pitch materials are similar in each measure of this particular passage, it is still puzzling for students to grasp the beats with the immediate change of time signature. To achieve a steady tempo and precise rhythm, students are encouraged to subdivide and count in the eighth note since it is the common subdivision shared by time signatures 7/8, 4/4, 5/4, and 3/4.

- **Small Beijing Gong-Reading Demands**

  Although there are several written in accidentals in *Small Beijing Gong*, the pitch patterns are quite identical from one measure to another. The most challenging reading demand in this composition is the rhythmic material. Other than the constant change of time signature mentioned in the technical demands segment, the placement of accents in the right hand also demands students’ careful consideration. Most of the melodic phrases do not start on the downbeat, but the ones that do contain meter changes. Students are encouraged to count and clap the eight notes to subdivide in order to play the correct rhythm and maintain a steady pulse.

*Bamboo Dance*

- **Musical Demands**

  *Bamboo Dance* is a composition inspired by a folksong of the Li People of Hainan Island. The musical motif is based on the descending major 7th. This four-page composition is

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66 Li People, the first group habitants who lived in Hainan Island.
dedicated to imitate the clapping sound of two long bamboo rods in a steady pulse of musical dancing rhythmic patterns. To highlight this particular musical character, *Bamboo Dance* has four musical demands. They are: 1) the staccato articulation, 2) precise rhythmic patterns, 3) specific dynamic notation, and 4) accents.

The first thing to consider is the primary articulation of the piece. Staccato articulation appears in almost every measure in both the notations of single notes and chords, which are the two main musical elements that construct *Bamboo Dance*. The main musical motif (See Figure 3.11), which appears right at the beginning, is performed in staccato style. Then this musical motif is developed into a sequence. In the main motif, staccato chords maintain the steady rhythmic beats for the piece (See Figure 3.12).

![Figure 3.11. Chen Yi, Bamboo Dance, mm.1-4.](image1)

The second musical element of the bamboo dance is its precise rhythm. Other than the crisp articulation of chords and motivic gestures of 7ths, *Bamboo Dance* is filled with rhythmic rests and meter changes. The rhythmic rests start in longer durations (such as half note rest,
quarter note rest and eighth note rests). Towards the end of the piece (especially the last page of the composition), sixteenth-note rests become dominant in the rhythmic pattern. Students need to learn how to precisely differentiate these rests patterns in order to show these rhythmic gestures (See Figure 3.13).

To enrich the musical power of *Bamboo Dance*, the composer has indicated specific dynamic changes. To make the constant staccato passages come to life, the composer uses a wide dynamic range from *piano* to *fortissimo*. This dynamic range serves the character of the clapping sound of two long bamboo rods well, since the softest sound still needs to be firm and audible. Although the softest sound only comes down to the dynamic of *piano*, instant and subtle dynamic changes are required often within every measure.

Developing the dynamic changes further, the composer also highlights the musical excitement with specific accent markings. While the accents are similar, to maintain the bamboo clapping sound throughout, they are required on specific beats, sometimes on the downbeat sometimes not. In each *forte* and *fortissimo* segment of music, there are accents marked along with the dynamics. In the softer dynamic range, such as *mezzo piano* and *piano*, accents are marked on either beat 4, beat 3, or beat 2 (See Figure 3.14). *Bamboo Dance* does not have an accent marked on beat one for the entire piece.
• Technical Demands

The technical demands of *Bamboo Dance* focus mainly on the execution of the musical motive, the staccato chords and the sixteenth-note broken chords. All of these three technical challenges are related to the interval of a 7th.

While staccato can be done in many different ways, the staccato sound in *Bamboo Dance* should be short, focused and percussive. Since the staccato notes bounce around the keyboard, students will learn to stay close to the keyboard and initiate finger action on the keys instead of
above the keys. Students will need less floppy wrists for playing staccato in *Bamboo Dance*. The arms will stay relatively firm and quiet but relaxed at the same time. The musical motif, constructed of four notes, should be played with a sense of hierarchy. These four notes should not be played the same. The descending 7th, from the third note to the fourth note, requires special attention by students. They should feel the distance of the descending 7th and provide a sense of direction with clean articulation.

The execution of the staccato chords requires similar techniques as for the motif. While the chords sound highly clustered, students will need to voice the highest note of the chords to show the “melody” that is hiding within the music. Since the technical elements in *Bamboo Dance* are not too diverse, students who are in the advanced levels (level 9-10) of Jane Magrath’s leveling system should be able to handle this composition. The chords constructed within the interval of the 7th may also help students to extend their chord-playing technique. Nonetheless, it is also important that piano pedagogues remind students to relax their hands, keeping them free from tension which chord playing can create. Students with smaller hands need to pay special attention to the release actions of their hands and arms, as they acquire this technique, to avoid unnecessary injuries.

In order to play the broken chord patterns successfully, students will learn not only how to transfer their arm weight from one finger to another, but also to maintain the ascending 7th hand position. Transferring arm weight from one finger to another will help students to produce an even tone from one note to the next. Furthermore, maintaining the ascending 7ths hand position will assist students to find the notes more efficiently and accurately. Teachers should also recommend legato practice in the broken chord passages (legato with the left hand alone and then legato with both hands) before students start practicing staccato, as written. Practicing
Legato at the beginning stage of study will help students to master both the quick change of hand positions and also the patterns of the ascending 7ths.

- **Reading Demands**

In order to focus on the technical and musical demands of *Bamboo Dance*, students may find it difficult to read the music for the first time. The most challenging aspects of reading are:

1. multiple octave signs (*8va*),
2. notes with multiple ledger lines,
3. constant change of clefs,
4. the added accidentals.

*Bamboo Dance* is a composition that covers the entire range of the keyboard. In order to notate notes played in the lowest and the highest registers of the piano the composer writes many octava signs and also uses multiple ledger lines. Although the pitches classes are the same when the composer puts the octave sign over/below the notes, the octave signs can be hard for the eyes to catch at first. Perhaps most importantly, the octave signs require students to move far away from their original hand positions. This factor intensifies the reading challenge. To help students in the reading process, teachers can recommend students to mark the places with visual hints.

Before learning *Bamboo Dance*, students should be comfortable reading notes with two on three ledger lines so that notes with four ledger lines are not completely unreasonable to read. To reduce the reading difficulty for the notes with multiple ledger lines, students might be allowed to write down the pitches for themselves to assist their reading at the early stage of learning. The visual hint can be taken out later in the reading process.

Moreover, the constant change of clefs adds to the reading difficulty. Although students at this stage of piano study should be able to identify clef changes, having the clef changes multiple times in one phrase is still challenging. Piano pedagogues should encourage their students to take a slower tempo in order to identify and execute the clef changes carefully. If it is
necessary, students can “glue” the ending measure of one clef and then advance to the first measure of the next one, as a practice unit.

Rhythmically, *Bamboo Dance* is a highly patterned piece. However, the added accidentals make the reading process challenging. Almost every measure has several notated accidentals (*sharps*, *flats*, and *naturals*) for students to identify. It is challenging for students who are used to learning by ear because the melodic lines of *Bamboo Dance* are not easy to identify. Nonetheless, with careful reading and efficient practicing, students will improve their accidental-note reading skills after they master *Bamboo Dance*.

**Guessing**

- **Musical Demands**

  *Guessing* is a composition that is inspired by a fragment of a Chinese folk song by the same name. Based on the song, the composer adds new pitches, an expanded range, more extreme dynamics and innovative rhythmic materials to evoke the rustic Chinese musical style.67 *Guessing* is a six-page piece. In the score, the composer indicates that *Guessing* should take approximately five minutes to perform. Even though *Guessing* is relatively short, it is constructed with a rich and continuously evolving musical character. Every musical demand in this piece should serve the purpose of portraying the liveliness of the musical character. The musical demands are 1) rhythmic complexity, 2) tempo changes, 3) dynamic changes and accents and 4) the unique sound produced by using the *sostenuto* pedal.

  The first musical demand that requires the students’ attention is the complexity of the rhythm. This rhythmic complexity manifests itself in meter changes, obscurity of beats, and multiple passages of triplets, sixteenth notes and quintuplets. Although the meter changes in

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Guessing are not as frequent as in Bamboo Dance, they are still difficult. Obscure beats, such as syncopations and hemiolas contribute to the rhythmic difficulty. Within the composition, students will encounter a section of hemiolas in 3/4 meter, a section with quintuplets played across the beats, a section with syncopations, and a section of half-note triplets in 4/4 meter. In order to precisely execute the rhythm throughout the piece, students will not only need to know where the rhythmic beats are but also be able to count the subdivisions. This way the hemiola passage and the syncopated passage can be precisely played. While counting subdivisions in the quintuplet section and half-note triplet section is close to impossible (see Figure 3.15), a student can feel a bigger pulse in order to keep the rhythm and tempo precise (see Figure 3.16.).

Figure 3.15. Chen Yi, Guessing, mm.55-59.

Figure 3.16. Chen Yi, Guessing, mm.116-128.
The second musical demand is the tempo changes on the first two pages of *Guessing*. Here the composer marks “piu mosso” and “accel.” on the first page and marks “accel.” and a tempo change from a quarter equals 120 to a quarter note equals 132 at the end of the second page. Pedagogues acknowledge the difficulty of teaching students to feel time.\(^6^8\) At the beginning stage of learning *Guessing*, students should learn to clap the beats in the original tempo and the accelerated beats heading toward the new tempo. Piano pedagogues should remind their students to practice this exercise slowly at first. Students can work toward a performance tempo as they become comfortable, during later stages of learning. More importantly, piano teachers should be flexible, allowing students to play in a range of performance tempi instead of an absolute one. A tempo that suits the musical character and fully illustrates the musical expression of the composition is the goal.

The third musical demand is to vividly show the musical character of *Guessing*, through precise execution of dynamic changes and accents. The *forte* and *fortissimo* dynamics at the beginning of the piece set up a bright and lively musical atmosphere. After the tempo change, the short passages, alternating between *forte* and *piano*, correlate to the loud percussive sound and the soft fragment of the original folk song melody. As the music progresses into the dynamic range of *pianissimo* and *mezzo piano*, an ethereal musical atmosphere is presented. Students who are at the appropriate level while studying this composition should be able to execute *forte* dynamics and *piano* dynamics. It is recommended that they learn to play *forte*, followed by *piano* while taking a little extra time. It is hard for our ears to process the sudden change of dynamics without taking a sliver extra of time. So, students should not only observe the rests

(written by the composer) between the *forte* passage and the *piano* passage carefully, but also should learn how to help listeners to hear the music better by taking time at sudden dynamic changes. If the *piano* dynamics are not soft enough nor able to be heard, students will need to adjust their timing between the passages accordingly.

The fourth musical demand is to create a unique musical sound by using the *sostenuto* pedal in the half-note triplet section (see Figure 3.16). With the *sostenuto* pedal down, the beginning unison chords (D-G-Aflat-D) is sustained through the next nine measures. Since the unison chords (D-G-Aflat-D) are placed in the extreme registers of the piano, its lingering sound, created by the *sostentuno* pedal, provides a surreal effect for the melody that follows.

- **Technical Demands**

The technical requirements of *Guessing* are closely related to its musical demands. In order to successfully perform *Guessing*, students will acquire the technical skills of: 1) precise articulation; 2) clean sixteenth-note passage-playing in a fast tempo, 3) clean execution of double-note passages (double-fourths and octaves), and 4) efficient travel across the keyboard that includes left-hand crossing.

For the articulation of *Guessing*, Chen Yi gives specific directions for the performer. There are no long slurs notated in the first half of the composition. There are only two-note slurs and slurs for the quintuplets. One might consider that the composer leaves the interpretation of playing legato to the performer; however, the composer writes *legato* when the half-note triplets start on page four. This articulation notation specifies and suggests that the beginning three pages should be mostly detached. An argument can be made that the rapid sixteenth-note passage on page two can be played legato, but with an articulated touch (see Figure 3.17). This articulation can be applied to the sixteenth-note passage toward the end of the piece (mm.151-165) as well.
Students should be made aware of the similarity of the sixteenth-note passages (noted above) as they begin their detailed work on articulation. For both sixteenth-note passages, students will work towards a clear articulation, which should produce a sound that is similar to the sound of pearls dropping into a glass container. Meanwhile, because the left hand plays the melody, to achieve a good balance, ensure that the right hand sixteenth notes should not overpower it.

The double-note passages (double-fourths and octaves) enhance the level of difficulty of Guessing. Double-note passages are always challenging for young fingers and hands to grasp. In order to achieve a musically clean performance of the double-note passages, students will first, learn how to prioritize the melodic layer of the double-notes; second, learn that it is not necessary to connect all the notes with finger legato; third, remember to maintain flexible wrists and arms to assist the fingers; and last, remember to stay attentive to the composer’s musical notations, such as accents, two-note slurs and dynamics, because playing musically always helps to overcome the technical difficulty.
The last important technical challenge of *Guessing* is the traveling of hands across the keyboard. Since the composer puts an abundance of clef changes and octave signs in the score, students will have to travel across the keyboard efficiently. Additionally, the composer often has a dynamic change at some large leaps on the keyboard. If students are not careful, the big leaps could end up creating an unnecessary accent in the beginning of the *piano/pianissimo* passages. So, piano teachers should advise their students to write down visual cues for the dynamic changes in the wide-leap passages. Furthermore, students will need to practice the dynamic transition (the ending measure of one dynamic followed by the starting measure of the next dynamic) in order to secure the precision of note playing and the accurate playing of dynamics.

- **Reading Demands**

There is one primary reading challenge in *Guessing*: learning the complex rhythms is far more difficult than reading the pitches. While addressing the rhythmic challenge (see above section on the musical demands), teachers should remind students to develop a steady pulse. If students cannot achieve this goal in the first few tries, they will need to identify the sections of complex rhythmic change and clap the rhythmic patterns until they can feel the pulse with ease. Then, teachers should encourage their students to count the big beats out loud while clapping the rhythm. This method will help students to be more autonomous in their learning and identify the correct rhythms. If neither of these two methods works for the students, teachers should offer to record a student’s performance and play the recording back. Students should be able to identify their mistakes, and then fix the problems. Last but not least, after students are more comfortable with clapping the correct patterns, teachers can play the passages along with students’ clapping, so that they hear how the pitches fit with the rhythmic patterns prior to being sent off to practice on their own.
Mongolian Folk-tune Variations

- Musical Demands

*Mongolian Folk-tune Variations* is a composition made up of a theme and eight variations followed by a coda. It takes approximately 10 minutes to perform. Each variation has its own technical demands and unique musical character. While studying this piece, students will learn about how to phrase with changing dynamics, to voice the melody within thicker textures, to integrate tempo and character change between variations, and to maintain the Mongolian folk character while playing in the western compositional style.

The Theme is written in three voices with a clear right hand melody and left hand accompaniment (See Figure 3.18). The theme is presented in the right hand in the first eight measures of the piece. The left-hand accompaniment imitates the strumming of a Chinese folk string instrument. Students will need to learn about the strumming sound of a Chinese folk string instrument to play the left-hand accompaniment in the appropriate character. Phrasing for the theme is indicated by the composer’s dynamic markings and the musical structure (2+2+4).

![Theme](image)

Figure 3.18. Zhou Long, *Mongolian Folk-tune Variations*, mm.1-8.
Variations 1 and 2 are written in four-voice counterpoint, preserving the tune from the Theme. Variation 1 sounds the theme in the soprano voice, whereas Variation 2 places the theme in the tenor voice. Similar to all the other contrapuntal music composed by western composers, the thematic material should be voiced to bring out the most important layer among the four voices. Furthermore, in order to show the continuation of each voice, students should remember that the musical line with longer note values should be voiced out more than the layers of moving notes.

Starting from Variation 3 the theme develops new melodic material with changes of tempo (Vivace) and texture. Even though it is still a four-voice variation, the right-hand melody is embedded within flowing triplets, while the left hand continues the strumming accompaniment gesture from the theme itself, only with different harmonies. Moreover, the left-hand strumming gesture maintains a counter melody to the right-hand melody, enriching the texture. Instead of playing two- and four-measure units, students will phrase in five-measure unit in Variation 3.

The first minor key appears in Variation 4. Shifting from major to minor alters the mood of the music. Here the musical atmosphere becomes nostalgic. Dynamic changes suggest four-bar phrasing, challenging students to maintain a long singing line while playing short slurs throughout almost the entire variation.

Variation 4 ends with a Chinese pentatonic scale (D-flat, E-flat, G-flat, A-flat and B-flat) (See Figure 3.19) preparing listeners for Variation 5, which is built on those tones. The musical character of Variation 5 is slow and somber. While the right-hand melody develops the Chinese pentatonic scale, the arpeggiated left-hand accompaniment may recall, for some, the style of some Brahms’ intermezzi.
Variation 5 and 6 are *attacca* movements. The sudden change of tempo at the end of Variation 5 immediately suggests a celebratory and jolly musical character that carries through Variation 6. The tempo marking in Variation 6 changes to *Scherzando*, a quarter note equals 132. Here we find the first appearance of sixteenth notes in the composition. These rapid melodic sixteenth-note passages in the right hand are accompanied by thick, chordal eighth-note passages in the left hand. Teachers will help their student to voice the right hand sixteenth notes to balance with the left-hand chords. Furthermore, due to the thick texture and fast tempo, soft dynamic markings such as *mezzo piano*, *piano*, and *pianissimo* enhance the challenge of voicing.

After the excitement of Variation 6, the music temporarily calms down in Variation 7. Students should be aware that the melody sounds in the left hand from the beginning of Variation 7, before right hand takes over in measure 17. Similar to Variation 6, the single-line melody is accompanied by thick passages of chords. Balance and voicing are particularly challenging in Variation 7, which starts *pianissimo*, while delicate crescendos and diminuendos are constantly required throughout. So students will not only discover how to listen attentively and achieve good balance in both hands; they will also learn about how to plan the subtle dynamic scheme wisely to accomplish full musical expressivity.

Polyphonic writing makes a return in Variation 8. The longest variation in the composition Variation 8 continues all the musical demands of the previous variations: voicing in polyphonic texture, voicing between hands (thick accompaniment against a thin melody),
phrasing of dynamic changes, fluctuating tempo, and so on. All of these musical demands in Variation 8 serve to build the triumph and excitement which conclude this variation.

Although the composition could end with Variation 8, the composer writes a one-page coda. The thematic material reoccurs as the coda begins; however, the musical character is transformed. The music becomes slower and more peaceful. Written in a four-voice texture once more, the coda brings peacefulness through its flowing sixteenth-note triplets in the tenor voice and the *pianissimo* dynamic.

- **Technical Demands**

*Mongolian Folk-tune Variations* is a composition that helps and requires students to develop multiple sets of technical skills. These technical skills include 1) fast rolled chords containing large intervals in a soft dynamic, 2) polyphonic playing, 3) sensitive use of the damper pedal and soft pedal, 4) fast passages of thick chords and sixteenth notes, 5) rapid changes of articulations, 6) fast and lengthy octave and double notes passages, and 7) unconventional leaps in fast sixteenth note passages. All these technical skills are exciting to acquire, and students will benefit from the to study of this composition.

The technical skill of fast and soft rolled chords with large intervals is required in the theme (See Figure 3.18) and Variation 3 (See Figure 3.20). Although Variation 7 contains some soft rolled chords, these rolled chords are not nearly as challenging as in the theme and Variation 3. For the chords in the theme and Variation 3, it is impossible for a regular sized hand to grab the entire chord in fixed position. Therefore, in order to play these large rolled chords in the soft dynamic indicated by the composer, students are advised to first aim for the lowest note and then the highest note. During the practicing process, students will listen for the evenness of tone between the notes and avoid unwanted accents. When this task is accomplished, students can add
the middle notes back into the rolled chords and go through the listening and practicing process once again. While practicing this technical skill, piano pedagogues should reinforce the importance of maintaining a relaxed hand position, so that students will not sustain injuries created by unnecessary tension.

![Variation 3](image)

Figure 3.20. Zhou Long, Mongolian Folk-tune Variation No.3, mm.1-3.

Then, there is the challenge of polyphonic playing in Variations 1 and 2. While the thematic materials take place in different voices in these two variations, the technique of voicing out the theme is similar. It is recommended that students play the thematic material alone. While doing that, students should sing the other part. Then, students can add the other three voices to the theme in succession. This practicing process will help students decide on the hierarchy of these three voices. In general, sustaining notes should be voiced out more.

The contrapuntal writing and the rich harmonies of *Mongolian Folk-tune Variations* compel the use of sensitive pedaling. In general, students should change the pedal when the harmony changes. However, when the melodic note is a sustaining note, half pedal changes are suggested in this context (See Figure 3.21).
In this scenario, students will learn about how to “flutter” the damper pedal in order to sustain the melodic note and not blur the harmonies too much at the same time. Moreover, when the large rolled chords in the left-hand accompaniment take places (See Figure 3.18 and Figure 3.20), it opens the discussion of whether the bass note should be caught with the damper pedal or not. When the bass note belongs to the harmony, it is appropriate and necessary to catch the bass note with the pedal in order to create a legato bass line and full harmony. However, if the bass note does not belong to the tonal harmony, it is debatable whether it should be included in the pedaled passage or not. The usage of the pedal is one of the hardest elements to teach piano students. The core issue for achieving might be to suggest students to listen attentively to their playing and react to the sound.

Then, another technical demand is the fast passages containing thick chords and sixteenth notes which appear in Variation 6,7 and 8 of the composition. In order to play the thick chordal passages over the running-note melody in Variation 6, students are advised to play the chords two dynamic levels softer than the melody, as indicated by the composer. The running sixteenth-note passages are mostly written within the 5-finger pattern. In general, an articulated approach to all the sixteenth notes in general is recommended. In practice, students should emphasize the first note of each beat in the sixteenth note passages in order to keep them from rushing. Furthermore, the chordal passages in Variation 7 has a different character from the ones in
Variation 6. Since Variation 7 is written cantabile throughout the repeating chords in the left hand should maintain a sense of legato to accompany the singing legato line in the right hand. Variation 8 is the most technically difficult variation. It is filled with almost every technical difficulty that appears in the composition.

Since Variation 8 is the most challenging segment, techniques such as rapid changes of articulation, extended octaves/double-note passages, and unconventional large leaps in passages of fast sixteenth notes only appear in this particular variation. While fast change of articulation and extended octave/double notes passages can be achieved with a reasonable amount of careful repetition and effective practice over time, the unconventional leaps (See Figure 3.22) in the passages of fast sixteenth notes enhance the difficulty of Variation 8 tremendously. The leaps do not fit easily into the hand and the directions of the leaps change constantly.

Figure 3.22. Zhou Long, Mongolian Folk-tune Variation No.8, mm.40-47.

An additional difficulty is the pianissimo and piano dynamics of the passage. When students see these dynamics, they have a tendency to tense up. In order to execute precisely in the indicated dynamics students should practice the passage slowly in smaller units. While
playing the passage a sense of pivoting the hands to relax is required to avoid too much tension in the hands and arms.

- **Reading Demands**

  Compared to the musical demands and the technical challenges, the reading demands of *Mongolian Folk-tune Variations* are less difficult. There are few notations with many ledger lines. Therefore, it is manageable for students to maintain a relatively smooth reading. The only musical element that makes the reading slightly difficult is the abundance of accidentals.

  Although there are some parts in the variations that use extended harmonies, *Mongolian Folk-tune Variations* is a composition that maintains its tonal center. Though the theme suggests that this composition might be in b minor, Zhou Long does not notate the key signature of b minor in the composition. When the new variations change into another key (Variation 3 is in e minor, Variation 4 is in d minor, and etc.), no key signatures are indicated at the beginning of the variation. Instead, there are written-in accidentals throughout this piece, which makes the reading more challenging. Nonetheless, even with the accidentals, *Mongolian Folk-tune Variations* is still easily manageable for students to read at this level of piano study.

**Northern Scenes**

- **Musical Demands**

  *Northern Scenes* is an eight-page virtuosic composition. It is strikingly different from the other compositions that are discussed in this monograph, *Northern Scenes* is the only piece that is atonal. The composer noted in the score that this composition is approximately 8 minutes long. In an interview, she also said that it is a composition that is full of mystery, darkness, passionate and expressive layers, as well as vertical soundscapes and space.\(^{69}\) Moreover, *Northern Scenes*\(^{69}\)  

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\(^{69}\) Chen Yi, Email Interview by author, Feb 19, 2019.
resembles the spiritual animal, black Xuanwu in the north (refer to in Chapter II-Performance Analysis). It is essential for students to learn about the characteristics of this ancient Chinese spiritual animal while studying *Northern Scenes*. In order to achieve the full musical power of this work, piano students will develop the following musical techniques: 1) playing the irregular groupings of sixteenth notes with direction, 2) placing the dense cluster chords in a different range of dynamics, 3) phrasing of the dense polyrhythmic musical passage, and 4) pacing the performance organically through this atonal composition.

The first musical demand is playing the irregular groupings of sixteenth notes with a sense of direction. The irregular groupings of sixteenth notes (see Figure 3.23), such as quintuplets, sextuplets, nonuplets, and decuplets, require students’ careful interpretation. If each note in each of these groupings is played evenly, the musical character will be less mysterious. Since each of these groupings of sixteenth notes is going upward, students are advised to play towards the highest note. Taking time is not necessary in this kind of phrasing. However, aiming for the highest note as the peak of the phrase is essential.

![Figure 3.23. Chen Yi, Northern Scenes, mm.31-33.](image)

The second musical demand involves placing the dense cluster chords in different dynamic ranges (see Figure 3.24). In all the A, A\textsuperscript{1} and A\textsuperscript{II} sections, there are dense cluster chords written at different dynamic levels. Although the tempo of *Northern Scenes* is moderately slow and free, the dynamics of these stoic cluster chords require students’ attention. While stronger
dynamics such as *forte* and *fortissimo* fit naturally for the hands in this context, the softer
dynamics, such as *piano* and *pianissimo*, require a delicate touch. Students will practice the
placement of these soft cluster chords individually, first making sure each note comes out as
evenly as the others. Then, students will learn how to voice the top notes of these chords. Even
though *Northern Scenes* is an atonal composition, voicing of each cluster chord is still necessary.

![Figure 3.24. Chen Yi, Northern Scenes, mm.1-5.](image)

The third musical demand is how to phrase in the polyrhythmic section (see Figure 3.25).
Although the right hand octave melody automatically comes through in the polyrhythm, it is the
left hand that indicates how to phrase. The low bass notes, which appear in different beats in
different measures, can help students to understand how to phrase this polyrhythm section.
Without overpowering the melody, students will stress each low bass with a tenuto articulation.
Taking a small amount of time is appropriate to phrase in this section.

![Figure 3.25. Chen Yi, Northern Scenes, mm.37-39.](image)

The last musical demand is how to perform this atonal composition with a natural pacing.
Atonal compositions are less accessible than tonal compositions. So when it comes to performing
the piece, a road map of how the music lays out is necessary. *Northern Scenes* is roughly divided into five different parts suggesting a rondo form. Students should highlight the reoccurrences of the A section. Moreover, piano pedagogues should remind students to carefully follow the composer’s musical indications, especially during the transitions between sections. At the ending of each section, Chen Yi writes out repeated *diminuendo* chords, left hand sequential patterns, *accelerando*, and dramatic *crescendos* to show the transition between sections. If students can execute these musical intentions, they will most likely achieve an organic pacing in performing *Northern Scenes*.

- **Technical Demands**

*Northern Scenes* is a musically virtuosic piece. The technical challenge is less demanding compared to its musical and reading demands. There are two technical aspects though that students need to solve: 1) finding effective fingerings and convenient hand distributions for the irregular sixteenth-note groupings, and 2) maintaining flexible arm and hand movements for the dense octave and chordal passages.

The first technical demand is finding efficient fingering and convenient hand distribution for the irregular sixteenth-note groupings. The irregular groupings of sixteenth-note can be divided into two technical categories. One is playing each group with one hand; the other is playing one grouping with both hands. In order to find the most efficient way to play these groups of sixteenth notes, students should single out these passages and experiment with different kinds of fingerings and hand distributions. To achieve the most economical way in playing these passages, students are advised to keep the alternations of each hand’s position to a minimum.
The second technical demand is to successfully play the dense octave and chordal
passages in the penultimate section of the piece (see Figure 3.26). As the composition develops,
the musical character changes from mysterious to passionate. The penultimate section of the
piece is not only faster than the previous sections, but also thicker in musical texture. To practice
the octave and chordal passages in forte dynamic with accents, students should avoid tension in
their hands and arms to prevent unnecessary injuries. Moreover, even though the passage is
written in *forte*, students still need to plan a variety of *forte* dynamics to give shape and,
therefore, greater musical power.

![Figure 3.26. Chen Yi, *Northern Scenes*, mm.106-110.](image)

- **Reading Demands**

  On top of all the challenging musical demands and technical demands, the reading
demands of *Northern Scenes* enhance its level of difficulty. The reading demands fall into three
categories. They are: 1) multiple ledger lines, 2) dense written-in accidentals, and 3) irregular
groupings of sixteenth notes.

  The first reading challenge is the multiple ledger-line notes. Students who are able to
learn *Northern Scenes* should be able to efficiently read notes with at least three lines. *Northern
Scenes* is often notated with five ledger lines. This creates a challenge for students to read since
the majority of them might not have abundant experience in reading notes with so many ledger lines. Furthermore, the composer places chords and double notes on multiple ledger-lines. This further enhances the difficulty of reading. In order to make the practicing progress efficiently, students are advised to read intervallically from the bottom note as they learn the chords. This will be less confusing for students in the early learning process.

The second reading challenge is the density of written-in accidentals. Students at this level should be able to read accidentals fluently. However, since *Northern Scenes* is atonal, students may not be able to hear a melodic line at the beginning stage of study. The accidentals require careful identification every time students (re)read the piece. Luckily, with time and practice, fitting the notes into the hands is manageable. Teachers should advise their students to write down the fingerings and make decisions about hand distribution as students learn the notes. This practical advice should be given at the earliest stage of learning.

The third reading challenge is the irregular groupings of sixteenth notes. If each of these groupings had fit into the beats, the reading challenge would not be nearly as hard. However, in the polyrhythm passage, the nonuplets in the left hand are notated to be played across two beats (see Figure 3.27). This increases the reading difficulty for students because the right hand maintains a steady beat with the melody. In this section, teachers should encourage students to feel a bigger pulse in two instead of in four. Then the reading challenge can be gradually solved.

Figure 3.27. Chen Yi, *Northern Scenes*, mm.50-51.
Chapter IV
Conclusion

Chen Yi and Zhou Long are two prominent Chinese-American composers who have been active and influential during the past decade. Their contributions to the piano literature are influential and meaningful. I chose these specific piano solo compositions, *Singing in the Mountain*, *Two Chinese Bagatelles: Yu Diao and Small Beijing Gong*, *Bamboo Dance*, *Guessing*, *Mongolian Folk-Tune Variations*, and *Northern Scenes* as they vary not only stylistically and musically, but also maintain high pedagogical and performance values for pianists.

Through the performance analysis, it is clear that each of the discussed compositions is inspired by one or more Chinese cultural or folk elements. Even though each of them resembles various western compositional techniques, the musical materials and the cultural elements are highly compatible to each other. In *Singing the Mountain*, the notation of extreme keyboard register resembles the sound of the call and echo from in traditional mountain singing style. The contrasted dynamics represent the echoing effect in the mountains. *Yu Diao*, composed using antiphonal style and pentatonic musical materials, reflects the local opera in Henan province. *Small Beijing Gong* shows the sound of a Gong by the accented harmonic 7th's in the high register. With its accented cluster chords and the staccato melodic 7th, *Bamboo Dance* vividly represents the clapping sound of the Li People’s bamboo dance. *Guessing*, adopted Bartok’s and Stravinsky’s compositional style, and is based on a fragmented tune of a Yunan children’s folk song, *Cai Diao*. *Mongolian Folk-tune Variations*, showing the influence of contrapuntal writing, French impressionistic style, and Brahmsian style, is based on a lyrical eight-measure folk tune called *Mongolian Xiao Diao*. And *Northern Scenes*, the only atonal composition discussed in this monograph, resembles a Chinese spiritual animal, *Black Xuanwu*. 
Furthermore, the level of difficulty increases progressively from *Singing in the Mountain* (level 3-4), *Two Chinese Bagatelles: Yu Diao and Small Beijing Gong* (level 7-8), *Bamboo Dance* (level 9-10), *Guessing* (level 10+), *Mongolian Folk-Tune Variations* (level 10+), and *Northern Scenes* (level 10+). The appropriate leveling for these compositions spans from the early intermediate level to professional and virtuosic piano playing. While each of these works maintains unique musical, technical and reading demands, pianists in the western world will have an authentic experience with the Chinese culture while enhancing their musical and technical skills on the piano. Whether the pianist learning this music is young and new to piano study, or is already established in the profession, this selection of piano solo repertoire will help them explore the unfamiliar musical and cultural world of the East.
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Books

Journal Articles

Scores

Thesis and Dissertations
Websites


VITA

Weiying Tang is born in Shenzhen, China. She was first introduced to piano at the age of six and started playing piano when she was eight, under the tutelage of Prof. Zhaoyi Dan. However, Weiying paused her piano study at the age of twelve, but started to play piano again when she came to United States in 2009. Weiying got her Bachelor of Music in piano performance and Bachelor of Arts in political science at DePauw University. Then she attended Louisiana State University from August, 2014 for her Master degree in piano performance and continued her Doctoral of Musical Arts at LSU from August, 2016. Weiying had collaborated with the Columbus Symphony Orchestra in Indiana as one of the soloists. And she has been active in collaborative piano since her Junior year in college. She is also an active piano pedagogue, and she has been one of the appointed judges for the DeBose National Piano Competition since April, 2017.