

CROSS-CULTURAL SYNERGIES: CHINESE INFLUENCES IN CHEN YI'S SOLO FLUTE
WORK 'MEMORY' AND ITS PERFORMANCE APPLICATIONS

by

Yinzi Zhou

(Under the Direction of Angela Jones-Reus)

ABSTRACT

Chen Yi's solo flute work "Memory" combines the composer's own culture—Chinese music—with Western compositional language, making it a perfect example of cross-cultural synergies. "Memory" has become an important part of the flute repertoire and is frequently performed, including as a required piece in top competitions. This document explores Chinese musical traditions in Chen Yi's solo flute work "Memory" by comparing five classical Chinese pieces and examining how this rich cultural heritage affects the work. It is a deeply emotional piece, full of mournful feelings, as expressed in the composer's program notes dedicated to her mentor, Professor Lin.

By comparing five classical Chinese pieces, this research explores the connections between these works and "Memory." It highlights shared human emotions such as sadness, homesickness, and tragedy, expressed through different Chinese instruments and genres, and relates them to Western flute performance techniques. The study focuses on specific flute techniques, such as ornamentations, pitch bending, vibrato, rhythm, and tempo, which mirror expressions in Chinese music. This research aims to provide performers with the necessary tools

to interpret "Memory" with an understanding of its roots in traditional Chinese music, through written analysis and a lecture recital.

INDEX WORDS: Chen Yi, Memory, Solo flute, Chinese musical traditions, Flute techniques, Performance interpretation, Grace note, Pitch bending

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YINZI ZHOU

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YINZI ZHOU

Major Professor: Angela Jones-Reus

Committee: Amy Pollard
Emily Koh

Electronic Version Approved:

Ron Walcott
Vice Provost for Graduate Education and Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

Looking at flute compositions from ancient to modern times, the characteristics of ethnic and cultural elements have always existed. Although contemporary music continues to incorporate these cultural elements, performers might not always be familiar with them. It is the performer's responsibility to understand the background and culture of the music they perform, which requires an in-depth study of the composer's cultural, historical, and compositional background to interpret the music more accurately.

Chen Yi's flute solo work, "Memory," exemplifies a piece that benefits from thorough research from the performer. Originally composed for violin, the piece was later adapted for flute by Chen Yi, becoming an important part of the flute repertoire. It is frequently performed, including serving as a required piece in prominent flute competitions such as the National Flute Association Young Artist Competition.¹

Through my research, I found that there is limited information specifically about the piece "Memory," and no existing published research papers dedicated to it. Although there are books and articles about the composer—providing valuable evidence of the influence she gained from Chinese traditional music—this significant and frequently performed piece deserves dedicated

¹ "2024 NFA Competitions Repertoire Solo Category," The National Flute Association, 2024, 5. https://www.nfaonline.org/docs/default-source/convention-documents/competition-documents/2024-nfacompetitions-repertoire.pdf?sfvrsn=fc946bf3_2.

analysis and research. Therefore, this study focuses on the Chinese musical performance traditions and influences within Chen Yi's flute solo work, "Memory."

Chen Yi's musical language reflects a very different cultural background to traditional Western "classical" music due to her experiences as a Chinese immigrant. To deeply understand "Memory," it is necessary to acknowledge the influence and inspiration Chen Yi absorbed from Chinese music. Chen Yi is a Chinese-American composer and violinist. She has studied Chinese music in depth, especially during her time with the *Beijing* Opera Troupe and her studies at the Central Conservatory.² Her teacher at Columbia University, Professor Chou Wen-chung, encouraged her to delve into her cultural history and put its legacy into practice.³ Thus, the combination of her own culture—Chinese music—and the western composition language, made her successful in promoting cross-cultural artistic style. The solo flute work, "Memory", is one of the works that represents these cross-cultural features.

In "Memory," Chen Yi reflects on the loss of her teacher through music. It is a piece full of strong emotions, especially painful and mournful feelings, according to the composer's program notes: "Dear Professor Lin: I wish you could hear the tune in MEMORY, which sounds like my painful cry out of your name in our Cantonese dialect. I expressed my deep sorrow in the music, to remember your fatherly mentorship. Your meaningful smile will always be with us encouragingly."⁴

To help understand Chinese musical traditions in "Memory," I have selected five classical Chinese pieces as examples. Each piece embodies the theme of "memory," which resonates with the essence of Chen Yi's work, "Memory." By comparing and analyzing these pieces, I will

² Leta E. Miller and J. Michele Edwards, *Chen Yi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2020), 27.

³ Miller and Edwards, *Chen Yi*, 31.

⁴ Chen Yi, "Memory: For Solo Flute," 4.

explore how they connect to and enhance our understanding of the theme in Chen Yi's work. Through these examples, I will cite specific instances, draw comparisons, and demonstrate how similar expressions can be played on the flute and in "Memory." This will show how traditional Chinese music captures the nuances of "memory" and deepens our appreciation of Chen Yi's work.

This study does not broadly compare Eastern and Western musical traditions. The selection of pieces for comparison excludes the Chinese bamboo flute (*dizi*); well-known pieces written for the *dizi* are typically happy and cheerful, which do not align with the somber theme of "Memory." Additionally, the performance applications discussed will be strictly relevant to flute performance and will exclude detailed formal or theoretical analysis.

The dissertation will explore the shared human emotions—sadness, homesickness, and tragedy—expressed through these different instruments and genres of music: solo wind instruments (*xiao* and *xun*), solo string instruments (*erhu*), *Beijing* opera, and *Kunqu* opera. It will discuss the performance style in the traditional pieces and how this style can be demonstrated with flute techniques.

Expected Result

By comparing classical Chinese traditional pieces with Chen Yi's "Memory," the study will discuss similarities in performance and content. The comparisons will be demonstrated on the flute. The study will offer performers insights and guidance for a deeper understanding of the piece, and it will be presented through written analysis and a lecture recital.

CHAPTER 2

COMPOSER

Biography

Chen Yi is a Chinese-American composer and violinist, known for merging Eastern and Western musical traditions. Chen Yi's early environment was richly influenced by Western music, thanks to her well-educated family. Her mother, Dr. Du Dianqin, was an accomplished pediatrician and musician, and her father, Chen Ernan, was an amateur violinist who greatly influenced Chen Yi's musical tastes.⁵ Despite the challenges posed by the Cultural Revolution, Chen Yi continued her musical studies, eventually attending the Central Conservatory of Music.⁶ After earning her B.M. and M.M. degrees at CCOM, she came to the United States to pursue her doctoral degree at Columbia University.⁷

She was the first woman to receive a Master of Arts in composition from the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing (CCOM). In the late 1980s, during China's new political openness and cultural exchange, Chen Yi and other young Chinese composers, like her husband Zhou Long, Tan Dun, Bright Sheng, and Ge Gan-ru, moved to the United States to advance their careers.⁸

⁵ Mia Chung, *Chinese Émigré Composers and Divergent Modernisms: Chen Yi and Zhou Long* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024), 35.

⁶ Chung, *Chinese Émigré Composers and Divergent Modernisms*, 44.

⁷ Chung, *Chinese Émigré Composers and Divergent Modernisms*, 52.

⁸ Miller and Edwards, *Chen Yi*, 1.

Chen Yi has won many prestigious awards and fellowships, including the 2006 Pulitzer Prize for Music,⁹ the Koussevitzky Music Foundation Award,¹⁰ and the American Academy of Arts and Letters' Lieberson Award.¹¹ She also received fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts.¹²

During her time in rural China, Chen Yi was exposed to folk music, which greatly influenced her compositional style. Her experiences with traditional Chinese music, along with her formal training at CCOM, and her innovative approach to integrating Eastern and Western elements, have established her as a significant figure in contemporary music.

Influence from Chinese Folk Music

It is clear in Chen Yi's works that she is strongly influenced by traditional Chinese music. During the Cultural Revolution, Chen Yi was sent to the countryside as part of Mao's "down-to-the-countryside" mandate. There, she was exposed to the folk music of rural China, which left a lasting impression on her.¹³ This experience, along with her time as a principal violinist in the Guangzhou *Beijing* Opera Troupe, allowed her to immerse herself in traditional Chinese music, learning instruments such as the *ruan* and understanding the stylistic nuances of genres like *quyi* and music theatre.¹⁴

At the Central Conservatory of Music, Chen Yi received formal training in both Western and Chinese music. Her studies included courses in harmony, counterpoint, orchestration, and ear training, as well as intensive training in traditional Chinese music. She memorized and analyzed

⁹ Miller and Edwards, *Chen Yi*, 42.

¹⁰ "Works Commissioned by the Serge Koussevitzky Music Foundation." The Koussevitzky Music Foundation, August 2024.

<https://www.koussevitzky.org/commissions/>

¹¹ Miller and Edwards, *Chen Yi*, 43.

¹² Miller and Edwards, *Chen Yi*, 36.

¹³ Miller and Edwards, *Chen Yi*, 14.

¹⁴ Miller and Edwards, *Chen Yi*, 20.

hundreds of folk songs, and her exposure to genres like *qiyi* and Chinese opera deeply influenced her compositional voice.¹⁵ This dual foundation in Eastern and Western music is a key feature of Chen Yi's work. She skillfully blends traditional Chinese melodies, instruments, and techniques with Western classical forms and orchestration. Works like her *Chinese Rap* for violin and orchestra demonstrate her ability to integrate folk elements into contemporary compositions.¹⁶ Her deep understanding of both Eastern and Western musical traditions allows her to create pieces that are innovative and deeply rooted in cultural heritage. This blend of East and West defines her style and contributes to the global appreciation of Chinese musical traditions.

¹⁵ 15 Miller and Edwards, Chen Yi, 28.

¹⁶ Miller and Edwards, Chen Yi, 28.

CHAPTER 3

WORKS RELATED

Su Wu Herding Sheep

"Su Wu Herding Sheep"¹⁷ is a well-known story passed down through generations. During the reign of Emperor Wu of Han, Su Wu was sent on a mission to the Xiongnu. He was detained by the Xiongnu Chanyu, who demanded his surrender. Su Wu stayed strong and unyielding, refusing to give in to threats or bribes. Unable to break Su Wu's resolve, the Chanyu sent him to the North Sea to herd rams, where he stayed in the extremely severe and cold North Sea for nineteen years. The Xiongnu tricked the Han dynasty (206 B.C.–220 A.D.), claiming that Su Wu had died. Later, Emperor Wu of Han found out that Su Wu was still alive and forced Chanyu to release Su Wu.¹⁸ Su Wu's noble integrity and unwavering spirit have inspired countless people. Songs that have been composed about his story have been sung for many generations.

I selected "Su Wu Herding Sheep" as one of the five pieces to demonstrate the techniques in "Memory" because the *xiao* solo version, depicting Su Wu's hardship when he was sent to herd rams, highlights the tragedy of the story, which aligns with the emotional expressions I aim to explore. The *xiao*, an ancient Chinese vertical end-blown flute, is usually made of bamboo. Before the Han dynasty, both vertical and horizontal flutes were called "flutes." From the *Tang* dynasty (618 –907), the term "flute" specifically referred to the horizontal flute, and "*xiao*"

¹⁷ Yue Chen, *Dong Xiao* (Harvest International Media Co., Ltd., 2012), CD.

¹⁸ Richard T. Griffiths, "The Long Exile of the Diplomat Su Wu," *Diplomat Magazine*, November 3, 2024, <https://diplomatomagazine.eu/2024/11/03/the-long-exile-of-the-diplomat-su-wu/?form=MG0AV3>.

referred to the vertical flute.¹⁹ The beauty of the *xiao*, with a sense of melancholy, is felt in a poem by Wang Wei, a well-known poet from the *Tang* dynasty, named "*Qu Lake*":²⁰

吹箫凌极浦，日暮送夫君。湖上一回首，山青卷白云。

My translation of this poem: "Playing the *xiao* by the shores, bidding farewell to my friend at dusk. A glance back at the lake, seeing white clouds embracing green mountains." The poem describes the mournful sound of the *xiao* and the melancholy feeling of seeing the green mountains and white clouds still remaining, though the friend goes further and further away. Choosing a wind instrument like the *xiao*, which is related to the flute, helps us understand how similar emotions are conveyed across different instruments.

Farewell My Concubine

*Farewell My Concubine*²¹ is a classic *Beijing* opera created by the *Beijing* opera master, Mei Lanfang. The story takes place at the end of the battle between the Chu and Han kingdoms, where Xiang Yu, the king of Western Chu, is trapped by Han Xin's ambush at Gaixia. Surrounded by the Han army and hearing Chu songs meant to lower his soldiers' morale, Xiang Yu believed his forces had defected to Liu Bang, the king of Han, and that all was lost. During a farewell banquet with his beloved concubine, Consort Yu, Xiang Yu sang the sorrowful "Song of Gaixia." Then Consort Yu performed a sword dance and, after finishing, tragically took her own life out of love and loyalty. Overcome with grief, Xiang Yu broke through the siege but, after fierce battles, committed suicide by the river.²²

¹⁹ Weiliang Zhang, *Xiao Playing Method* (Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 1995), 1.

²⁰ Wei Wang and Diancheng Zhao, *The Collected Poems of Wang Wei*, ed. He Bai and Bai Meng (Shanghai: Shanghai Classics Publishing House, 2017), 715, Kindle.

²¹ Zhong Hua Xi Yun, "Renowned Peking Opera Artist Wang Yan's Elegant Expressions and Delicate, Charming Singing in 'Farewell My Concubine' from 'Selected Peking Opera Audio-Visual Collection of China.'"

²² Zabrina Lo, "Farewell My Concubine Is Rekindling Hong Kong's Interest in Cantonese Opera," *The Theatre Times*, October 19, 2019, <https://thetheatretimes.com/farewell-my-concubine-is-rekindling-hong-kongs-interest-in-cantonese-opera/>.

I selected *Farewell My Concubine* because the theme of farewell resonates deeply with Chen Yi's "Memory," which expresses the composer's grief over her teacher's death. Both pieces explore the emotional experience of saying goodbye and facing the loss of a significant person in one's life. Although the opera *Farewell My Concubine* is two hours long, my focus will be on the scene where Xiang Yu and Consort Yu realize that Xiang Yu will lose the battle, leading up to Yu's final dance.

Song of Chu

"Song of Chu"²³ for *xun* solo echoes the tragic themes of *Farewell My Concubine*. This adaptation, with the *xun*'s sad and mournful tones, creates a tragic atmosphere of the hero's downfall, the collapse of an empire, and eternal separation from his beloved.

The piece starts with a free introduction, and then the melody of a Chu folk song starts with a soft beginning. The *xun* then imitates the sound of sobbing and crying, evoking the mournful wails of ghosts. After a transition, the Chu song returns. This piece evokes a powerful emotional portrayal and atmosphere set against the historical background of the war.

I selected "Song of Chu" because I was deeply impressed by the haunting sound of the *xun*. The *xun*, being a vessel flute, is played in a manner similar to the Western flute, which provides a valuable point of reference for understanding how emotions are expressed through different but related instruments. As one of the oldest musical instruments in China, with a history spanning approximately 7,000 years, the *xun* has deep cultural significance.²⁴ It is the ideal instrument for creating a heartbreaking tone.²⁵ The *xun*'s sound embodies a unique beauty that

²³ Shibin Zhou, *Xun* (Beijing: China Record Corporation, 2017), CD.

²⁴ Qishu Wang, Shibin Zhou, and Li Zhang, *Fundamental Guide to Double-Chambered Xun* (Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 2021), 3.

²⁵ Kuanren Liu, *Xun Yan Zou Fa* (Beijing: People's Music Publishing House Co.,Ltd., 2004), 2.

combines loneliness, desolation, and elegance, making it a perfect instrument for exploring the themes of sadness, grief, and tragedy shared in Chen Yi's "Memory."

River of Sorrow

"River of Sorrow"²⁶ is a truly heartbreaking piece, as its title suggests. It tells the story of Meng Jiang, a woman from the Qin dynasty (1644–1911), who wept at the Great Wall after her husband, who was taken away for forced labor shortly after their wedding, never returned. Determined to find him, she started on a long journey, and along the way, she encountered someone who informed her that her husband had died long ago. Overwhelmed with grief, she wept at the riverbank, her tears flowing like the turbulent waters of the river.²⁷

Unlike many traditional Chinese music pieces, "River of Sorrow" is not descriptive or narrative; it is purely expressive. The piece doesn't offer a solution or an answer to the tragedy. The ending doesn't provide spiritual relief after crying; it only illustrates uncontainable sorrow and despair.²⁸

In 1962, Huang Haihui adapted the Northeastern folk song "River of Sorrow" into an *erhu* solo piece.²⁹ I selected "River of Sorrow" because its expressive qualities match perfectly with the themes of sadness, grief, and despair in Chen Yi's "Memory." The *erhu* is a Chinese, two-stringed bowed instrument from the *Tang* dynasty. Key *erhu* techniques include slides and vibrato, which are closely related to the flute techniques discussed in "Memory."

The Peony Pavilion

²⁶ Ding Yi Music Company, "River of Sorrow (Performed by Min, Huifen)," YouTube, September 27, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RD6hq_hVDLM.

²⁷ Min Hui-fen, Yan-jin Hua, and Reflections of the Moon on Erquan Spring, "The River of Sorrow," accessed February 17, 2025, <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=fe2135c8-9283-390e-a06c-fde7af40a666>.

²⁸ Jiusheng Yang, "The origin and development of *Jianghe shui*." (*Renmin Yinyue/People's Music*, 1981), 46.

²⁹ Yang, "The origin and development of *Jianghe shui*.", 44.

The Peony Pavilion (*Mudan ting*, 1598),³⁰ also known as *The Return of the Soul*, is the most famous of Tang Xianzu's "four dream plays" (*si meng*). This Ming dynasty play, by the prominent playwright Tang Xianzu (1550-1616), is considered a masterpiece of Chinese literature and *Kunqu*, a type of Chinese opera.³¹

Kunqu originated during the transitional period between the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368) and the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) and reached full development by the early 1600s. Since the late 1990s, its revival has been driven by China's efforts to preserve cultural heritage and a growing global interest in Chinese performing arts.³²

The story follows sixteen-year-old Du Liniang. On a fine spring day, she enters the garden of her parents' house for the first time, falls asleep, and dreams of a young scholar, Liu Mengmei. The two fall in love. The next day, she returns to the garden to seek her dream but is heartbroken when she cannot find him. Over the heartache of her dream lover, Du Liniang becomes very ill. When she realizes that she will not live for much longer, she paints a self-portrait and asks her mother to place it under a rock in the garden and bury her by the peony pavilion under the plum blossom tree where her dream with Liu Mengmei took place.³³ In this scene, "Retrieving Dream," the singing and narrative sections are interspersed, with transitions played by accompanimental instruments. It depicts Du Liniang waking from her dream, recalling what happened, and seeking the person from her dream. As she realizes everything has disappeared, her sadness deepens each

³⁰ Cheng Yue Dao Ren Jian, "Youth Version of The Peony Pavilion Volume 1-6, Dream Searching," YouTube, October 4, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mBol_CdcccE&list=PL6WA9UIadO4R0QIdpnuT-UMMdmvASkmH&index=7.

³¹ Siu Wang-NGai and Peter Lovrick, *Chinese Opera: Images and Stories* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997), 9

³² Patricia Sieber and Regina S. Llamas, *How to Read Chinese Drama: A Guided Anthology* (Columbia University Press, 2022), 192.

³³ Wang-NGai and Lovrick, *Chinese Opera: Images and Stories*, 204.

time the singing returns. The scene begins with excitement and happiness but becomes extremely sad by the end, as Du Liniang plans her death and chooses the plum tree as her burial place.

Although the second half of the play highlights Du Liniang's revival and happy ending, I chose the excerpt in the first half, that captures her deep longing and eventual death. This resonates deeply with the theme in Chen Yi's "Memory," which explores the grief of losing an important person.

Conclusion

In my dissertation, I introduced the background and story of five selected Chinese traditional pieces, each rich with expressive techniques that convey a wide range of emotions. These pieces demonstrate the power of specific techniques such as pitch bending, ornamentation, vibrato, rhythm, and tempo in expressing deep feelings.

The next part of my dissertation will explore how these techniques are employed in Chen Yi's "Memory." The expressive qualities found in the traditional pieces—like the crying quality of grace notes, the emotional intensity of vibrato, and the seamless transitions created by ornamentation—are all crucial elements that can enhance the emotional depth of "Memory." By using these traditional techniques, we can achieve a similar level of expressiveness in "Memory," creating a rich and emotive musical experience.

CHAPTER 4

PERFORMANCE APPLICATION

Chapter Statement: Unless otherwise stated, all measure numbers in the figures refer to the score of Chen Yi's work, "Memory." This chapter is divided into two main groups: techniques that are notated in the score of "Memory" and performance practices from Chinese music that are not notated in the score.

Techniques Notated in the Score

Ornamentation

Ornamentation has a significant role in Chen Yi's "Memory," with the grace note being the most prominent and expressive element throughout the piece. There are three primary ways to play the grace note, each with a different purpose.

- Grace Notes at the Beginning of a Phrase

The first role of the grace note is to begin a phrase, imitating the natural inflections of the human voice. It is uncommon for humans—particularly when expressing emotion—to produce a note with perfect, unwavering pitch. Adding one or a few grace notes at the beginning of the phrase gives instrumental playing a human-like quality.

In "Memory,"³⁴ examples of phrases that begin with grace notes are measures 1-2, measures 8-9, and measures 31-32.

³⁴ Chen Yi, "Memory: For Solo Flute," 2-3.



Figure 1.1 Measures 1-2

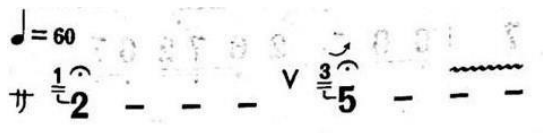


Figure 1.2 Beginning grace note in “Song of Chu”

The piece begins with a grace note (Figure 1.1), much like the “Song of Chu,”³⁵ which frequently incorporates one or more grace notes at the start of a phrase. In “Song of Chu,” grace notes are particularly common in the slow section, such as the beginning introduction (Figure 1.2). Similarly, “Memory” starts with a slow introduction that includes a grace note. Beginning with a grace note can capture the audience’s attention and set a tragic tone. Even when not explicitly used to express crying, grace notes have the natural crying quality.



Figure 1.3 Measures 8-9

³⁵ Wang, Zhou, and Li Zhang, *Fundamental Guide to Double-Chambered Xun*, 159.

At letter A, starting in measure 8 (Figure 1.3), the music becomes more exciting with the forte dynamic. This time, the phrase begins with three grace notes instead of just one, as seen at the beginning of the piece. The increased number of grace notes, matched with the dynamic intensity and the accent on the first sixteenth note, create a sense of intensity. Therefore, these three grace notes should be played with greater emphasis. Since these grace notes are intended to have a crying quality, playing them with more emphasis intensifies the sadness even more.



Figure 1.4 Measures 31-32

In measures 31 to 32 (Figure 1.4), the sadness intensifies further, and the mood becomes more exciting. This heightened emotion is shown in the first grace note, which is an octave lower than the main note. With an octave interval between these notes, the player should allow ample time to express the main note, which will exaggerate the emotional impact. The grace note on the pick-up to measure 32 evokes the feeling of sobbing, similar to the trembling effect on the *erhu*, which brings us to the second role of grace note.

- Grace Notes in the Middle of a Phrase

In "River of Sorrow,"³⁶ a typical *erhu* technique for emphasizing a note involves creating a trembling or quivering motion with the bow at the beginning. This trembling sounds like a fast

³⁶ Ding Yi Music Company, "River of Sorrow (Performed by Min, Huifen)," YouTube, September 27, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RD6hq_hVDLM.

grace note, and a similar approach should be applied in the pick-up to measure 32 (Figure 1.4).

An example of the *erhu*'s trembling motion with the bow can be heard in this video of “River of Sorrow” (3:04): https://youtu.be/RD6hq_hVDLM?si=7syvTgWnYPrs-nCe&t=184.³⁷

Another example of “crying” grace notes is in measures 37-40 (Figure 1.5).



Figure 1.5 Measures 37-40

The music from measures 37 to 39 (Figure 1.5) is deeply heartbreaking, resembling the sound of a person sobbing uncontrollably. In the second half of measure 37, every note is preceded by a grace note. Measures 38 and 40 both begin with a grace note, and in measure 39, nearly every beat is tied to a grace note.

To make it even more captivating, the player can make each group of slurred notes imitate different instruments by playing each of them with a different tone color. This can be achieved through adjustments in dynamics and shifts between darkness and brightness in the sound. For example, the three rising notes in measure 37 can emulate the *erhu*, while the lower melody—the

³⁷ Ding Yi Music Company, “River of Sorrow (Performed by Min, Huifen),” *YouTube*, September 27, 2011. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RD6hq_hVDLM.

rest of measure 38—could represent the *xun*. Measure 39 could be *erhu* again, and the low slurred notes in measure 40 could imitate the sound of *xiao*.

Additionally, the dotted rhythm appears in measures 38 to 40. In “Su Wu Herding Sheep,”³⁸ dotted rhythms and the notes that follow are emphasized with accents, where the *xiao* player blows fast air to start each note. The combination of grace notes and the dotted rhythm suggests a sighing moment.

- Grace Notes as Articulation

The third role of the grace note is that it can be used as a type of articulation. To achieve this, grace notes should seamlessly blend with the phrase and not stand out too prominently. This style of playing the grace note can be traced to Chinese folk music. In “Su Wu Herding Sheep,” ornamentations (such as grace notes, trills, turns, and mordents) are closely related to articulation. This usage is likely due to the difficulty of tonguing on ancient instruments like the *xiao* and *xun*. Unlike the Western flute, which can easily produce clear and sparkling tonguing, the *xiao* and *xun* sometimes rely on ornamentation to articulate notes, creating smoother transitions. In “Song of Chu,”³⁹ grace notes are often added on moving notes for clear articulation and on leading tones for emphasis. In *xun* playing, the grace notes have their own names. When the grace note is the upper note of the main note, it is called *dieyin*, and when it is the lower note, it is called *dayin*.⁴⁰

In “Memory,” examples of phrases that use grace notes as articulation are: measures 4-7, measures 11-13, and measures 18-20.

³⁸ Chen, *Dong Xiao*.

³⁹ Zhou, *Xun*.

⁴⁰ Liu, *Xun Yan Zou Fa*, 30.



Figure 1.6 Measures 4-7



Figure 1.7 Measure 18

Measures 4-7 (Figure 1.6) and measure 18 (Figure 1.7) provide a great example of using grace notes for articulation. In "Su Wu Herding Sheep," repeated notes are almost never tongued, similar to the repeated F in measure 5 on the second beat, which is ornamented by a grace note. To play it in the style of *xiao*, the grace note should not be tongued heavily but should be played with the flow of air. This also applies to the F in the quintuplet in measure 18.

The grace note should also be played with a sense of improvisation and spontaneity. In "Su Wu Herding Sheep," ornamentations are not strictly notated in the score but are added freely throughout the piece.

- Trills

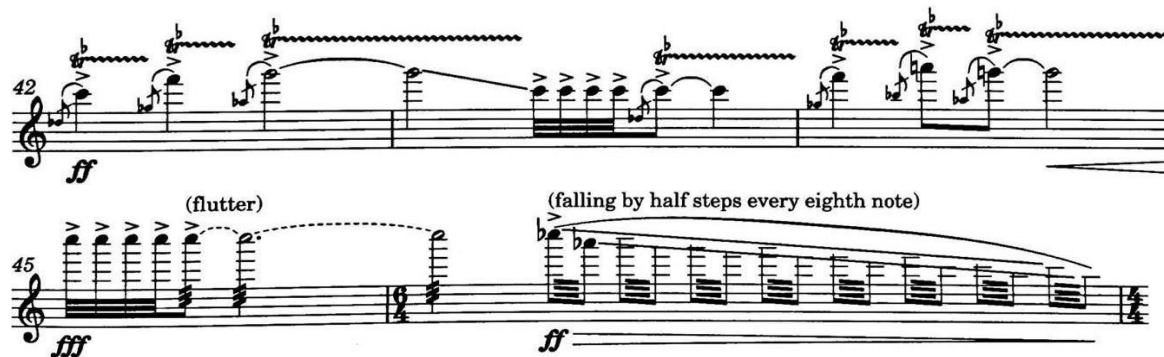


Figure 1.8 Measures 41-46

In *xun* and *xiao* music, repeated notes are almost never tongued. Therefore, the fast repeated and accented notes in measures 43 and 45 (Figure 1.8) do not match the style of Chinese folk music. We can infer that these notes are expressing something beyond melody, possibly relating more to acting, such as in *Kunqu*.

In *Kunqu* opera, shaking the "water sleeves" is a distinctive and expressive movement by the role type *qingyi*, the young maiden, or *xiaosheng*, the young man, to convey emotions and enhance the performance's visual appeal. These long, flowing sleeves of the clothes drape nearly to the feet and are used for a wide variety of expressive gestures. Gracefully shaken, they create elegant and dynamic patterns, adding fluidity and beauty to the movement. This technique often emphasizes moments of emotional intensity, such as sorrow, longing, or joy, and is integral to *Kunqu's* stylized dance and gesture language.⁴¹

⁴¹ Wang-Ngai and Lovrick, *Chinese Opera: Images and Stories*, 33.

*The Peony Pavilion*⁴² is a *Kunqu* opera that features many moments of sleeve shaking. However, shaking is not the only stylistic action. There are numerous walking scenes where a typical walk involves taking small steps in a circle. In these scenes, a character announces the start of a journey and simply walks in a circle on the stage. Upon completing the circle, the character then announces their arrival at the destination.⁴³ From a musical perspective, the walk can serve as a transition between words, making them smooth and connected, similar to a musical slur, or it can occur on the leading tone and stop upon arrival. When the performer is not singing or speaking, they may also walk accompanied by percussion, usually starting slowly and then accelerating to show a scene change.

The first two trills in measure 42 (Figure 1.8) can be imagined as the actress in the opera swinging her long sleeves, with the right and left hands following. The third and longest trill on high G can represent the actress walking around with small steps. A similar image recurs in the next measure.

Pitch Bending

- Last Notes

When analyzing the singing and spoken text in *The Peony Pavilion*, it is apparent that both song and spoken text always have shape or direction. Every spoken word involves some kind of motion, whether it's sliding up or down or shaking. The most noticeable and special aspect is the last note of each phrase. One way to interpret the last note is by sliding it up and down, similar to the pitch bending in "Memory." Sometimes it even bends and intertwines with a few notes before returning to the original note. The last note is often stretched with dynamic

⁴² Cheng Yue Dao Ren Jian, "Youth Version of The Peony Pavilion Volume 1-6, Dream Searching," YouTube, October 4, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mBol_CdcccE&list=PL6WA9UIadO4R0QIdpnuT-UMMdmvASkmH&index=7.

⁴³ Wang-Ngai and Lovrick, *Chinese Opera: Images and Stories*, 28.

hairpins, making it the key note for expressing the phrase's emotion. For example, if the phrase's context is overly sad, the performer will enhance the sadness of the last note by adding pitch bending, vibrato, stretching, and dynamic changes. While notes in the middle of a phrase can also be stretched and intertwined with other notes, changes to the last note are more commonly emphasized. This emphasis is evident in the breath taken before the last note in *The Peony Pavilion*, where the singer often takes a deep breath or pauses, indicating its importance.

This feature of the last note also applies to *Farewell My Concubine*.⁴⁴ In both *Beijing Opera* and *Kunqu Opera*, when the character is calling names, each syllable bends downwards. The last words Concubine Yu says to Xiang Yu before her final dance are, "So, here I am, ready to dance." This sentence has seven syllables in the Chinese language. The first two syllables start softly, the pitch rises on the third and fourth, the fifth and sixth are stretched, and the seventh is sung with vibrato and pitch bending, going up and then down. We can conclude that bending the pitch down on the last note of a phrase emphasizes the expression in the singer's tone, making it full of sadness and tragedy.



Figure 2.1 Measures 2-3

⁴⁴ Zhong Hua Xi Yun, "Renowned Peking Opera Artist Wang Yan's Elegant Expressions and Delicate, Charming Singing in 'Farewell My Concubine' from 'Selected Peking Opera Audio-Visual Collection of China.'"

The bending pitch at the end of the phrase in measures 2-3 (Figure 2.1) indicates that the story is not a happy one. To convey this sense of unhappiness, the flute player can add vibrato to the bending pitch, or simply make it sound like a sigh by bending the pitch down smoothly and effortlessly.



Figure 2.2 Measures 16-17

Measure 16 (Figure 2.2) is a moment of intense expression due to the extremely high register on the flute and the forte dynamic. Viewing these two bars as a single line or one continuous motion, aligns with the shape of the final note in *Kunqu*. This means that after arriving on the F—downbeat of measure 17—not every note should be emphasized; instead, they should be smooth and connect seamlessly toward the bend at the end.

The bending of the last note can also be enhanced with vibrato, particularly when the dynamic is loud. When bending and vibrato techniques are combined, they create a crying sound. In "Song of Chu,"⁴⁵ pitch bending plays a crucial role in imitating crying, which is an impressive highlight of the piece.

The *xun* is handmade from clay, and no two instruments are exactly the same. Therefore, tuning relies on the performer's ears. It is hard to play each note perfectly in tune, so the *xun* has a

⁴⁵ Zhou, *Xun*.

lot of freedom to bend and vibrate using different air speeds and partially covering the holes to adjust the pitch. Because of this trait, the *xun* is considered the instrument closest to the human voice, which is why adding vibrato while bending the pitch downward is effective.

- Passing and Neighbor Tones

Pitch bending is a significant technique used as a substitution for passing tones. In "Song of Chu," when there are one or two leaps between two notes, the first note will bend to the second note to make the transition smooth.

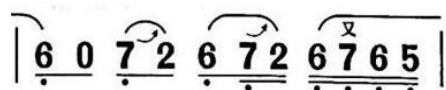


Figure 2.3 Pitch bending in “Song of Chu”

In the score of “Song of Chu,” arrows are used to indicate pitch bending. In this measure from the example figure (Figure 2.3), scale degree 1 is hidden in a pitch bend from scale degree 7 to scale degree 2, making the pitch bend a substitution for the passing tone.

Neighboring tones, whether on the score or improvised, are played by bending the main note up or down and then bending it back. This technique appears in "River of Sorrow,"⁴⁶ where the *erhu* uses pitch bending for passing tones, neighbor tones, the first two notes of a phrase, and arpeggios.

⁴⁶ Ding Yi Music Company, “River of Sorrow (Performed by Min, Huifen),” *YouTube*, September 27, 2011. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RD6hq_hVDLM.

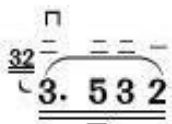


Figure 2.4 Pitch bending in “River of Sorrow”

An example of the bending neighboring tones (Figure 2.4) can be heard in this video (0:26): https://youtu.be/RD6hq_hVDLM?si=SFvm4UshbnskAE1Q&t=26.⁴⁷ In the pentatonic scale, scale degrees 3 and 5 are a step apart, making this an effective example of bending neighboring tones.

In flute playing, when bending pitch as a substitution for passing tones and neighbor tones, making the transition between the pitches smooth and connected can create a seamless flow in the music, much like how passing and neighboring tones are handled in traditional pieces.



Figure 2.5 Measures 12-13

In measure 12 (Figure 2.5), the E is bending down to C. This is an example of how pitch bending on E can substitute the hidden passing tone D.

⁴⁷ Ding Yi Music Company, “River of Sorrow (Performed by Min, Huifen),” *YouTube*, September 27, 2011. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RD6hq_hVDLM.



Figure 2.6 Measures 49-51

Some imagery for interpretation in measures 49-51 (Figure 2.6): The harmonic fermata G should be long, as if a person is looking up to the sky. As the G slides down to A-flat, the person looks down and slowly shakes their head on the sixteenth triplets, then sighs quietly.

Rhythm

- Acceleration

In the *Beijing* opera *Farewell My Concubine*,⁴⁸ several percussion instruments are used to accompany characters' movements, including walking. For example, the Large Gong (*Daluo*) produces deep reverberations and is used to accompany scenes of battle and exciting moments. The Small Gong (*Xiaoluo*) produces a clear and bright sound and is mainly used for the entrance and exit of scholars, women, or humorous characters. Other percussion instruments include Hall Drum (*Tanggu*), Single-Skin Drum (*Dan pigu*), and Cymbals (*Bo*).⁴⁹ These instruments work together to create a rich and dynamic soundscape that enhances the visual and emotional impact of the performance. The upbeat and the downbeat are not played by one single instrument, thus, the color of the upbeat and downbeat are different. Even though the selection in *Beijing* Opera is

⁴⁸ Zhong Hua Xi Yun, "Renowned Peking Opera Artist Wang Yan's Elegant Expressions and Delicate, Charming Singing in 'Farewell My Concubine' from 'Selected Peking Opera Audio-Visual Collection of China.'"

⁴⁹ Wang-Ngai and Lovrick, *Chinese Opera: Images and Stories*, 32.

not in a triplet rhythm, the repeated pattern, acceleration, and the accented upbeat can refer to the measures 35 to 36 (Figure 3.1) in “Memory”.



Figure 3.1 Measures 35-36

In measure 35 (Figure 3.1), the third note of each triplet is accented, as well as the third and sixth notes of the sextuplets in measure 36. There is a written accelerando that can be imagined as mimicking the sound of percussion instruments in *Beijing* opera. The accented notes should have a different color than the slurred notes.



Figure 3.2 Measure 14-15

From measures 14 to 15 (Figure 3.2), the written acceleration happens twice in each measure. In measure 14, the rhythm gets faster, from triplets to sixteenth notes, but then suddenly broadens or slows down on the first beat of measure 15, only to speed up again. In addition to the

notated acceleration, the performer can accelerate more, exaggerating the movement. In the second accelerando, the notes are repeated. This repetition mirrors the Chinese word "Ayaaaaaa..." echoed in the opera *Farewell My Concubine* when Xiang Yu saw his beloved take her own life in front of him. The expression here should be urgent and panicked, capturing the feeling of an unexpected, shocking discovery.



Figure 3.3 Measures 23-27

This time in the B section (Figure 3.3), the acceleration is twice as long as the one in the A section (measures 14-15). There should be a small gap or lift between each note in measures 23-24, to make the accent heavier and more obvious. The phrase begins with heavy accents but then becomes lighter and smoother starting in measure 25, evoking the small steps the character is taking, walking and turning in a circle. To make the music more dramatic, the notes get extremely fast before the arrival in measure 28.

- Dotted Rhythms

Based on what is heard in “Su Wu Herding Sheep,” “Song of Chu,” and *The Peony Pavilion*, the stylistic way of playing the dotted rhythm is to lean on the dotted note and

emphasize the three notes that follow the dotted note by slightly accenting each of them, as if knocking or shaking one's head helplessly.



Figure 3.4 Measures 2-3

For example, in measures 2 to 3 (Figure 3.4), the dotted sixteenth note—B on the last beat of measure 2—should be leaned into, and the following three notes, D-B-A, should be slightly accented. As all the dotted rhythms in “Memory” ascend on the second note, return on the third, and drop down on the fourth, they should evoke a sense of a deep sigh or cry.



Figure 3.5 Measure 18

In “Memory”, G-A-G-F in measure 18 (Figure 3.5) is another example of the dotted rhythm, which has the same shape as in measure 2.

Vibrato

- Crying Vibrato

Vibrato is used to express crying or whimpering and is featured in both *xiao* and *xun* works, especially in "Song of Chu,"⁵⁰ which has an entire cadenza that expresses crying. During that cadenza, the *xun* demonstrates its full capacity, imitating crying in varying speed, frequency, and amplitude of the vibrato. The vibrato can become so intense that it actually interrupts the tone, mimicking the uncontrollable breaths and broken sounds of a sobbing person.

Similar to "Song of Chu," *The Peony Pavilion*⁵¹ uses vibrato as a significant technique to express crying. It can be applied in both narrative and singing. In narrative, for example, it is often added on the last word of the phrase with a rise in pitch. In the singing section, vibrato is used when Du Liniang is crying and singing "Ah my dear." The tone starts high and descends with vibrato.

In *Farewell My Concubine*,⁵² when the character is expressing lament, the vibrato can be extremely fast and intense, accompanied by hand shaking, and followed by bending the pitch down at the end. An example of this is the text spoken by Concubine Yu, "So, here I am, ready to dance." In this situation, the vibrato is not used to enrich the tone or bring warmth, but solely for dramatization.

⁵⁰ Zhou, *Xun*.

⁵¹ Cheng Yue Dao Ren Jian, "Youth Version of The Peony Pavilion Volume 1-6, Dream Searching," *YouTube*, October 4, 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mBol_CdcccE&list=PL6WA9UIadO4R0QIdpnuT-UMMdmvASkmH&index=7.

⁵² Zhong Hua Xi Yun, "Renowned Peking Opera Artist Wang Yan's Elegant Expressions and Delicate, Charming Singing in 'Farewell My Concubine' from 'Selected Peking Opera Audio-Visual Collection of China.'"



Figure 4.1 Measures 21-22

This example in “Memory” is where flute imitates the *xun*. At the end of measure 22 (Figure 4.1), the forte dynamic on the bending note implies that this is the moment of the "crying last note." Therefore, it should be played with vibrato.



Figure 4.2 Measures 48-49

Towards the end of the piece, the composer marked "emotionally" under the pick-up to measure 48 (Figure 4.2). Dramatic vibrato should be added throughout the entire phrase, until the harmonic G at the end of measure 49, to evoke a sense of crying and lamentation as in *Farewell My Concubine* and *The Peony Pavilion*.

- Crescendo Vibrato

String players usually have two ways of ending a phrase: one is to release bow pressure, letting the vibration gradually fade and the sound diminish naturally; the other is to raise the bow after a crescendo, creating a sudden dynamic lift. In "River of Sorrow," the *erhu* performs many

crescendos and uses the latter type of ending. Long notes usually begin with a subtle trembling, soften right away, and then crescendo with increasingly fast vibrato. The note finally ends with an accented lift, as though the *erhu* is taking a breath. An example of this lifting ending after a crescendo can be heard in this video (00:20):

https://youtu.be/RD6hq_hVDLM?si=TPB2d_YRtQnsgZDp&t=20.⁵³

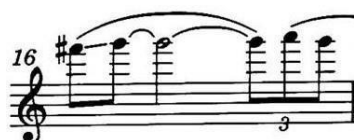


Figure 4.3 Measure 16

In measure 16 (Figure 4.3), the long G that is slurred to the fourth beat should be played with a crescendo and increasingly fast vibrato. This is followed by a sudden lift, as in the music for *erhu*, allowing a breath to be taken before it continues to the A.



Figure 4.4 Measure 29

⁵³ Ding Yi Music Company, “River of Sorrow (Performed by Min, Huifen),” *YouTube*, September 27, 2011. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RD6hq_hVDLM.

Measure 29 (Figure 4.4) is also a good place to imitate this same *erhu* playing.

- Stabilizing Vibrato

In "Song of Chu" and "River of Sorrow," vibrato is often used after pitch bending or ornamentations to stabilize the note, and emphasize its arrival.



Figure 4.5 Measures 11-13

The flute player can add vibrato on the last E-flat in measure 11 (Figure 4.5) and the accented B-flat in measure 12. Both of these notes follow ornamentations (sixteenth-note triplets in measure 11 are considered ornamental) and need to be stabilized if imitating the playing style in *xun* and *erhu* pieces.



Figure 4.6 Measures 18-20

The phrase starts from the pick-up to measure 18 (Figure 4.6) marks the climax of the first page of “Memory”. It starts on the second highest note and is marked forte. The group of quintuplets suddenly slows down the rhythm, while the sixteenth notes on the last beat of measure 18 speed it up again. Picture a person painfully stretching every word on the quintuplet, then crying on the long B-flat in measure 19. The grace note helps the B-flat having a sobbing quality, and vibrato can make this even more effective.

Timing

Overall, the approach to time in traditional Chinese music is remarkably free, allowing for a fluid and expressive performance, giving performers significant freedom to arrange their own tempo. One piece of evidence that supports this idea—particularly in “Memory”—is the use of time signatures in traditional Chinese music and drama. In Chinese, the term “time signature” is called *banyan*, where *ban* refers to the main beat, and *yan* refers to the beats that follow. A type of *banyan* frequently used in the slow sections of a piece or drama is called *sanban*, which means “free.”⁵⁴ Similar to time signatures in Western music, *sanban* is also written in the score. For example, the beginning of “*Song of Chu*” is marked *sanban* (Figure 5.1).⁵⁵ The mark is placed below the tempo marking and to the left of the small “1.”

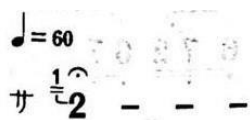


Figure 5.1 *Sanban* in “*Song of Chu*”

⁵⁴ Stephen Jones, *Folk Music of China: Living Instrumental Traditions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 124.

⁵⁵ Wang, Zhou and Li Zhang, *Fundamental Guide to Double-Chambered Xun*, 159.

Sanban is a common time signature, and to incorporate this Chinese music style into "Memory," as long as the direction is clear—such as an *accelerando* moving from slow to fast—and the tempo changes align with the emotional context, the timing can be adjusted as needed. This flexibility not only applies to tempo but also includes silence or pauses.

- Silence

To discuss the use of silence throughout the piece “Memory”, I need to introduce the Chinese aesthetic concept of "The Aesthetics of Intended Blank".⁵⁶ This concept is a key principle in traditional Chinese art, drama, and music. It highlights the beauty and power of what is left unsaid or undone, allowing the audience to engage their imagination and fill in the gaps. This emphasizes the importance of space and silence in conveying meaning and emotion.

In Chinese painting, this aesthetic involves leaving parts of the canvas blank, inviting viewers to imagine the missing elements and creating a sense of openness.⁵⁷ Similarly, in Chinese drama, performers use pauses and moments of silence to amplify the emotional impact of their performances. This is especially evident in traditional Chinese opera, where movements and expressions are carefully choreographed.⁵⁸

The importance of the concept of "leaving blank space" in Chinese music can be proven in an old Chinese saying that comes from the *Tang* Dynasty poet Bai Juyi's "Song of the Pipa": “Silence at this moment surpasses the sound.”⁵⁹ This approach allows the music to breathe and

⁵⁶ Tianyi Zhang, “Aesthetics and Philosophical Interpretation of the ‘Intended Blank’ in Chinese Paintings,” *International Journal of Arts, Humanities & Social Science* 02, no. 10 (October 2021), 64.

⁵⁷ Zhang, “Aesthetics and Philosophical Interpretation of the ‘Intended Blank’ in Chinese Paintings”, 65.

⁵⁸ Donghua Yu, “Leaving Blank Space — the Highest Realm of Chinese Painting,” *Youth Innovation Center of Tianjin Academy of Painting, Tianjin, China* 1, no. 1 (2020), 2.

⁵⁹ Chen Caizhi, *Selected Readings of Classical Chinese Poetry - Bai Juyi* (Beijing: China Intercontinental Press, 2017).

gives the listener time to absorb the emotions being conveyed. Therefore, in "Memory," the rests can be freer and extended.



Figure 5.2 Measures 10-11

In measure 10 (Figure 5.2), even though the rest is only an eighth note, it comes after a phrase that ends in a downward pitch bend, like a big sigh. After this breath, the triplets introduce something completely new. Therefore, instead of a very rhythmic eighth note rest before the triplets in measure 11, there should be a pause, allowing the audience to experience the sadness a little longer.



Figure 5.3 Measures 13-14

For the same reason, a short pause should be taken before measure 14 (Figure 5.3), as what comes next is new material.

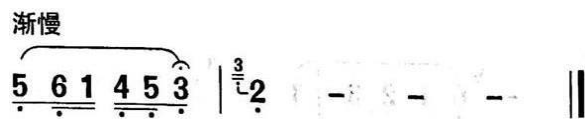


Figure 5.5 Ending of “Song of Chu”

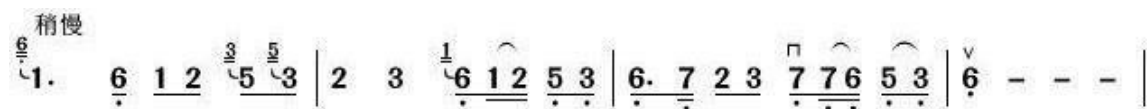


Figure 5.6 Ending of “River of Sorrow”

Other Techniques

- Key Clicks

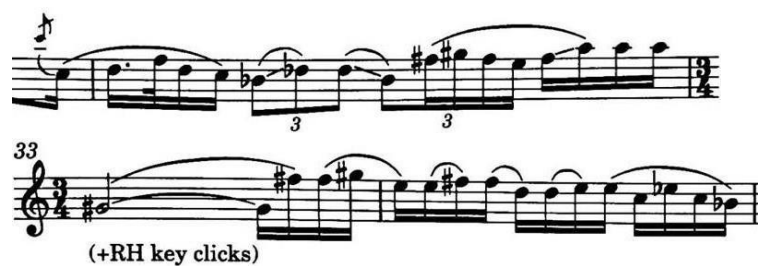


Figure 6.1 Measures 32-34

In measure 33 (Figure 6.1), the key clicks could be reminiscent of the small footsteps of a character in *The Peony Pavilion*.⁶³ The *qingyi*'s walking in *Kunqu* is light and cohesive to the

⁶³ Cheng Yue Dao Ren Jian, “Youth Version of The Peony Pavilion Volume 1-6, Dream Searching,” *YouTube*,

ground, making the movements quiet and smooth. To play it effectively, the right-hand fingers must move quickly and with enough force for the clicking sound to be audible. To mimic the *qingyi*'s walking, the key clicks can have a slight acceleration.

- Alternate Fingerings



Figure 6.2 Measure 45-46

It is extremely challenging—nearly impossible—to play the third octaves “falling by half steps every eighth note” in measure 46 (Figure 6.2). To execute this passage, the flute player must use alternate fingerings. For instance, the author suggests that the first beat can be played using the original high C-flat and a harmonic D-flat fingering for the A-flat, and the rest of the phrase can be executed entirely with harmonic fingerings. This gesture can be interpreted as imitating the walking in *Kunqu* or the crying in “Song of Chu.” Therefore, it should be smooth and fluid in a single phrase. The player should not be overwhelmed by the fingerings or striving for perfect intonation on every note.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Looking at flute compositions from ancient to modern times, the characteristics of ethnic and cultural elements have always been present. In contemporary music, these cultural elements persist, even though performers may not always be familiar with them. Chen Yi's flute solo work, "Memory," exemplifies a piece that contains many cultural elements that need to be understood by the flutist who performs it.

This dissertation can be likened to a detective case. When I first played the piece "Memory," it felt very familiar, leading me to surmise that it must contain many elements that have accompanied me since childhood. Like a detective, I meticulously analyzed a selection of the most iconic pieces from the Chinese folk music repertoire to trace the origins of these familiar clues.

Through analyzing the performance style of these pieces, I discovered that these elements are demonstrated through various techniques, which can also be found on the Western flute in "Memory." Through this analysis, I have successfully deciphered a potential stylistic code and identified a possible source.

For example, ornamentation, grace notes, and trills are great techniques to express sobbing emotions on the flute, as reflected in the crying sections of "Song of Chu" and *Farewell My Concubine*. Pitch bending is common in Chinese wind instruments such as *xiao* and *xun*. In Chinese traditional music, whether written on the last note of a phrase or as a substitution for passing notes, pitch bends are frequently used to express deep emotions. It is closely related to

the human voice and dialogue, often used to imitate a person's sigh or cry, especially when combined with vibrato. The unique crying vibrato, used on crescendos and to stabilize a note, matches the style of performance in Chinese traditional music. Additionally, there are specific ways to interpret pauses, ritardandos, accelerations, dotted rhythms, and other techniques in the style of traditional Chinese music that express shared expressions in "Memory", and showcase Chinese aesthetics. All these techniques have been analyzed by comparing them with the five selected pieces: "Su Wu Herding Sheep", *Farewell My Concubine*, "Song of Chu", "River of Sorrow", and *The Peony Pavilion*.

My intuition was correct—this piece, "Memory," indeed incorporates numerous elements of traditional Chinese music and requires a specific performance style to be accurately interpreted. It embodies significant influences from Chinese musical style and culture. The combination of Western flute techniques with traditional Chinese styles proves that it is a cross-cultural work, deserving of the attention of both the flute and broader communities.

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APPENDIX

SCRIPT

Hello everyone, welcome to my DMA lecture recital. My topic is: (Read the topic).

Content

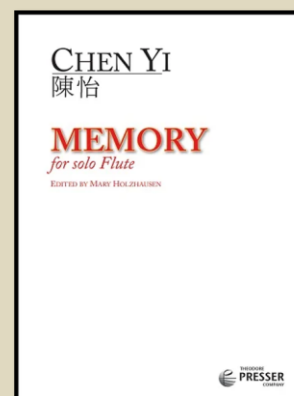
- Introduction
- Composer
- Works Related
- Performance Application



My research is in 4 parts: (Read the topics)

Introduction

- Purpose of the Study
 - Performer's responsibility
 - Composer's cultural background
 - Compositional background
- "Memory" by Chen Yi
 - Background story
 - Significance
 - Frequently performed.
 - Required piece in the NFA Young Artist Competition.



INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

Looking at flute compositions from ancient to modern times, the characteristics of ethnic and cultural elements have always existed. Although contemporary music continues to incorporate these cultural elements, performers might not always be familiar with them. It

is the performer's responsibility to understand the background and culture of the music they perform, which requires an in-depth study of the composer's cultural, historical, and compositional background to interpret the music more accurately.

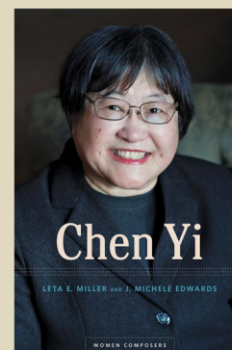
"Memory" by Chen Yi

Chen Yi's flute solo work, "Memory," exemplifies a piece that benefits from thorough research from the performer. This piece was composed in memory of her teacher's passing. It is a piece full of strong emotions, especially painful and mournful feelings, according to the composer's program notes: "Dear Professor Lin: I wish you could hear the tune in MEMORY, which sounds like my painful cry out of your name in our Cantonese dialect. I expressed my deep sorrow in the music, to remember your fatherly mentorship. Your meaningful smile will always be with us encouragingly."

Originally composed for violin, the piece was later adapted for flute by Chen Yi, becoming an important part of the flute repertoire. It is frequently performed, including serving as a required piece in prominent flute competitions such as the National Flute Association Young Artist Competition.

Composer – Chen Yi

- Chinese-American composer and violinist
- Education
 - B.M. & M.M. at Central Conservatory of Music
 - Doctorate at Columbia University
- Achievements
 - 2006 Pulitzer Prize for Music
 - Koussevitzky Music Foundation Award
 - Etc.



Let me first introduce the composer of “Memory”.

COMPOSER

Biography

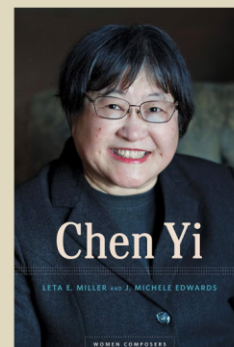
Chen Yi is a Chinese-American composer and violinist. Chen Yi's early environment was richly influenced by Western music. Despite the challenges posed by the Cultural Revolution, Chen Yi continued her musical studies, attending the Central Conservatory of Music. After earning her B.M. and M.M. degrees at CCOM, she came to the United States to pursue her doctoral degree at Columbia University.

Chen Yi has won many prestigious awards and fellowships.

Her innovative approach to integrating Eastern and Western elements, have established her as a significant figure in contemporary music.

Composer – Chen Yi

- Influence from Chinese Traditional Music
 - Folk Music
 - Exposed to rural folk music
 - Beijing Opera Troupe
- Formal Training
 - Studied at the Central Conservatory of Music
 - memorized and analyzed hundreds of folk songs



In order to deeply understand “Memory,” it is necessary to acknowledge the influence and inspiration Chen Yi absorbed from Chinese music.

Influence from Chinese Folk Music

During the Cultural Revolution, Chen Yi was sent to the countryside and was exposed to the folk music of rural China, which left a lasting impression on her.

This experience, along with her time as a principal violinist in the Guangzhou *Beijing* Opera Troupe, allowed her to immerse herself in traditional Chinese music.

At the Central Conservatory of Music, Chen Yi received formal training in both Western and Chinese music. She memorized and analyzed hundreds of folk songs, and her exposure to genres like Chinese opera deeply influenced her compositional voice. She skillfully blends traditional Chinese melodies, instruments, and techniques with Western classical forms and orchestration. The combination of her own culture—Chinese music—and the western composition language, made her successful in promoting cross-cultural artistic style. The solo flute work, “Memory”, is one of the works that represents these cross-cultural features.

Works Related

• Five pieces



• Su Wu Herding Sheep (*Xiao*)



• Farewell My Concubine (*Beijing Opera*)



• Song of Chu (*Xun*)



• River of Sorrow (*Erhu*)



• The Peony Pavilion (*Kunqu Opera*)

• Reason I made the selection:



• Themes resonate with Chen Yi’s “Memory”

• Beauty of the instruments – *Xiao*, *Xun*, *Erhu*

• Importance of the musical genres – *Beijing Opera*, *Kunqu Opera*

WORKS RELATED

To help understand Chinese musical traditions in "Memory," I have selected five classical Chinese pieces as examples. Through these examples, I will cite specific examples, draw comparisons, and demonstrate how similar expressions can be played on the flute and in "Memory."

The selections are based on their shared themes with “Memory”—tragedy, sadness, and farewells to significant figures—as well as the beauty of the instruments and the cultural importance of the musical genres.



Su Wu Herding Sheep

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5MzQHDKGRs>
Ctrl+Click to follow link

• Story

During Han dynasty, Su Wu was sent on a mission
He was captured
Stayed strong and unyielding
Su Wu was sent to the North Sea to herd sheep
Emperor finally found out and rescued Su Wu

• Instrument *Xiao*

- An ancient Chinese vertical end-blown flute.
- Usually made of bamboo
- Melancholy feel
 - Mentioned in a poem by Wang Wei,

吹簫凌極浦，日暮送夫君。湖上一回首，青山卷白雲。



Su Wu Herding Sheep

The story is: During the Han dynasty, this guy called Su Wu was sent on a mission but was captured. Despite threats and bribes, Su Wu stayed firm and refused to surrender. As punishment, he was sent to a harsh, cold place called the North Sea to herd sheep. He endured this hardship for 19 years. Eventually, the Emperor of Han rescued him. Su Wu's bravery and strong spirit have inspired many people, and songs that have been composed about his story have been sung for many generations.

I selected "Su Wu Herding Sheep" because of the beauty of the instrument, *xiao*. This *xiao* solo version, depicting Su Wu's hardship, highlights the tragedy of the story, which aligns with the emotional expressions I want to explore in "Memory". *Xiao* is an ancient Chinese vertical end-blown flute and is usually made of bamboo. **Picture.** A sense of melancholy from the sound of *xiao*, is felt in a poem by Wang Wei:

吹簫凌極浦，日暮送夫君。湖上一回首，山青卷白雲。

My translation of this poem: "Playing the *xiao* by the shores, bidding farewell to my friend at dusk. A glance back at the lake, seeing white clouds embracing green mountains." The poem describes the mournful sound of the *xiao* and the melancholy feeling of seeing the green mountains and white clouds still remaining, though the friend goes further and further away.



Farewell My Concubine

It is a classic *Beijing opera* created by the *Beijing opera* master, Mei Lanfang.

• Story

At the end of the battle between the Chu and Han kingdoms
 Xiang Yu, the king of Chu, was trapped
 Xiang Yu believed his forces had defected to the Han
 Consort Yu performed a sword dance
 She took her own life out of love and loyalty
 Xiang Yu broke through the siege
 But, after fierce battles, committed suicide by the river



Farewell My Concubine

Farewell My Concubine is a classic *Beijing opera*. The story takes place at the end of the battle between the two kingdoms, Chu and Han, where Xiang Yu, the king of Chu, is trapped. Surrounded by the Han army, the king of Chu believed that all was lost. During a farewell banquet with his beloved concubine, Consort Yu performed a sword dance and, after finishing, tragically took her own life out of love and loyalty. Overcome with grief, Xiang Yu broke through the siege but, after fierce battles, committed suicide by the river. [Show pictures](#)



Song of Chu

• Story

"Song of Chu" for *xun* solo is based on the same story of *Farewell My Concubine*.

• Structure of the piece

- A free introduction
- The melody of a Chu folk song
- The “**crying cadenza**”
- Return of the Chu folk song



• Instrument Xun

- A vessel flute
- One of the oldest musical instruments in China - exist more than 7,000 years.
- It is the ideal instrument for creating a heartbreaking tone.

Song of Chu

"Song of Chu" for *xun* solo is based on the same story of *Farewell My Concubine*. This adaptation, with the *xun*'s sad and mournful tones, creates a tragic atmosphere of the hero's downfall, the collapse of an empire, and eternal separation from his beloved.

The piece starts with a free introduction, and then the melody of a Chu folk song starts with a soft beginning. The *xun* then imitates the sound of sobbing and crying, evoking the mournful wails of ghosts. It's very special section which I call it “crying cadenza”, and we will hear it later. After a transition, the Chu song returns.

I selected “Song of Chu” because I was deeply impressed by the haunting sound of the *xun*. The *xun*, being a vessel flute, is played in a manner similar to the Western flute, which provides a valuable point of reference for understanding how emotions are expressed through different but related instruments. It is one of the oldest musical instruments in China, that has a history around 7,000 years. It is the ideal instrument for creating a heartbreaking tone, making it a perfect instrument for exploring the themes of sadness, grief, and tragedy shared in Chen Yi's "Memory." [Show pictures](#)



River of Sorrow

- "River of Sorrow" is **purely expressive**.

- Story

Meng Jiang wept at the Great Wall after her husband never returned
 Determined to find him, she started on a long journey
 Along the way, she was informed that her husband had died long ago
 Overwhelmed with grief, she wept at the riverbank

- Instrument *Erhu*:

- Two-stringed bowed instrument from the *Tang* dynasty
- Key *erhu* techniques include slides and vibrato.
- Its expressive qualities match perfectly with the themes in Chen Yi's "Memory".



River of Sorrow

Unlike many traditional Chinese music pieces, "River of Sorrow" is not descriptive or narrative; it is purely expressive. The piece doesn't offer a solution or an answer to the tragedy. The ending doesn't provide spiritual relief after crying; it only illustrates uncontainable sorrow and despair.

It tells the story of a woman called Meng Jiang, who wept at the Great Wall after her husband, who was taken away for forced labor shortly after their wedding, never returned. Determined to find him, she started on a long journey, and along the way, she met someone who informed her that her husband had died long ago. Overwhelmed with grief, she wept at the riverbank, her tears flowing like the waters of the river.

The *erhu* is a Chinese, two-stringed bowed instrument from the *Tang* dynasty. Key *erhu* techniques include slides and vibrato, which are closely related to the flute techniques discussed in "Memory." I selected "River of Sorrow" because the *erhu*'s expressive qualities match perfectly with the themes of sadness, grief, and despair in Chen Yi's "Memory." [Show picture](#)



The Peony Pavilion

• Story

Du Liniang enters the garden of her parents' house, falls asleep
 Dreams of a young scholar, and the two fall in love
 The next day, she returns to the garden to seek her dream
 Heartbroken when she cannot find him
 Du Liniang becomes very ill
 She asks her mother to bury her by the peony pavilion

• Selected scene - “Retrieving Dream”

- Depicts Du Liniang waking from her dream, recalling what happened, and seeking the person from her dream
- Theme of the grief of losing an important person



The Peony Pavilion

The Peony Pavilion, created in 1598, is considered a masterpiece of Chinese literature and *Kunqu*, which is a type of Chinese opera.

The story follows sixteen-year-old woman Du Liniang. On a fine spring day, she enters the garden of her parents' house for the first time, falls asleep, and dreams of a young scholar. The two fall in love. The next day, she returns to the garden to seek her dream but is heartbroken when she cannot find him. Then Du Liniang becomes very ill. When she realizes that she will not live for much longer, she asks her mother to bury her by the peony pavilion where her dream with the scholar took place.

The scene I selected, “Retrieving Dream,” depicts Du Liniang waking from her dream, recalling what happened, and seeking the person from her dream. The scene begins with excitement and happiness but becomes extremely sad by the end, which resonates with the theme in Chen Yi’s “Memory,” – explores the grief of losing an important person.

Conclusion

I just introduced the background and story of five selected Chinese traditional pieces. These pieces demonstrate the power of specific techniques such as pitch bending, ornamentation, and vibrato in expressing deep feelings. Next, I will explore how these techniques are employed in Chen Yi’s “Memory.”

Performance Application

- Techniques Notated in the Score
 - Ornamentation
 - Pitch Bending
 - Rhythm

- Performance Practices from Chinese Traditional Music
 - Vibrato
 - Timing



PERFORMANCE APPLICATION

I divided this section into two main groups: techniques that are notated in the score of “Memory” and performance practices from Chinese music that are not notated in the score. I will talk about each of these techniques. **Read.**

All the measures numbers in this section are from Chen Yi’s Memory. Audiences may have the score in their hands, and showing the measure numbers may be convenient.

Notated - Ornamentation

- Grace Notes
 - Beginning of a Phrase
 - Middle of a Phrase
 - As Articulation

- Trills



Techniques Notated in the Score

Ornamentation

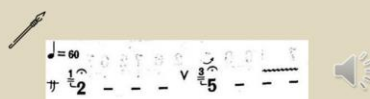
A technique that is notated in the score is Ornamentation. Ornamentation has a significant role in Chen Yi's "Memory," with the grace note being the most prominent and expressive element throughout the piece. There are three primary ways to play the grace note, each with a different purpose. At last, I will also talk about the other ornamentation type - trills.

Notated - Ornamentation

• Grace Notes - Beginning of a Phrase

- Human-like quality

Beginning of "Song of Chu"



Beginning of "Memory"



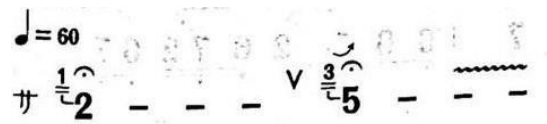
Beginning with a grace note can:

- capture the audience's attention
- set a tragic tone - express crying

• Grace Notes at the Beginning of a Phrase

The first role of the grace note is to begin a phrase, imitating the natural inflections of the human voice. It is uncommon for humans—particularly when expressing emotion—to produce a note with perfect, unwavering pitch. Adding one or a few grace notes at the beginning of the phrase gives instrumental playing a human-like quality.

"Memory" begins with a grace note, much like the "Song of Chu". Beginning with a grace note can capture the audience's attention and set a tragic tone. Even when not explicitly used to express crying, grace notes have the natural crying quality.



Beginning grace note in "Song of Chu" [Play](#)

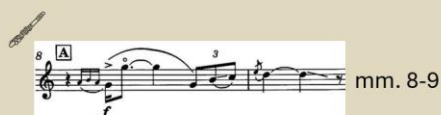


Measures 1-2 [Play](#)

Notated - Ornamentation

- Grace Notes - Beginning of a Phrase
 - Examples of more intense grace notes:

- Three grace notes:



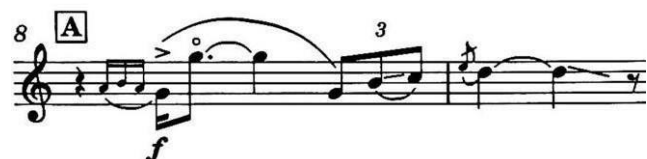
- Grace note in octave:



Here are examples of more intense grace notes in “Memory”.

At letter A, the music becomes more exciting with the forte dynamic. This time, the phrase begins with three grace notes instead of just one. The increased number of grace notes, the forte dynamic, and the accent on the first sixteenth note, create a sense of intensity.

Therefore, these three grace notes should be played with greater emphasis. (Play.)



Measures 8-9

In measures 31 to 32, the sadness intensifies further and the mood becomes more exciting. This heightened emotion is shown in the first grace note, which is an octave lower than the main note. With an octave interval between these notes, the player should allow more time to express the main note. (Play.)



Figure 1.4 Measures 31-32

Notated - Ornamentation

• Grace Notes – Middle of a Phrase

- *Erhu's* trembling motion in “[River of Sorrow](#)” – sounds like a fast grace note

- Sobbing, heartbreaking

- Imitate different instruments



- Grace Notes in the Middle of a Phrase

In "River of Sorrow," a typical *erhu* technique for emphasizing a note involves creating a trembling or quivering motion with the bow at the beginning. This trembling sounds like a fast grace note. Here is an example of the *erhu's* trembling motion with the bow in “River of Sorrow” [play](#).

The music from measures 37 to 39 is deeply heartbreaking, resembling the sound of a person sobbing uncontrollably. In the second half of measure 37, every note is preceded by a grace note. [Play](#). Measures 38 and 40 both begin with a grace note, and in measure 39, nearly every beat is tied to a grace note. [Play](#).

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The top staff is in 2/4 time, marked with a forte 'f' dynamic and a 'C' time signature. It features a series of notes with grace notes above them, highlighted in yellow. The bottom staff is in 4/4 time, starting at measure 38, and contains a melodic line with various ornaments and grace notes, also highlighted in yellow and blue. The text 'mm. 37-40' is written below the second staff.

To make it even more captivating, the player can make each group of slurred notes imitate different instruments by playing each of them with a different tone color. For example, the three rising notes in measure 37 can emulate the *erhu* (play), while the lower melody—the rest of measure 38—could represent the *xun* (play.) Measure 39 could be *erhu* again (play), and the low slurred notes in measure 40 could imitate the sound of *xun* again (play.)

C

mm. 37-40

Notated - Ornamentation

• Grace Notes – As Articulation

🧠 • Articulation in “[Su Wu Herding Sheep](#)”

🎷 • “Song of Chu” 🔊

- *Dieyin* – when the grace note is the upper note of the main note
- *Dayin* – when it is the lower note

🎷 • Back to “Memory”

- Play with the flow of air
- Play with a sense of improvisation

mm. 4-7

m. 18

• Grace Notes as Articulation

The third role of the grace note is that it can be used as a type of articulation. To achieve this, grace notes should seamlessly blend with the phrase and not stand out too prominently. This style of playing the grace note can be traced to Chinese folk music. In “Su Wu Herding Sheep,” ornamentations (such as grace notes, trills, turns, and mordents) are closely related to articulation. This usage is likely due to the difficulty of tonguing on ancient instruments like the *xiao* and *xun*. Unlike the Western flute, which can easily produce clear

and sparkling tonguing, the *xiao* and *xun* sometimes rely on ornamentation to articulate notes, creating smoother transitions. (Play “Su Wu Herding Sheep”)

In "Song of Chu," grace notes are often added on moving notes for clear articulation and on leading tones for emphasis. In *xun* playing, the grace notes have their own names. When the grace note is the upper note of the main note, it is called *dieyin*, and when it is the lower note, it is called *dayin*. (Play “Song of Chu”)

In Memory, measures 4-7 and measure 18 are great examples of using grace notes for articulation. To play it in the style of *xiao*, the grace note should not be tongued heavily but should be played with the flow of air. This also applies to the F in the quintuplet in measure 18.

The grace note should also be played with a sense of improvisation and spontaneity. In “Su Wu Herding Sheep,” ornamentations are not strictly notated in the score but are added freely throughout the piece. (Play)

Musical notation for measures 4-7 of "Su Wu Herding Sheep". The notation is in treble clef and 4/4 time. It features a series of eighth notes with grace notes above them. Measures 4, 5, and 6 are marked with a '3' below the notes, indicating triplets. Measure 7 is marked with a '7' below the notes, indicating a septuplet. The piece concludes with a final triplet of eighth notes. A dynamic marking of *p* (piano) is present at the start of measure 7. The notes in measures 5, 6, and 7 are highlighted in yellow.

mm. 4-7

Musical notation for measure 18 of "Su Wu Herding Sheep". The notation is in treble clef and 4/4 time. It features a series of eighth notes with grace notes above them. The notes in measure 18 are highlighted in yellow.

m. 18

Notated - Ornamentation

- Trills

- In *xun* and *xiao* music, repeated notes are almost never tongued
 - “Memory” measures 43 and 45 don’t match the style of Chinese folk music.
 - These notes are possibly relating more to acting
 - Such as in *The Peony Pavilion* 🌀

mm. 41-46

The image shows a musical score for measures 41-46. The top staff is measure 42, marked *ff*, with a yellow highlight under a trill. The bottom staff shows measures 45 and 46, also marked *ff*. Measure 45 has a yellow highlight under a trill labeled "(flutter)". Measure 46 has a yellow highlight under a descending scale labeled "(falling by half steps every eighth note)".

- Trills

In *xun* and *xiao* music, repeated notes are almost never tongued. Therefore, in “Memory”, the fast repeated and accented notes in measures 43 and 45 do not match the style of Chinese folk music. **Play**. We can infer that these notes express something beyond melody, possibly relating more to acting, such as in *Kunqu*, *The Peony Pavilion*.

The image shows a detailed musical score for measures 42 and 45. The top staff is measure 42, marked *ff*, with a yellow highlight under a trill. The bottom staff shows measure 45, marked *fff*, with a yellow highlight under a trill labeled "(flutter)". To the right of measure 45, there is a descending scale labeled "(falling by half steps every eighth note)" marked *ff*.

Notated - Ornamentation

• Trills

- **“Water sleeves”** in *Kunqu* (*The Peony Pavilion* 🌸)
 - Expressive movement by young maiden or the young man
 - Elegant and dynamic patterns
 - Fluidity and beauty to the movement
 - Emphasizes moments of **emotional intensity**



In *Kunqu* opera, shaking the "water sleeves" is a distinctive and expressive movement by the role type the young maiden or the young man. These long, flowing sleeves of the clothes drape nearly to the feet and are used for a wide variety of expressive gestures. They create elegant and dynamic patterns, adding fluidity and beauty to the movement. This technique often emphasizes moments of emotional intensity, such as sorrow, longing, or joy, and is integral to *Kunqu*. [Show Pictures.](#) [\(Play\)](#)

Notated - Ornamentation

• Trills

- **“Walking scenes”** in *Kunqu* (*The Peony Pavilion* 🌸)
 - Start of a journey and arrival at the destination
 - Transition between words, like a musical slur
 - Occur on the leading tone and stop upon arrival
 - It can show a scene change

- Back to “Memory”

swinging sleeves
small steps
sleeves

(flutter)
(falling by half steps every eighth note)

mm. 41-46
Small steps

Sleeve shaking is not the only stylistic action. There are numerous walking scenes where a typical walk involves taking small steps in a circle. In these scenes, a character announces the start of a journey and simply walks in a circle on the stage. Upon completing the circle, the character then announces their arrival at the destination. From a musical perspective, the walk can serve as a transition between words, making them smooth and connected, similar to a musical slur, or it can occur on the leading tone and stop upon arrival. When the performer is not singing or speaking, they may also walk accompanied by percussion, usually starting slowly and then accelerating to show a scene change. [\(Play\)](#)

The first two trills in measure 42 can be imagined as the actress in the opera swinging her long sleeves, with the right and left hands following. The third and longest trill on high G can represent the actress walking around with small steps. A similar image recurs in the next measure. [\(Play\)](#)

42 *ff*

45 *fff* (flutter) *ff* (falling by half steps every eighth note)


Notated - Pitch Bending

- Last Notes
- Passing Tones
- Neighboring Tones



Next, we will talk about another huge notated technique in “Memory”, Pitch Bending. There are three roles of pitch bending: On the last note, as substitution of the passing tone and neighboring tone.

Notated - Pitch Bending

- Last Notes
 - In *Kunqu (The Peony Pavilion)* 
 - Sliding it up and down
 - Stretched with dynamic hairpins
 - Evident in the breath taken before the last note

Pitch Bending

- Last Notes

When analyzing the singing and spoken text in *The Peony Pavilion*, it is apparent that both song and spoken text always have shape or direction. The most noticeable and special aspect is the last note of each phrase. One way to interpret the last note is by sliding it up and down, similar to the pitch bending in "Memory." The last note is often stretched with dynamic hairpins, making it the key note for expressing the phrase's emotion. While notes in the middle of a phrase can also be stretched and intertwined with other notes, changes to the last note are more commonly emphasized. This emphasis is evident in the breath taken before the last note in *The Peony Pavilion*, where the singer often takes a deep breath or pauses, indicating its importance. Let's listen to the example from *The Peony Pavilion*.

(Play)

Notated - Pitch Bending

• Last Notes

• Back to “Memory”

- The bending pitch at the end of the phrase indicates that the story is not a happy one.

- Add vibrato to the bending pitch
- Or simply make it sound like a sigh by bending the pitch down smoothly and effortlessly.



- Measure 16 is a moment of intense expression due to the extremely high register and the forte dynamic.

- View these two bars as a single line or one continuous motion.



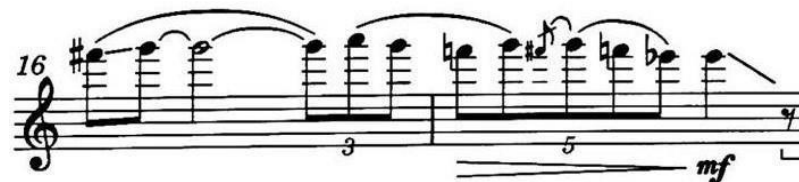
Back to “Memory”

The bending pitch at the end of the phrase in measures 2-3 indicates that the story is not a happy one. To convey this sense of unhappiness, the flute player can add vibrato to the bending pitch, or simply make it sound like a sigh by bending the pitch down smoothly and effortlessly. (Play)



Measures 2-3


Measure 16 is a moment of intense expression due to the extremely high register on the flute and the forte dynamic. Viewing these two bars as a single line or one continuous motion, aligns with the shape of the final note in *Kunqu*. This means that after arriving on the F—downbeat of measure 17—not every note should be emphasized; instead, they should be smooth and connect seamlessly toward the bend at the end. (Play)



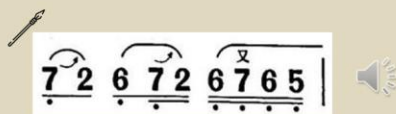
Measures 16-17

Notated - Pitch Bending

- Passing Tones

- “Song of Chu” 

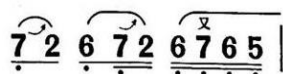
- when there are one or two leaps between two notes, the first note will bend to the second note to make the transition smooth.



- Passing and Neighbor Tones


Pitch bending is a significant technique used as a substitution for passing tones. In "Song of Chu," when there are one or two leaps between two notes, the first note will bend to the second note to make the transition smooth. In the score of "Song of Chu," arrows are used to indicate pitch bending. In this measure, scale degree 1 is hidden in a pitch bend from scale degree 7 to scale degree 2, making the pitch bend a substitution for the passing tone.

(Play)

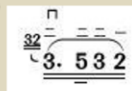


Notated - Pitch Bending

- Neighboring Tones

- “River of Sorrow” 

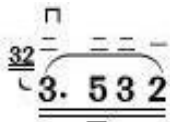
- Neighboring tones are played by bending the main note up or down and then bending it back



In the pentatonic scale, scale degrees 3 and 5 are a step apart, making this an effective example of bending neighboring tones.

Neighboring tones, whether on the score or improvised, are played by bending the main note up or down and then bending it back. This technique appears in "River of Sorrow".

An example of the bending neighboring tones can be heard in this video. In the pentatonic scale, scale degrees 3 and 5 are a step apart, making this an effective example of bending neighboring tones. [\(Play\)](#)



Notated - Pitch Bending

• Passing and Neighboring Tones in “Memory”

- make the transition between the pitches smooth and connected.



In flute playing, when bending pitch as a substitution for passing tones and neighbor tones, making the transition between the pitches smooth and connected can create a seamless flow in the music, much like how passing and neighboring tones are handled in traditional pieces.

For example, in measure 12, the E is bending down to C. This is an example of how pitch bending on E can substitute the hidden passing tone D. [\(Play\)](#)



Measures 12-13

In measures 49-51, there are a lot of bending as well. I have some imageries for interpretation: The harmonic fermata G should be long, as if a person is looking up to the sky. As the G slides down to A-flat, the person looks down and slowly shakes their head on the sixteenth triplets, then sighs quietly [\(Play\)](#)




Notated - Rhythm

- Acceleration
- Dotted Rhythms



The next technique I will talk about is the types of Rhythm: Acceleration and Dotted Rhythm.

Notated - Rhythm

- Acceleration
 - In *Beijing Opera* (*Farewell My Concubine* )
 - Percussion instruments are used to accompany characters' movements
 - The upbeat and the downbeat are not played by one single instrument
 - The color of the upbeat and downbeat are different



Rhythm

- Acceleration

In the *Beijing opera Farewell My Concubine*, several percussion instruments are used to accompany characters' movements, including walking. For example, the Large Gong (*Daluo*) is used to accompany scenes of battle and exciting moments. The Small Gong

(*Xiaoluo*) is mainly used for the entrance and exit of scholars, women, or humorous characters. Here are the other percussion instruments: Hall Drum (*Tanggu*), Single-Skin Drum (*Dan pigu*), and Cymbals (*Bo*). These instruments work together to create a rich and vibrant sound. The upbeat and the downbeat are not played by one single instrument, therefore, the color of the upbeat and downbeat are different. Let's listen to the percussions in *Farewell My Concubine*. (Play)

Notated - Rhythm

- Acceleration

- Back to "Memory"

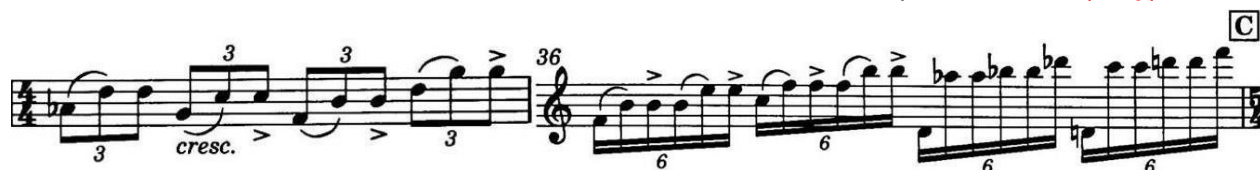
- The written accelerando can be imagined as mimicking the sound of percussion instruments.
 - The accented notes should have a different color than the slurred notes.



- The performer can accelerate more to exaggerate the movement.
 - This repetition of notes in measure 15 mirrors the Chinese word "Ayaaaaa..." in the opera *Farewell My Concubine* - urgent and panicked.



Even though the selection in *Beijing* Opera is not in a triplet rhythm, the repeated pattern, acceleration, and the accented upbeat can refer to the measures 35 to 36 in "Memory". In measure 35 and 36, there is a written accelerando, triplets to sextuplet, that can be imagined as mimicking the sound of percussion instruments in *Beijing* opera. The accented notes should have a different color than the slurred notes, as the percussions. (Play)



From measures 14 to 15, the written acceleration happens twice in each measure. In measure 14, the rhythm gets faster, but then suddenly broadens or slows down on the first beat of measure 15. In addition to the notated acceleration, the performer can accelerate more to exaggerate the movement. (Play) In the second accelerando, the notes are repeated. This repetition mirrors the Chinese word "Ayaaaaaaa..." echoed in the opera

Farewell My Concubine when Xiang Yu saw his beloved take her own life in front of him. The expression here should be urgent and panicked, capturing the feeling of an unexpected, shocking discovery. (Play)



Measure 14-15

Notated - Rhythm

- Acceleration

- Back to “Memory”

- Imitate the small steps the character is taking, walking and turning in a circle.
 - The notes get extremely fast before the arrival in measure 28.



In this example, which is section B, the acceleration is twice as long as the previous examples in section A. The phrase begins with heavy accents but then becomes lighter and smoother starting in measure 25. You can imagine the small steps the character is taking, walking and turning in a circle. To make the music more dramatic, the notes get extremely fast before the arrival in measure 28.



Measures 23-27

Notated - Rhythm

- Dotted Rhythms

- [“Su Wu Herding Sheep”](#) 
- [The Peony Pavilion](#) 

- lean on the dotted note and emphasize the three notes that follow the dotted note by slightly accenting each of them, as if knocking or shaking one’s head helplessly

- Dotted Rhythms

First, let’s listen to an example of dotted rhythm in “Su Wu Herding Sheep” and *The Peony Pavilion*. [\(Play\)](#)

Based on what is heard in “Su Wu Herding Sheep” and *The Peony Pavilion*, the stylistic way of playing the dotted rhythm is to lean on the dotted note and emphasize the three notes that follow the dotted note by slightly accenting each of them, as if knocking or shaking one’s head helplessly.

Notated - Rhythm

• Dotted Rhythms

• Back to “Memory”

- As all the dotted rhythms in “Memory” ascend on the second note, return on the third, and drop down on the fourth, they should evoke a sense of a deep sigh or cry.



mm. 2-3



m. 18

For example, in “Memory”, measures 2 to 3, the dotted sixteenth note—B on the last beat of measure 2—should be leaned into, and the following three notes, D-B-A, should be slightly accented. [\(Play\)](#)



Measures 2-3

Measure 18 is another example of the dotted rhythm, which has the same shape as in measure 2. [\(Play\)](#)



Measure 18

As all the dotted rhythms in “Memory” ascend on the second note, return on the third, and drop down on the fourth, they should evoke a sense of a deep sigh or cry.




Performance Practice - Vibrato

- Crying
- Crescendo
- Stabilizing



Next is Vibrato. I will talk about three kinds of vibrato: The crying vibrato, crescendo vibrato, and stabilizing vibrato.

Performance Practice - Vibrato

- Crying
 - “Song of Chu”  – crying cadenza 
 - The *Xun* imitates crying in varying speed, frequency, and amplitude of the vibrato
 - *Farewell My Concubine* 
 - when the character is expressing lament, the vibrato can be extremely fast and intense.
 - Concubine Yu, "So, here I am, ready to dance." In this situation, the vibrato is used only for dramatization.

Performance Practices from Chinese Music

Vibrato

- Crying Vibrato

Vibrato is used to express crying or whimpering and is featured in both *xiao* and *xun* works, especially in "Song of Chu," which has an entire cadenza that expresses crying. During that

cadenza, the *xun* demonstrates its full capacity, imitating crying in varying speed, frequency, and amplitude of the vibrato. (Play)

In *Farewell My Concubine*, when the character is expressing lament, the vibrato can be extremely fast and intense, accompanied by hand shaking, and followed by bending the pitch down at the end. An example of this is the text spoken by Concubine Yu, "So, here I am, ready to dance." In this situation, the vibrato is not used to enrich the tone or bring warmth, but only for dramatization. (Play)

Performance Practice - Vibrato

- Crying

- Back to "Memory"

- Flute imitates the *xun*.
 - At the end of measure 22, the bending note should be played with vibrato



- "emotionally"
 - Dramatic vibrato can be added to evoke a sense of crying as in *Farewell My Concubine*



In "Memory", this example is where flute imitates the *xun* in "Song of Chu". At the end of measure 22, the forte dynamic on the bending note implies that this is the moment of the "crying last note." Therefore, it should be played with vibrato. (Play)




Measures 21-22

Towards the end of the piece, the composer marked "emotionally" under the pick-up to measure 48. Dramatic vibrato can be added throughout the entire phrase, until the harmonic G at the end of measure 49, to evoke a sense of crying and lamentation as in *Farewell My Concubine*.



Measures 48-49

Performance Practice - Vibrato

- Crescendo
 - “River of Sorrow” 
 - The *erhu* performs many crescendos and end with lifting the bow.
 - Long notes usually begin with a trembling, soften right away, and then crescendo with increasingly fast vibrato.
 - The note finally ends with an accented lift, as though the *erhu* is taking a breath.

Next is the Crescendo Vibrato.

- Crescendo Vibrato

String players usually have two ways of ending a phrase: one is to release bow pressure, letting the vibration gradually fade and the sound diminish naturally; the other is to raise the bow after a crescendo, creating a sudden dynamic lift. In "River of Sorrow," the *erhu* performs many crescendos and uses the latter type of ending. Long notes usually begin with a subtle trembling, soften right away, and then crescendo with increasingly fast vibrato. The note finally ends with an accented lift, as though the *erhu* is taking a breath. Let's listen to an example from "River of Sorrow". [\(Play\)](#)

Performance Practice - Vibrato

- Crescendo
 - Back to “Memory”
 - the long G should be played with a crescendo and increasingly fast vibrato.
 - Take a breath before A.



Back to “Memory”, in measure 16, the slurred long G should be played with a crescendo and increasingly fast vibrato. This is followed by a sudden lift, as in the music for *erhu*, allowing a breath to be taken before it continues to the A. [\(Play\)](#)

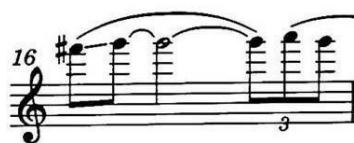


Figure 4.3 Measure 16

Measure 29 is also a good place to imitate this same *erhu* playing. [\(Play\)](#)



Figure 4.4 Measure 29

Performance Practice - Vibrato

- Stabilizing

- “River of Sorrow” 

- vibrato is often used after pitch bending or ornamentations to stabilize the note and emphasize its arrival.

- Stabilizing Vibrato

In "River of Sorrow," vibrato is often used after pitch bending or ornamentations to stabilize the note and emphasize its arrival. (Play)

Performance Practice - Vibrato

- Stabilizing

- Back to “Memory”

- Add vibrato on the E-flat in measure 11
 - Add vibrato on the accented B-flat in measure 12.



mm. 11-13

- Picture a person painfully stretching every word on the quintuplet, then crying on the long B-flat in measure 19.
 - The grace note helps the B-flat having a sobbing quality, and vibrato can make this even more effective.



mm. 18-20

Back to “Memory”, the flute player can add vibrato on the last E-flat in measure 11 and the accented B-flat in measure 12. (Play) Both of these notes follow ornamentations (sixteenth-

note triplets in measure 11 are considered ornamental) and need to be stabilized if imitating the playing style in *xun* and *erhu* pieces.



Figure 4.5 Measures 11-13

This phrase is the climax of the first page of “Memory”. It starts on the second highest note and is marked forte. The quintuplets suddenly slow down the rhythm, while the sixteenth notes on the last beat of measure 18 speed it up again. Picture a person painfully stretching every word on the quintuplet (**Play**), then crying on the long B-flat in measure 19. (**Play**) The grace note helps the B-flat having a sobbing quality, and vibrato can make this even more effective. (**Play the whole phrase**)



Performance Practice - Timing

The approach to time in traditional Chinese music is remarkably free.

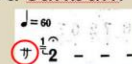
Evidence: the time signatures – **banyan**.

- *ban* – the main beat
- *yan* – the beats that follow.

A type of *banyan* – **Sanban**, is used in the slow sections of a piece or drama

- It means "free."
- It is written in the score.

For example, the beginning of “*Song of Chu*” is marked *sanban*.



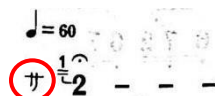
- Silence
- Ritardando



Timing

Overall, the approach to time in traditional Chinese music is **remarkably free**, allowing for a fluid and expressive performance, giving performers significant freedom to arrange their own tempo. One piece of evidence that supports this idea is the use of time signatures in traditional Chinese music and drama. In Chinese, the term "time signature" is called

banyan, where *ban* refers to the main beat, and *yan* refers to the beats that follow. A type of *banyan* frequently used in the slow sections of a piece or drama is called *sanban*, which means "free." Similar to time signatures in Western music, *sanban* is also written in the score. For example, the beginning of "Song of Chu" is marked *sanban*, which I circled it in this example.



Sanban is a common time signature, and to incorporate this Chinese music style into "Memory," as long as the direction is clear—such as an *accelerando* moving from slow to fast—and the tempo changes align with the emotional context, the timing can be adjusted as needed. This flexibility not only applies to tempo but also includes silence or pauses, and *ritardando*.

Performance Practice - Timing

- Silence

- “The Aesthetic of Intended Blank”

the beauty and power of what is left unsaid or undone

- Chinese painting: leave parts of the canvas blank
- Chinese drama: use pauses and moments of silence
- Chinese music can be proven in the *Tang* Dynasty poet Bai Juyi's "Song of the Pipa": “Silence at this moment surpasses the sound.”
- In “Memory”: the rests can be freer and extended



- Silence

To discuss the use of silence throughout the piece “Memory”, I need to introduce the Chinese aesthetic concept of "The Aesthetics of Intended Blank". This concept is a key principle in traditional Chinese art, drama, and music. It highlights the beauty and power of what is left unsaid or undone, allowing the audience to engage their imagination and fill in the gaps. This emphasizes the importance of space and silence in conveying meaning and emotion.

In Chinese painting, this aesthetic involves leaving parts of the canvas blank, inviting viewers to imagine the missing elements and creating a sense of openness. Similarly, in Chinese drama, performers use pauses and moments of silence.

The importance of the concept of "leaving blank space" in Chinese music can be proven in an old Chinese saying that comes from the *Tang* Dynasty poet Bai Juyi's "Song of the Pipa": "Silence at this moment surpasses the sound."

This approach allows the music to breathe and gives the listener time to absorb the emotions being conveyed. Therefore, in "Memory," the rests can be freer and extended.

Performance Practice - Timing

• Silence

• Back to "Memory"

- The rest comes after a big sigh. After the rest, the triplets introduce something completely new. Therefore, there should be a pause, allowing the audience to experience the sadness a little longer



- For the same reason, a short pause should be taken before measure 14, as what comes next is new material.



Back to "Memory". In measure 10, even though the rest is only an eighth note, it comes after a phrase that ends in a downward pitch bend, like a big sigh. After this breath, the triplets introduce something completely new. Therefore, instead of a very rhythmic eighth note rest before the triplets in measure 11, there should be a pause, allowing the audience to experience the sadness a little longer. (Play)



Measures 10-11

For the same reason, a short pause should be taken before measure 14, as what comes next is new material. (Play)



Performance Practice - Timing

- Ritardando


- Artistic belief in Chinese culture: when people die, they transform into a butterfly or bird and return to nature. This belief provides comfort to the living and offers a peaceful resolution for life. This philosophy is often reflected in Chinese music and visual art, emphasizing the importance of space and silence in conveying meaning and emotion.

- Ritardando


In Chinese culture, there is an artistic belief that when people die, they transform into a butterfly or bird and return to nature. This belief provides comfort to the living and offers a peaceful resolution for life. This serene philosophy is often reflected in Chinese music and visual art, emphasizing the importance of space and silence in conveying meaning and emotion.

Performance Practice - Timing

- Ritardando

- “Song of Chu” 

渐慢
5 6 1 4 5 3 | 2 - - - || 

- “River of Sorrow” 

稍慢
1. 6 1 2 5 3 | 2 3 6 1 2 5 3 | 6. 7 2 3 7 7 6 5 3 | 6 - - - ||

The Chinese words on top of both examples indicate “getting slower”

Both “Song of Chu” and “River of Sorrow” end slowly with a ritardando. The Chinese words on top of both examples indicate “getting slower”. Let’s listen to the end of “Song of Chu”.

(Play)

渐慢
5 6 1 4 5 3 | 2 - - - ||

Ending of “Song of Chu”

稍慢
1. 6 1 2 5 3 | 2 3 6 1 2 5 3 | 6. 7 2 3 7 7 6 5 3 | 6 - - - ||

Ending of “River of Sorrow”

Performance Practice - Timing

- Ritardando

- Back to “Memory”

- The artistic belief can be expressed in the last three measures
 - It should be played slowly, without vibrato
 - It requires tonal stability to convey the desired peacefulness and to effectively express the sense of distance as it fades away



The artistic belief can be expressed in the last three measures of “Memory”. The final phrase should be played slowly, without vibrato. While it doesn't need to be extremely soft, it requires tonal stability to convey the desired peacefulness and to effectively express the sense of distance as it fades away. (Play)



Measures 52-end



CONCLUSION

This project is like a detective case to me. When I first played the piece "Memory," it felt very familiar, leading me to surmise that it must contain many elements that have accompanied me since childhood. Like a detective, I analyzed a selection of the most iconic pieces from the Chinese folk music repertoire to trace the origins of these familiar clues.

Through analyzing the performance style of these pieces, I discovered that these elements are demonstrated through various techniques, which can also be found on the Western flute in "Memory." Through this analysis, I have successfully deciphered a potential stylistic code and identified a possible source.

For example, ornamentation, grace notes, and trills are great techniques to express sobbing emotions on the flute, as reflected in the crying sections of "Song of Chu" and *Farewell My Concubine*. Pitch bending is common in Chinese wind instruments. It is closely related to the human voice and dialogue, often used to imitate a person's sigh or cry, especially when combined with vibrato. Additionally, there are specific ways to interpret rhythms, timing and tempo in the style of traditional Chinese, and showcase Chinese aesthetics.

I believe that my intuition was correct—this piece, "Memory," indeed incorporates numerous elements of traditional Chinese music and requires a specific performance style to be accurately interpreted. It embodies significant influences from Chinese musical style and culture. The combination of Western flute techniques with traditional Chinese styles

proves that it is a cross-cultural work, deserving of the attention of both the flute and broader communities.

Thank you!