EXPLORING CHINESE FOLK MUSICAL ELEMENTS IN THREE PIANO WORKS BY TAN DUN, BRIGHT SHENG, AND CHEN YI

by

NGAN NEI CHAN

(Under the Direction of David Fung)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to provide an analytical guide for common Chinese folk musical elements found in the early piano works of three contemporary Chinese-American *New Wave* composers: Tan Dun, Chen Yi, and Bright Sheng. These three composers were thoroughly exposed to folk traditions as they spent a significant amount of time studying folk songs around different regions of China. Influences from Chinese folk music can be found in their early piano works. The dissertation briefly covers the development of Chinese folk music in the twentieth century, which provides a context for how these three composers might have been influenced by folk elements during their time in China. Brief biographical and musical stylistic views of these composers and their mentor, Chou Wen-chung, are provided which crystalizes the discussion of their use of folk elements in their early piano works. In later chapters, theoretical analyses of three piano works showcase these composers' use of Chinese folk musical elements and explore areas of intersections and differences. The three piano works that are examined in depth include

Tan Dun's *Eight Memories in Watercolor* (1978, revised in 2002), Chen Yi's *Duo Ye* for solo piano (1984), and Bright Sheng's *My Song* (1989).

These three composers fuse traditional Chinese musical elements with Western post-tonal techniques. It is notable to see the similar journey of these three composers in terms of cultural and educational background, and how this background reflects their fusion of Chinese folk musical elements and Western compositional techniques to create unique musical styles. Particularly striking is the common use of Chinese folk tunes, pentatonic scales and the manipulations of these scales through modes and pitch substitutions, as well as imitations of Chinese instruments for acoustic colors. In summary, the main goals of the document are to present similarities and differences of these folk elements in the early piano works of these *New Wave* composers and provide an analytical guide for pianists and piano teachers interested in learning about the Chinese musical elements in these contemporary works.

INDEX WORDS: Chinese-American piano repertoire, contemporary classical music, Chinese piano repertoire, folk music, folk singing, Chinese folk music, folk musical elements, Chinese folk music culture, folk dance and music, New Wave, Peking Opera, Tan Dun, *Eight Memories in Watercolor*, Chen Yi, *Duo Ye*, Bright Sheng, *My Song*, Chou Wen-chung, piano analytical guide, Chinese pentatonic scales, Chinese instruments, Heterophony, call and response, shange, mountain song

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NGAN NEI CHAN

B.M., The University of Texas at Austin, 2016

M.M., The University of South Carolina, 2018

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by

NGAN NEI CHAN

Major Professor: David Fung

Committee: Adrian Childs
Peter Jutras

Electronic Version Approved:

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

To my dearest parents, Koi Meng Chan and Sok Ton Cheang.

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INTRODUCTION

Tan Dun, Chen Yi, and Bright Sheng all share a similar upbringing and cultural background. They were born in the mid-1950s in China, a few years after the victory of the Chinese Communist Revolution and the establishment of the Republic of China in 1949. Besides living through the common experience of the Cultural Revolution, these composers were the first group of students admitted to top conservatories after these institutions reopened in 1978.[1] With their extensive knowledge of music, specifically folk songs, Tan Dun and Chen Yi were accepted into the Beijing Central Conservatory, while Bright Sheng was accepted into the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, majoring in music composition. In 1977, visiting scholars and composers such as Chou Wen-chung, Alexander Goehr, and George Crumb made their visits to China. They brought with them Western scores, books, and records, and these materials quickly spread throughout music schools in China.[2] This first generation of Chinese musicians who were exposed to post-1949 developments in Western music adopted avant-garde music and the practice of atonal music were called *New Wave*, including notable ones such as Chen Yi, Tan Dun, Bright Sheng, Zhou Long, and Chen Qigang.[3] Many of them migrated west, including Chen Yi, Tan Dun, and Bright Sheng, who continued their musical journey in the United States. These three composers attended Columbia University, studying with their mentor Chou Wen-chung. Chou Wen-chung once said, "I felt my responsibility is to build my ideas, my career, my

[1] Cheryl Melfi, "An Investigation of Selected Works by Chen Yi" (D.M.A. diss. University of Arizona, 2005), 17.
[2] Songwen Li, "East Meets West: Nationalistic Elements in Selected Piano Solo Works of Chen Yi" (D.M.A. diss. University of North Texas, 2001), 12.
[3] These composers except Bright Sheng follows the Chinese practice of presenting their names in the order of family name (i.e. Chen) and given name (Yi), rather than the reverse which is commonly practiced in Western culture. Bright Sheng's Chinese name is Sheng Zongliang, however, he uses "Bright Sheng" as his name in the United States and many publications, and therefore the document would present his name in this order.

products, on the basis of how to revive the Chinese heritage, and, in view of the time lag, to merge with modern ideas."[4] His thoughts resonated with these composers. Tan Dun, Chen Yi, and Bright Sheng embraced their Chinese heritage and composed unique music, fusing Chinese elements from their cultural roots and Western techniques from their current environment. Folk music is undeniably important to these three *New Wave* composers' compositional development and their identities as composers.

This paper presents interesting areas of intersection and divergence in these composers' use of the Chinese folk musical elements in their piano works. Chapter 1 briefly covers the development of Chinese folk music in the twentieth century, which provides a context for how these three composers might have been influenced by folk elements during their time in China. Chapter 2 provides brief biographies and musical stylistic views of these composers and their important mentor, Chou Wen-chung, as well as an overview of the three piano compositions, *Eight Memories in Watercolor* (1978, revised in 2002), *Duo Ye* for piano (1984), and *My Song* (1989). These works explore the use of folk musical elements in the composers' early piano works. Chapters 3 to 5 provides an analytical guide to folk elements used by these composers, including Chinese pentatonic scales and modes (Chapter 3), the use of original folk tunes and textures common in folk music such as heterophony and call and response in folk singing (Chapter 4), and imitations of Chinese instruments for timbral effects (Chapter 5). Theoretical analysis and examples will be discussed in exploration of the intersections and differences among these works.

[4] Michelle Vosper, "Biography," *Chou Wen-Chung* website. https://chouwenchung.org/about/biography/

CHAPTER 1

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHINESE FOLK CULTURE SINCE THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

Folk music is an essential part of Chinese culture used in rituals and ceremonial events such as weddings, funerals, calendrical festivities, religious events, work, and courtship. The tradition of folk music has been passed from generation to generation, resulting in many different regional styles. With the establishment of conservatories and institutions in the early twentieth century, the study of folk music and traditional Chinese music was added to the academic curriculum. Chinese folk music is crucial to Tan Dun, Chen Yi, and Bright Sheng, as they continually write music with many folk influences. Their interests in folk music grew after being exposed to it in the countryside with folksong collecting during the Cultural Revolution. Also, during their undergraduate study in music conservatories in China, training in Chinese music and folk music was required. Furthermore, they were sent to different parts of the rural areas of China by the music conservatories to collect folk songs each year during the summer.[5] These collective experiences with Chinese folk culture helped to shape these composers' compositional styles.

What is Folk Music?

The meaning of the term *folk music* can vary according to different regions of the world, however, most performers and participants would agree on certain criteria that are essential to traditional folk music in terms of patterns of transmission, social function, origins, and

[5] Chen Yi, "Compositional Process and Technique in *Happy Rain on a Spring Night (2004)*," *Music Theory Online* 26, no. 3 (September 2020). https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.20.26.3/mto.20.26.3.chen.html

performance.[6] In Europe and the Americas, the term has been used both with regard to social class, nation, or ethnicity.[7] *Volkslied*, which means folksong in German, was first coined by cultural philosopher, theologian, and writer Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) in one of his publications. He mentioned that folk song is the "communal composition" and aesthetic of dignity.[8] From the late nineteenth century onwards, the concept became significant with the notion of nationality. Composers who want to create national music would use "folk" to denote the idea of nation.[9] The German term *Volksmusik* ("people's music") might be the closest translation to the Chinese term folk music *minge*. *Min* indicates "people's" while *ge* denotes "song" or "music."

There are several general characteristics of traditional folk music. First, the origin or composer of the music is rarely known, and thus the anonymity of the music becomes a large factor in folk music identification. The spread of folk music is usually dependent on oral transmission. Music is often passed between generations of family members, community members, coworkers and friends, etc. Thus, folk music of this kind usually has the tendency to change as it passes from one individual to another, creating variations. There might even be significant differences within the same village, community, or each singer over time.

Chinese folk music incorporates many regional styles and was created for many occasions. The Han ethnic group makes up about 92% of the whole Chinese population. Within this Han population, there are many different dialects and languages, resulting in many regional

[6] Bruno Nettl, "Folk Music," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, December 3, 2020. https://www.britannica.com/art/folk-music.
[7] Carole Pegg, "Folk Music," *Grove Music Online.* 2001. https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000009933
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.

styles of folk music.[10] Until the last few decades, Chinese people were mostly peasant farmers. Most folk music was about common people's daily life, and some music was being played during ritual events such as weddings, funerals, or festival celebrations.

Chinese Folk Culture in the Early Twentieth Century

Since the popularity and development of folk traditions peaked during the Ming and Qing dynasties (from the fourteenth to the nineteenth centuries), folk musicians often speak of the pre-war period as the golden age for their music. Many traditions were threatened by the end of the mid-nineteenth century due to natural disasters, warfare, foreign imperialism, and new and foreign culture.[11] The 1911 Revolution ended China's last imperial dynasty and led to the establishment of the Republic of China. The Republican period in the 1910s and the New Culture Movement in the 1920s criticized classical Chinese traditions, and promoted new Chinese culture based on Western ideals like freedom, democracy, and science. Military expenditure in the 1920s had forced villagers in many regions to stop practicing music and curtailed annual ritual plays.[12] Many old musicians in the north considered the war against Japan (1936-45) during World War II as a decisive period when many traditions were damaged.

Although damage pervaded traditional Chinese music, the rise of the Republic of China in 1911 helped urban development and professional music-making trends. While the inland rural ceremonial genres were mostly conserved, music in the large cities and urban areas changed rapidly. Western brass bands have been used commonly in festivals and ceremonies in small towns since their introduction to China in the nineteenth century. Other western imports such as dance halls, silent movies, and recording industries influenced urban Chinese people. As such,

[10] Fercility Jiang, "Chinese Folk Music," *China Highlights* (October 2, 2021). https://www.chinahighlights.com/travelguide/culture/folk-music.htm
[11] Stephen Jones, *Folk Music of China: Living Instrumental Traditions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 33.
[12] Ibid.

many sought Western ideology, civilization and technology as opposed to "backward" and "feudal" traditional culture.[13]

Some Chinese literati rejected the Western values and sought to preserve the classical Chinese music heritage. This created a new interest in folk culture among urban Chinese during the New Cultural movement. Stephen Jones states that the distinctions between ancient folk traditions and "manufactured re-creations" are often blurry, as these groups of musicians tended to preserve Chinese traditions while they selectively absorbing new Western ideas.[14] The literati societies described their music as "national music," *guoyue*, which implied traditional music, as opposed to Western music such as Western military music, Christian hymns, and school songs. However, not all Chinese musicians agreed on what Chinese national music should be: some proposed that new Chinese national music should only include the practice of traditional Chinese instruments, while others favored the use of Western music and instruments as the foundation of the new national music.

Around the same time, Cantonese music and Jiangnan silk-and-bamboo instrumental genres were considered "new" genres and music of the twentieth century with a synthesis of Chinese and modern Western elements.[15] In the 1930s and 1940s, cosmopolitan cities like Hong Kong and Shanghai were the leading centers for new music genres, which incorporated Western features. Modernization was an important and burning issue during the time. Raw folk materials seemed to be "backward," "unscientific," and "out of tune" to modern educated crowds in the cities.[16] The idea was clear that China needed to create more sophisticated and modern music,

[13] Ibid., 35.
[14] Ibid., 39.
[15] Frederick Lau, *Music in China: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 40.
[16] Ibid.

especially under the Chinese Communist Party in the Yan'an Rectification Movement of the mid-1940s.

The Chinese Folk Scene in the 1950s

The victory of the Chinese Communist Revolution in 1949 had a great impact on social changes and the music culture. Certainly, the revolution brought unprecedented peace and social stability to the country compared to previous dynasties, but many music cultures and genres suffered from threats with national attempts to abandon religious and "superstitious" music practices.[17] Traditionally, village musicians were indeed closely associated with societies that are religious in nature. The livelihood of folk musicians was greatly impacted by the limitations set by social reform, and musicians were forced to abandon their practices. Wood and metal instruments were requisitioned as raw material for the socialist reconstruction.[18] Ritual musicians and traditions struggled since the end of the Revolution. Research on Chinese musicology was slow due to the restrictions on research areas related to subjects such as religion. Traditional contexts such as weddings and funerals were briefly acknowledged. Nonetheless, some traditional ceremonies, festivals, and rituals have survived, particularly in rural villages.

With the Party's effort to change from the old society to the new society, leaders encouraged traditional music by establishing government and army troupes, starting in the 1930s. Folk musicians were recruited. However, rather than playing traditional folk music, many had found themselves accompanying the new-style opera, or national style of pseudo-popular "light music" that was heard everywhere through loudspeakers in public venues in the 1950s.[19] With the intention to create a national synthesis and standardize the music culture, these government

[17] Jones, *Folk Music of China*, 43.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Lau, *Music in China*, 49.

music troupes also collected folk music material, arranged the traditional material, and removed the musicians from their traditional performance contexts, thus making these materials less accessible in their original form. Thus, regional characteristics were lost in the process.[20]

Status of Folk Music Since the End of the Cultural Revolution

Rural and urban musicians were in an equally vulnerable place after 1949, in particular during the Cultural Revolution from 1966-1976. Musicians and scholars suffered during the 1957 Anti-Rightist campaign, followed by the Great Leap Forward of 1958 with agricultural cultivation and rural industrialization, which led to famines throughout the country. The Anti-Revisionist campaigns, the Socialist Education, and Four purifications campaigns in the 1960s eventually led to the infamous Cultural Revolution. Many musicians were disbanded in the 1950s, fieldwork and research of traditional music were paused, and many were forced to work in agricultural and industrial labor. While most Western instruments were banned, the piano was one of the few instruments allowed for use in Revolutionary Peking Opera during the course of the Cultural Revolution.[21]

Folk music culture was slowly revived after the death of Chairman Mao Zedong and the overthrow of the Gang of Four in 1976, which marked the end of the radical sociopolitical movement. The liberalization of the 1980s encouraged revival of musical groups and ensemble playing; music research, fieldwork, and publication resumed. Many cities and provinces reported hundreds to thousands of instrumental ensembles in the mid-1980s.[22]

With the new freedoms of the 1980s, people began showing more interest in Western music: popular, light, and classical music aligned with their ideals for modernization, while

[20] Ibid., 51.
[21] Lau, *Music in China*, 98.
[22] Ibid., 57.

traditional and folk music were often seen as obstacles to modernization. The phenomenon led to an increase in the repertoire of popular and vocal pieces with influences from folksong, opera, film, and television. Factory-made instruments replaced the wood and metal traditional instruments. Western instruments dominated the market and replaced traditional shawm bands in ritual wedding and funeral ceremonies. The adaptation of Western instruments also naturally led to the use of Western temperament.

Research in traditional and folk music resumed after the Cultural Revolution. Although Western music was more popular at the time, the Music Research Institute of the Chinese Academy of Arts in Beijing and many conservatories had folk music departments that dedicated resources to research. These conservatories include the Central and Chinese Conservatoires in Beijing, the Shanghai Conservatoire, and others in Xi'an, Shenyang, Wuhan, Chengdu, and Guangzhou.[23] Research often involves documenting and studying local traditions. Primary authentic sources of folk music were urgently needed, and since the 1980s, fieldwork on folk song collecting has become available not just to the Chinese people, but also to foreigners around the world. Stephen Jones mentions in his book *Folk Music of China*, "Change in folk music is everywhere."[24] Modernization has affected towns and villages as we compare traditional folk music from rural areas to many newly-emerged genres since the 1980s. It is important to seek innovations while remembering our culture and heritage. Luckily, there is more research available nowadays, together with the awareness from the music educational system and advocates of Chinese folk music by contemporary composers, allowing us to gain more understanding and access to Chinese music folk culture.

[23] Lau, *Music in China*, 66.
[24] Jones, *Folk Music of China*, 366.

The Establishment of Conservatories and Institutions

Rote playing and oral transmission were the most often used methods in traditional musical training in China between teacher and student before the middle of the twentieth century. There was no standardized pedagogy and repertory across the nation. However, many missionary schools provided Western music training in piano, music theory, and singing that changed the course of the education system in the mid-twentieth century. Conservatory training in China started with the establishment of the National Music Conservatory in 1927 founded by two Western-trained educators, Xiao Yaomei and Cai Yuanpei, with the goal of providing systematic musical training in Chinese and Western music. Courses included theory, composition, piano, symphonic strings, winds, vocal music, and Chinese music.[25] Modeled on the Western practice of solo repertoire and orchestral playing, the conservatory developed a systematic way of teaching traditional music and codified the playing style and performance practice for all Chinese instruments. After 1949, the People's Republic of China put effort into centralizing all institutions and conservatories, cultivating the shift from traditional methods to formal conservatory training.

The higher educational system in conservatories changed the social status of musicians after 1949. Before this, musicians were disparaged with low class status in society and were requested only when ritual services were needed, while competition among musicians was high. Once the conservatories were recognized with higher education, musicians became respected and were seen as professionals and specialists in their fields.[26]

[25] Jones, *Folk Music of China*, 67.
[26] Ibid., 63.

CHAPTER 2

COMPOSERS' BIOGRAPHIES AND COMPOSITIONS

After the downfall of the Cultural Revolution in the late 1970s and the open-door policy in China, Chinese modern music and music cultural exchange flourished. Foreign scholars brought in Western music and resources to Chinese conservatories. The term "*New Wave*" is used to describe the first generation of Chinese musicians after the Cultural Revolution who were exposed to the post-1949 developments in Western music and adopted the avant-garde style in their compositions, including Tan Dun, Chen Yi, and Bright Sheng. With the influence and encouragement of their important mentor, Chou Wen-chung, these composers developed their personal styles with ties to their Chinese folk influences.

This chapter explores the biographies of these three composers and their compositions. It also includes biographical background of these composers' important mentor, Chou Wen-chung, who built the necessary bridge in the educational system between the United States and China in the classical music scene, allowing these composers to study at Columbia University.

The New Voice of Chinese Music: Chou Wen-chung

Modern Chinese music continued to absorb many outside influences after the Cultural Revolution in the early 1980s. While many inland Chinese composers continued to write music with strong political messages, some who resided outside of China found their new voice in modern Chinese music. One of the most important composers who lived outside of China is Chou Wen-Chung.

Chou Wen-chung made a significant contribution in bridging the East and West in art and music. Chou Wen-chung was born in Yantai, China, in 1923. Chou's childhood and adolescence

helped pave his way to study in the West and become a great cultural ambassador for Chinese music. When Chou was nine years old, he began to study violin with his older brother. Later he developed a passion for music and taught himself Chinese instruments such as the mandolin, *erhu*, harmonica, and others. He then studied at the Jinling Middle School, a missionary school where English was taught. During World War II, the Japanese army invaded many regions of China. Chou and his family were in danger of being captured and had to flee to different cities seeking safety in the heavily guarded international settlements. Music became his only solace during this harsh war period.[27] After the war, Chou arrived in the United States, studying Civil Engineering at Yale University in 1964 with a full five-year scholarship. Witnessing suffering and atrocities during the war, Chou carried a sense of purpose in the music field, but he was denied the scholarship in music from Yale University. When the New England Conservatory reopened after the war, Chou enrolled as a violin major in 1946, and he was the only student from China. In 1949, Chou moved to New York City to live with his brother, where by chance he met the American composer Colin McPhee. It was McPhee who later introduced his most important mentor, Edgard Varèse, to Chou.[28] Chou studied with Varèse from 1949 to 1954, and since the maestro refused payment for his teaching, Chou reciprocated by working as his copyist and assistant.[29] Several manuscripts of Varèse's, including his important orchestra piece *Déserts*, were handwritten by Chou. As a teacher, Varèse focused on helping the student find his own musical voice and was outraged by any trace of imitation or copying.[30] After years of collaboration, Chou and Varèse developed a mutual friendship, and Chou regarded Varèse as an exceptional person and mentor. After Varèse's death, Chou became his music executor, editing

[27] Michelle Vosper, *Biography: Chou Wen-Chung* website. https://chouwenchung.org/about/biography/
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.

and completing several of Varèse's works. He promoted Varèse's legacy and organized performances and lectures, and collaborated in recordings of all of Varèse's works.[31]

With the cultural mission in mind, Chou Wen-chung never forgot about his past and roots. Chou joined the faculty of Columbia University in 1964. During his three decades of teaching in the United States, he made a significant impact on the field of art education. He continued to bridge the East and West, teaching Columbia's first course in Chinese Music in 1984, as well as introducing a new program of "Asian Humanities in Music."[32] He also began the first doctoral program in composition at Columbia University and supervised numerous emerging composers including Chen Yi, Tan Dun, Bright Sheng, and Zhou Long. In 1972, after the open-door policy in China was adopted, Chou made his first visit back to his homeland after twenty-five years in the United States. In 1977, he made a landmark visit to the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing where he gave lectures and composition lessons.[33] Within a year, Chou had established the Center for U.S.-China Arts Exchange based at Columbia University, which brought together different artists and specialists from all fields of visual and performing arts. Many cultural exchange programs were launched over the past forty years, and he has made a significant contribution to arts education in both the U.S. and China. After almost three decades of teaching at Columbia University, Chou retired and focused his energy on composition. Chou said in one interview, "My job is to, as much as I could, as a modern person, to look back at the Chinese heritage and really ask the question. Does it deserve to continue? My ancestors gave it up by the end of the nineteenth century. Should I, if I want to be a composer, take that up first, or should I follow western tradition? Write a piece that everybody likes? Or

[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.

you want to express your own musical language? I felt my responsibility is to build my ideas, my career, my products, on the basis of how to revive the Chinese heritage and, in view of the time lag, to merge with modern ideas."[34]

For nearly a century, Chou Wen-chung made groundbreaking contributions to the realms of music composition, higher education in music, international cultural exchange, and mentorship to new generations of Chinese composers like Chen Yi, Tan Dun, Bright Sheng, Zhou Long, and many others. His legacy continues through his students and artists around the world. Chou passed away at the age of 96 in 2019 in Greenwich Village, in the former home of his mentor Edgard Varèse.

New Wave Composers

After the downfall of the infamous Cultural Revolution in the late 1970s, the development of Chinese modern music reached new heights and innovations. Under the influence of an open-door policy, China adopted a more open policy in terms of economics, cultural, and social realms. In music, the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing reopened in 1978, and among thousands of applicants, only 31 students were admitted to the composition class including Chen Yi, Tan Dun, Zhou Long, Chen Qigang, and Qu Xiaosong.[35] This group of artists shared similar cultural and educational backgrounds, having been sent to work in the countryside during the Cultural Revolution and studying at the Conservatories. In 1977, visiting scholars and composers such as Chou Wen-chung, Alexander Goehr, and George Crumb made their visits to China. They brought with them Western scores, books, and records, and these materials quickly spread throughout music schools in China.[36] This first generation of Chinese

[34] Ibid.
[35] Melfi, "An Investigation of Selected Works by Chen Yi", 17.
[36] Songwen Li, "East Meets West: Nationalistic Elements in Selected Piano Solo Works of Chen Yi" (D.M.A. diss., University of North Texas, 2001), 12.

musicians who were exposed to post-1949 developments in Western music adopted avant-garde music and the practice of atonal music instead of the more conventional political "national style" music promoted in the 1950s. This group of composers who adopted the more avant-garde compositional techniques and thinking was called *New Wave* or *New Tide*, including prominent composers Chen Yi, Zhou Long, Bright Sheng, Tan Dun, and others.[37] Chou Wen-chung's teaching was particularly influential among these composers, and in addition, with the resources and cultural exchange programs set up at Columbia University, several of them left China in 1986-1987 to study with Chou. The *New Wave* movement soon migrated overseas, with this group of composers continuing to blossom and writing music in foreign countries.[38]

Tan Dun and His Musical Language

Tan Dun is one of the most celebrated Chinese-American composers in the twenty-first century. Among members of the *New Wave* composers, Tan Dun seems to have attracted the most public attention due to his involvement in the film industry.[39] He was born in 1957 in Hunan, central China, and received no schooling or early musical training. He taught himself how to compose using simple number notation. He learned to play the *dizi*, the traditional bamboo flute, and the *erhu*, the Chinese two-stringed knee-fiddle. Eventually, he learned to play the western violin and described the instrument "just like an *erhu*, only a little bit different in sound."[40] Like many Chinese during the Cultural Revolution, Tan Dun was sent to plant rice on a commune. During that time, Tan was recruited to play erhu with the provincial *jingju* Beijing Opera Company.[41] Tan would also spend a significant amount of time collecting and studying

[37] Lau, *Music in China*, 102.
[38] Ibid., 103.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Frank Kouwenhoven, "Composer Tan Dun: The Ritual Fire Dancer of Mainland China's New Music" *China Information* 6, no. 3 (1991): 3.
[41] Lau, *Music in China*, 103.

folk songs around the Hunan area. His extensive knowledge of music, in particular local folk songs, led him to be accepted to the Beijing Central Conservatory in 1978.

After entering the Conservatory, Tan Dun was exposed to western classical music for the first time and immediately became "a slave for western classical music by Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin or Liszt."[42] With the introduction to more avant-garde western classical music through British composer Alexander Goehr, Tan Dun and his classmates were fascinated with the music written by Bartók, Messiaen, Boulez, and Stockhausen. Although Tan embraced the western idiom in his composition, strong Chinese references of ritual sounds and folk elements, and the use of traditional Chinese instruments were prominent in his work. As early as 1982, Tan Dun was invited by Chou Wen-chung to come and study in the United States, however he did not receive permission to go abroad until 1986. These extra years spent in China enabled Tan to immerse himself deeply in the rediscovery of China's cultural heritage. He studied classical poetry and philosophy, as well as the ritual and tribal life of China and many other traditional Chinese rituals and cultures. He mentioned that, "If I had left China in 1982, I would perhaps not have become the Tan Dun whom I am today…[but] a copy of an American composer instead."[43]

In 1986, Tan Dun traveled to the United States and began a Doctor of Musical Arts degree at Columbia University under Chou Wen-Chung and Mario Davidovsky. Like many other *New Wave* composers, his first year in the United States was a period of adjustment, and he was searching for his new voice and direction. Tan first wrote atonal music back in 1982, but his interest in serialism was only on the level of melodic design.[44] At Columbia University, teachers urged him to apply the twelve-tone compositional technique in a more thorough way. Nearly all

[42] Eline Flipse, "Chinese Classical Composers: Interview Tan Dun," *YouTube* (April 3, 2011), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T9WBfn1DgDo.
[43] Lau, *Music in China*, 13.
[44] Ibid., 16.

his works from 1986-87 involve atonalism. In 1987, Tan composed *In Distance*, a trio for piccolo, harp, and bass drum which he described as "one of the three struggling pieces of the period."[45] Tan explained reasons for giving this piece its title: "I wanted to write a piece very much in twelve-tone style, with a row, I couldn't do it. Psychologically, culturally, it just went against myself...I thought this piece reflected a distance that existed between me and the twelve-tone music tradition."[46] Eventually, Tan Dun rejected twelve-tone technique and returned for musical inspiration to Chinese spiritual music of ancient folk rituals. Nevertheless, he admitted that serialism and twelve-tone compositional technique had a positive and formative influence on him, saying, "Twelve tone composers teach you how to repeat without being boring."[47]

Tan Dun's growing interest in Chinese culture and philosophy led him to create several new artistic formats such as organic music, orchestral theatre, and opera that encompassed sound, sight, narrative, and ritual.[48] After rejecting the twelve-tone compositional technique, Tan turned to writing opera in a new artistic way. He composed the opera *Nine Songs* in 1989, a Chinese theatrical work with a strong ritualistic character for dancers and singers accompanied by an ensemble of ceramic chimes, bells, and jars, as well as some Chinese instruments. The invention of these ceramic instruments was Tan Dun's ideal for natural, non-artificial earthly sounds and a rejection of the cold, technological side of today's world.[49] In fact, since the late 1980s, Tan Dun has explored making music with various organic materials, such as water, wind, ceramics, metal, and stone. He has written organic music such as *Water Concerto* (1998) for water percussion and orchestra and *Paper Concerto* (2003) with materials such as large sheets of

[45] Su Zheng, *Claiming Diaspora: Music, Transnationalism, and Cultural Politics in Asian/ Chinese America* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 259.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Kouwenhoven, *Composer Tan Dun*, 18.
[48] Frank J. Oteri, "About Tan Dun," *Tan Dun* website. http://tandun.com/about/
[49] Lau, *Music in China*, 19.

paper. In 1990, Tan Dun also created the orchestral theatrical work *Orchestral Theatre I: O,* which involves the unconventional practice of orchestral players yelling, murmuring, chanting, and singing in addition to playing their instruments. Later, he composed *Orchestral Theatre II: Re* (1992) that involved audience participation with a divided orchestra led by two conductors.

Eight Memories in Watercolor, Op. 1

The piano suite, *Eight Memories in Watercolor, Op. 1,* was written in 1978 when Tan Dun left his hometown of Hunan to study at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing. During that time, the infamous Cultural Revolution had just ended, and schools and conservatories reopened. Tan said that "China just opened its doors, I was immersed in studying Western classical and modern music."[50] The work was originally titled *Eight Sketches in Hunan Accent.* Tan was homesick and longed for the folksongs from his hometown. He composed his Opus 1 as a piano suite, which he describes as a "dairy of longing" inspired by the folk songs from Hunan and memories of his childhood.[51]

In 1996, choreographers Chiang Ching and Muna Tseng set the work into a modern dance production. Pianist Fou Ts'ong got to know this work through Chiang and performed four of the pieces.[52] In 2001, Tan met Lang Lang, who played "Floating Clouds" from the set, and was touched by his interpretation, saying, "Lang Lang's interpretation was pure as water. I almost thought that I had written this work for him, even though he hadn't been born then."[53] Later, he made some slight revisions to the work including renaming titles, reordering the pieces, and altering the overall structure with Lang Lang's suggestions. The work was not premiered as a whole until 2003 by pianist Lang Lang.

[50] Oteri, "About Tan Dun."
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.

The piano suite consists of eight miniatures:

1. “Missing Moon”

2. “Staccato Beans”

3. “Herdboy’s Song”

4. “Blue Nun”

5. “Red Wilderness”

6. “Ancient Burial”

7. “Floating Clouds”

8. “Sunrain”

Each piece has a title that hints at its theme or image. Pieces 2, 3, 4, and 8 (“Staccato Beans,” “Herdboy’s Song,” “Blue Nun,” and “Sunrain”) are based on traditional Hunan folk songs. Tan Dun composed original melodies for the other four pieces. This piano suite incorporates many Chinese musical elements including pentatonic scales, imitation of Chinese instruments, as well as Chinese folk elements such as decorating notes and an imitation of *Shange* (mountain song), etc. With the dissertation’s focus on Chinese folk elements, I will investigate pieces 2, 3, 4, and 8, which are based on traditional Hunan folksongs.

Chen Yi and Her Musical Language

Chen Yi was born in 1954 in the city of Guangzhou in southern China. Through the encouragement from her parents, she received Western classical music training at a very young age. She started playing piano at the age of three and violin at the age of four. Chen Yi’s father was a huge classical music fan and had a big record collection at home. Chen’s father took her to

many concerts. She said she experienced "Japanese music and African dancing, any symphony orchestra from a Western country as well as the local orchestra, the Guangzhou Symphony."[54] At the same time, Chen started learning Chinese folk songs. During the Cultural Revolution, Chen's family was split up by the government and made to do heavy labor in different parts of the country. In 1970, Chen won a position as a composer and concertmaster in the Beijing Opera Troupe Orchestra in Guangzhou for eight years.

After the Cultural Revolution, Chen Yi, together with Tan Dun and Zhou Long attended the Central Conservatory in Beijing. She spent five years getting a Bachelor of Arts degree and three years on a Master's degree, and was the first woman to receive a Master's Degree in Composition in China after the Cultural Revolution.[55] Chen Yi and other *New Wave* composers like Tan Dun and Zhou Long systematically went through Western classical training and Chinese music training. Western classical training included ear-training, piano lessons, harmony, counterpoint, music analysis, and orchestration.[56] Chinese traditional music training involved learning different folk songs, musical styles, different genres of Chinese music, and Chinese instruments. Chen Yi and other composers were also sent to the countryside to collect folk songs for five years in the undergraduate program and three years in the Master's program. After working and living together with farmers and going to the mountains, Chen Yi discovered her own voice, saying, "It's the first time for me to realize that [Chinese music] is my native language! It's not classical [music]. It's not Mozart! It's not Beethoven that I'm used to."[57]

[54] Frank J. Oteri, *"*He Said, She Said: Zhou Long and Chen Yi, American Growth, Chinese Roots*" New Music Box* (August 1, 2006). https://nmbx.newmusicusa.org/he-said-she-said-zhou-long-and-chen-yi/2/
[55] Melfi, "An Investigation of Selected Works by Chen Yi", 16.
[56] Chen Yi, "Tradition and Creation," *Current Musicology* 67-68 (Composers Issue 2002): 60.
[57] Ibid.

In 1986, Chen came to the United States to study at Columbia University for her Doctor of Musical Arts degree in composition with prestigious professors Chou Wen-Chung and Mario Davidovsky. With professor Davidovsky, she trained extensively in the areas of musical concepts, construction, and orchestral wiring. Chen Yi concludes that the training at Columbia University gave her the ability to consider that music is not "new versus historical, nor as Eastern versus Western, but rather to consider the fact that human thought goes into all of these musics."[58]

With her unique blend of different cultural and compositional techniques, and rich musical imagination, Chen won numerous composition awards and recognitions, including the Charles Ives Living Award, the Rome Prize, Lieberson Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters and Guggenheim Fellowship. Chen was also elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2005. Through her professorship in conservatories in the United States including the Peabody Conservatory, John Hopkins University, and the University of Missouri-Kansas City since 1996, Chen Yi also has made great contribution in music education with composition lectures, workshops, and residences in new music festivals throughout the United States and China.[59]

When asked about her Chinese and American influences, Chen Yi mentioned that the Chinese cultural roots are implanted in her. She further explained: "I am in America. I write music inspired by the culture around me. My cultural root is Chinese, and now my inspiration is a combination. This is what makes me have my own voice. I do honor both cultures and even more cultures because America is a multicultural society; you have influence from many

[58] Chen Yi, "Tradition and Creation": 64.
[59] "Chen Yi," *Presser*, https://www.presser.com/chen-yi.

different resources...My root does not change even though my style can grow richer. As you grow you can be more inclusive, but you can never get rid of the blood."[60]

Elaborating further, she says, "I hope to capture the essence of both Eastern and Western cultures, and to write more compositions that embody my own temperament as well as the spirit of this brave new epoch."[61] Chen Yi developed her own personal style with the incorporation of Chinese elements and Western post-tonal compositional techniques. In her research and dissertation, Xin Guo identifies four main focuses in Chen Yi's music: pitch structure, formal structure, timbre, and expressive qualities of Chinese and Western instruments, and the process and developments of the above elements. For example, works like *Duo Ye* for piano (1984) and *Ba Ban* for piano (1999) are built upon the formal structure of "Baban" while incorporating Chinese and Western elements such as post-tonal techniques, Chinese elements found in Peking Opera, folk tunes, and the imitation of Chinese instruments.

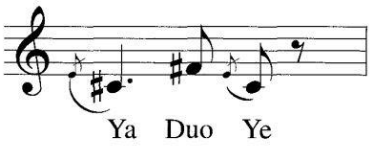
Duo Ye

Chen Yi composed *Duo Ye* for solo piano in 1984. It was inspired by a folk song collecting field trip to the Dong minority in the Guangxi province in southwest China. In 1980, she and a group of composers from the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing traveled to the Guangxi province and visited the Dong and Yao ethnic groups. The warm welcome with singing and dancing from the Dong minority left a deep impression and inspired her. The work gained immense recognition and won first prize at the Fourth Chinese National Composition in 1985. Chen Yi later used material from *Duo Ye* and arranged it for chamber orchestra in 1985. She

[60] Oteri, "He Said, She Said."
[61] Chen Yi, "Tradition and Creation": 59.

adapted it again (*Duo Ye No. 2*) for full orchestra in 1987, and it received its world premiere performance in Lincoln Center in New York City by the Central Philharmonic of China.[62]

Duo Ye uses pitch materials from the traditional song and dance, "Duo Ye," of the Dong minority: people stand in a circle with a bonfire in the center and dance in slow steps in one direction while singing a short phrase "Ya Duo Ye" in a call and response form with the lead singer and the chorus.[63] According to the composer, "Ya Duo Ye" are nonsense syllables, which are sung as a refrain in the traditional dance "Duo Ye" with intervals of a minor third, perfect fourth, and major second (Example 1). These pitch materials are the basis for the three main motives in *Duo Ye* that govern the organization of the piece.

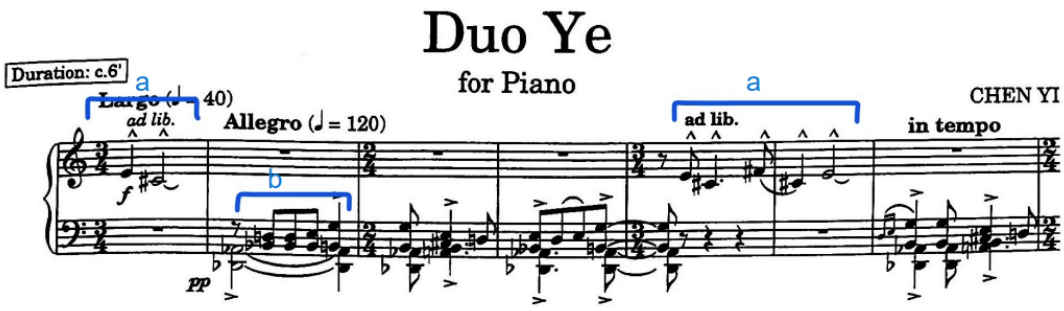


Example 1. Melody in the refrain of Chinese folk dance "Duo Ye."[64]

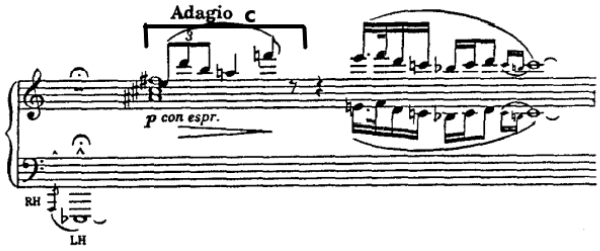
Chen Yi took the original pitch materials from the dance and composed three distinct melodic motives in this work. The first motive "a", appearing at the beginning of the piece in the treble clef, represents the lead singer declaiming the opening phrase. The dancing chorale interrupts with a rhythmic dance-like response with motive "b" in the bass clef and acts as the accompaniment to the soloist or the leader. It also encompasses intervals of a major second, minor third, and perfect fourth. The lead singer motive "a" reenters in mm. 5 and 6 for a full

[62] William E. Runyan, *Duo Ye No. 2, Runyan Program Notes.* website. https://runyanprogramnotes.com/chen-yi/duo-ye-no-2
[63] Chen Yi, "Tradition and Creation": 61.
[64] Ibid.

disclosure (Example 2). The third motive "c" is brought out in m. 71 and represents Chen Yi as a visitor from Beijing.[65] It is derived from the "a" motive and imitates a Peking Opera tune (Example 3). Chen Yi further employs these three motives in the *Andante* section in m. 73 by using the melodic contour of "c" and combining pitch materials in "a" and "b" to develop the twelve-tone rhythmic pattern in the bass: "the first, fourth, and sixth eighth notes are taken from the intervals of 'a' and 'b'."[66] Besides motivic developments using pitch materials, Chen Yi carefully crafts and organizes the work using rhythmic arrangements such as "The Sum of Eight" and "The Golden Olive" from the traditional percussion ensemble music in southeastern China *Shifan Luogu*.[67]



Example 2. Pitch materials of motive "a" and motive "b" of *Duo Ye*, mm. 1-6.



Example 3. Pitch materials of motive "c" of *Duo Ye*, m. 71.

[65] Chen Yi, "Tradition and Creation": 61.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.

She skillfully uses these simple pitch materials to construct this one movement work using motivic development and transformation. The piece can be analyzed as having three large sections. The first, mm. 1-70, features the free call and response antiphonal writing of the leader "a" and the chorus "b". The second section is from mm. 70-114 in which the guest motive "c" is introduced in the improvised mountain song and Peking Opera styles. Chen Yi further uses the three motives to develop a twelve-tone accompaniment pattern in m. 73. The third section *Allegro* starts in m. 115 and features motivic development of the three motives using different compositional techniques: rhythmic diminution, augmentation, transposition, and fragmentation to create a climax in the fast section.

Bright Sheng and His Musical Language

Bright Sheng was born in 1955 in Shanghai into a musical family. He began studying the piano with his mother at age four. During the infamous Cultural Revolution in the 1960s and 1970s, Sheng was sent to Qinghai, a Chinese province bordering Tibet, where he performed as a pianist and percussionist in the provincial music and dance theater. He was greatly attracted to the local folk culture there and spent years studying and collecting folk music of the region.[68] Many of Sheng' s compositions are inspired by folk melodies from the region, for example: *My Song, My Other Song, Tibetan Dance, Two Folk Songs from Qinghai, Seven Tunes Heard in China.*

The end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976 gave hope to the higher educational system in China. Universities reopened in 1978, and Sheng became one of the first students accepted to the Shanghai Conservatory of Music in music composition. He then moved to the United States and attended Queens College in New York City for his Master of Arts degree in 1982. Later, Sheng

[68] "Biography," *Bright Sheng: Composer, Conductor and Pianist*. http://brightsheng.com/bio.html

studied at Columbia University in 1993, where he met other fellow Chinese classmates like Tan Dun and Chen Yi. They all studied with Chou Wen-Chung at the time. In 1985, he met his mentor Leonard Bernstein at the Tanglewood Music Center and studied composition and conducting privately with Bernstein, working for him as an assistant until his death in 1990.[69]

As one of the highly successful composers, conductors, and pianists worldwide, Bright Sheng has appeared with major orchestras such as the Chicago Symphony, New York Philharmonic, Cleveland Orchestra, etc. As an artistic director and advisor, he has appeared at many of the world's most prestigious music centers including Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, and Kennedy Center.[70] In 1999, Sheng received an invitation by President Clinton and a special commission from the White House for his work *Three Songs for Pipa and Cello*, which was premiered by Wu Man and Yo Yo Ma. He also featured as one of the composers at the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games to compose music for the opening ceremony. In academia, Sheng is the Leonard Bernstein Distinguished University Professor of Music at the University of Michigan where he has been teaching composition since 1995.

Bright Sheng's works are well known for their dramatic style and historical significance. Three of his major orchestral works (*H'un: In Memoriam 1966-1967*, *Nanking! Nanking!*, and his opera *Madam Mao*) are inspired by real historical events from Chinese history such as the Cultural Revolution. Due to Sheng's attraction to raw folk materials, and his experience in folk song collecting in Qinghai, many of his works are based on Chinese folk music or inspired by ancient Chinese poems and landscapes.[71] Sheng has great respect and admiration for the composer Bela Bartók, writing in his article *Bartók, the Chinese Composer,* "Often, his

[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Yi Zhang, "When East Meets West: A Stylistic Analysis of Bright Sheng's Piano Works" (D.M.A. diss. University of Houston, 2010), 12.

compositions are manifestations of the true beauty of folk music. In his music we hear 'unrefined', 'raw' peasant songs alongside the 'high art' classical music, a coexistent quality obvious even in his most lyrical passages."[72] He mentions that some Chinese composers such as himself have a strong resonance with Bartók's music. One obvious reason would be the similarities shared by Hungarian and Chinese folk traditions with the use of the pentatonic scale. He further explains that in practice, however, the fundamental tone in authentic Chinese music has never been pentatonic; each fundamental tone is modified and embellished by its adjacent semitones and results in the usage of pentatonic scales in modern Chinese music.

My Song

The four-movement piano solo *My Song* is Bright Sheng's first published solo piano work. It was commissioned and premiered by pianist Peter Serkin on November 11, 1989 in New York City. In Sheng's program note for the work, he writes, "The phonetic pronunciation of 'My Song' (m'ai-sang) in Chinese can coincidentally be translated as 'pulsating voices.' And my 'm'ai-sang' (pulsating voices) is the folk music and dance of my native land."[73] The work is inspired by Chinese folk music and elements while also exhibiting Western compositional techniques. In one interview, Sheng states, "In writing [*My Song*], I was searching for a kind of harmonic language that could offer the same kind of tension and release as in Western tonal music. I therefore went back to my 'mother tongue,' and tried to explore ways to achieve a similar effect while utilizing pentatonicism in this piece."[74]

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[72] Bright Sheng, "Bartok, the Chinese Composer," *Bright Sheng* website. http://www.brightsheng.com/Sheng_essay/BARTOK.pdf.
[73] Bright Sheng, Program Note from *My Song* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1994).
[74] Wendy Wan-Ki Lee, "Unpacking Aspects of Musical Influence in Three Piano Works by Chinese Composers" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2006), 133.

Traditionally, Western tonal harmony creates tension and release through the use of half steps and tritones while following the rules of voice leading to resolve dissonances. However, there is no half step or tritone in a typical pentatonic collection with pitch class set 02479. Therefore, Sheng must find a way to generate tension and release while using the pentatonic collection in *My Song*. He said, "I tried to create tension and release by adding a half step above the third note of a pentatonic scale such that it can generate another collection. For example, in a pentatonic collection of C D E G A, I would insert an F, resulting in a semitone between E and F (to create tension), as well as a different pentatonic collection (F G A C D)."[75] Essentially, this kind of pitch substitution allows Sheng to explore tension and resolution in his work. Furthermore, Sheng uses transposition of the pentatonic collection at a half step, a major third, or a tritone, and juxtaposes two such pentatonic collections that share minimal numbers of common tones in the second, third, and fourth movements to create chromaticism.[76]

The prelude-like first movement is constructed through the development of heterophony in the folklore style. He uses grace notes and 01 half step dyads, imitating the indefinite pitches and glissandi in Chinese folk singing.[77] The second movement is humorous and joyful, inspired by the Chinese folk tune "Tai Yang Chu Lai Xi Yang Yang" ("Joy at the Sunrise") from Sichuan. The third movement is a rhythmic savage dance featuring "Chinese sequences," a term that was coined by the composer himself to describe a type of melodic development in Chinese folk music in which "each repetition of the initial motive increases the number of notes, duration, and tessitura."[78] The last movement features reduced texture and wide spatial orientation that

[75] Ibid., 134.
[76] Zhang, "When East Meets West," 16.
[77] Lee, "Unpacking Aspects of Musical Influence in Three Piano Works by Chinese Composers," 134.
[78] Sheng, Program Note from *My Song*.

create a nostalgic atmosphere. The movement is inspired by the Shanxi folk tune "Sanshi Lipu" (Village of Thirty Miles) composed by Chang Yongchang in the late 1930s.[79]

Chinese Traditional Music Training in Conservatories

The three composers were the first group of students admitted to music conservatories in 1978 right after the Cultural Revolution. Chen Yi and Tan Dun were accepted to the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, while Bright Sheng went to the Shanghai Conservatory of music in music composition. They all recalled going through systematic Chinese traditional music training in the conservatories in China. Bright Sheng mentioned in one of his interviews, "Western music education in China is a bit like Chinese food here: not very authentic…However, education in Chinese classical and traditional music was very good and this was most beneficial to me."[80] Chen Yi recalls the Western music training, "during the five years of undergraduate study in China, and three years for a Master's degree from the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, I was trained by a group of professors who followed the Western European tradition, particularly the Russian tradition in terms of musical language, form, structure, harmonic progressions, and counterpoint techniques are all European training."[81] In addition, compositional students are required to train in Chinese traditional music. Chen Yi says, "we memorized all the folk songs and tried to learn how to write in those local styles, including the dialects in singing from different provinces and different minority groups, as well as the majority group, the Han people."[82] Besides folk songs, students also learned about opera, which included singing, reciting, acting, lighting, mask, make-up, and costumes.[83] These

[79] Lee, "Unpacking Aspects of Musical Influence in Three Piano Works by Chinese Composers," 53.
[80] "An Interview with Bright Sheng," *The Journal of the International Institute* 7, Issue 1, 1999.
[81] Chen Yi, "Compositional Process and Technique in *Happy Rain on a Spring Night (2004).*"
[82] Ibid.
[83] Bruce Duffie, *Chen Yi Conversation with Bruce Duffie*, December 14, 2005. http://www.bruceduffie.com/chenyi.html

composers also needed to learn different types of traditional Chinese instruments: plucking instruments, wind instruments, and percussion. The composers were also sent to the countryside to collect folk every year. Chen Yi recounts, "before the summer vacation started, we were supported by the Conservatory, and in groups we went to the countryside to collect folk songs. We could choose our own itinerary, but each group was led by two professors, and we reported what the farmers did, much like Bartók did with his ethnography in eastern and southeastern Europe. Then we would go to write analyses of the technique in the songs we collected."[84] These collective experiences with conservatory training in Chinese music and folksong collecting greatly impacted these composer's musical growth, and further shaped their personal compositional styles with Chinese folk influences.

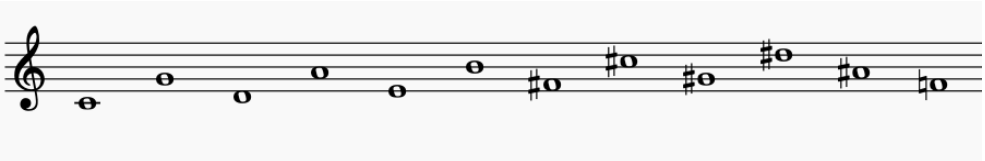
[84] Chen Yi, "Compositional Process and Technique in *Happy Rain on a Spring Night (2004).*"

CHAPTER 3

USE OF CHINESE PENTATONIC SCALES

Development of the Chinese Pitches and the Pentatonic Scale

The invention of the Chinese pentatonic scale can be traced back to 2697 B.C. and the reign of Emperor Huang Ti. Emperor Huang Ti sent his courier, Ling Lun, to the western mountains to cut bamboo pipes, *lus*, from which the twelve chromatic fundamental pitches are derived.[85] The particular bamboo length was selected to be the fundamental tonic note, and the next pitch was obtained by cutting another bamboo to two-thirds the length of the first, which produced a perfect fifth above the first pitch.[86] This process of bamboo cutting in proportion continued until the twelve pitches formed the twelve chromatic semitones. The first real pitch of the first bamboo tube was said to be close to present pitch D.[87] The principal fixed instruments, such as the flute, *Sheng*, and *Yun-lo*, all set D as the tonic. For the purpose of this dissertation as a guide to Chinese music, the examples are shown in Western notation, taking C as the tonic for the sake of clarity (Example 4).



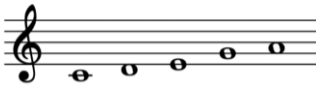
Example 4. Ancient Lus (Bamboo Tubes) Scale.

[85] J.A. Van Aalst, *Chinese Music* (Chinese Maritimes Customs Service, 1933), 6.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid., 7.

However, these twelve tones do not represent the Western chromatic scale. Due to the untempered nature of pitches with the length of the bamboo tubes that are tuned in fifths, the pentatonic pitches in perfect fifths, C, G, D, A, E would not result in pitches close to our tempered instruments. J.A. Van Aalst writes, "The E last obtained will be found too sharp to form a true major third to the note C. Indeed, the third thus obtained is so sharp as to be absolutely offensive to the ear."[88] The D, E, A, and B of the scale are said to be too sharp, and the F is nearly F sharp. However, Chinese musicians in the ancient times were able to flatten or sharpen the notes according to requirements.[89] Similar to the ancient Greek Pythagorean tuning system from the sixth century B.C., the Chinese had been using this gamut with twelve pitches tuned based on 2:3 ratios since 2967 B.C., and only intervals of the fifth, the fourth, and the octave were considered consonant.[90]

The Chinese pentatonic scale with five notes (the sounds emitted by the first five *lus)* was generally used only until the Yin dynasty (B.C. 1300). Example 5 shows how the five notes of the pentatonic scale are arranged in accordance to the Western scale degrees. Later in the Chou dynasty (B.C. 1100), two more notes, the sounds emitted by the sixth and seventh *lus,* were introduced. Essentially, they are the fourth and seventh degrees of the scale and are called *bianyin* "changing tone" or "exchange notes." Changing tones are used to expand the pentatonic scale and provide more variety of sounds and timbre to the music. They are generally used in melody in a descending melodic passage or act as leading or passing notes.[91]

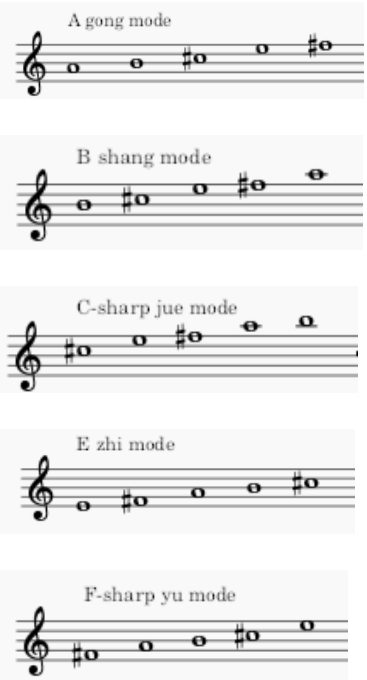
[88] Van Aalst, *Chinese Music*, 21.
[89] Ibid., 22.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Candice Bass, "Chinese Folk Music: Suggestions for Use in Elementary Schools" (M.M. diss. University of Southern California, 1980), 44.



Example 5. Pentatonic Scale.

Modes

The Chinese pentatonic scales are much like the major pentatonic scales with each scale degree's name as 宫 *gong* (C), 商 *shang* (D), 角 *jue* (E), 徵 *zhi* (G) and 羽 *yu* (A). Similar to the Western music theory church modes, each scale degree can be treated as a pitch center, which results in five different modes. These five modes combined are called the "gong system," having the similar connotation as key signature in Western music theory. For example, a gong system established on A pentatonic scale would have A as the tonic pitch (Example 6). The five modes of the A gong system would have: A *gong* mode (A, B, C-sharp, E, F-sharp), B *shang* mode (B, C-sharp, E, F-sharp, A), C-sharp *jue* mode (C-sharp, E, F-sharp, A, B), E *zhi* mode (E, F-sharp, A, B, C-sharp) and F-sharp *yu* mode (F-sharp, A, B, C-sharp, E).



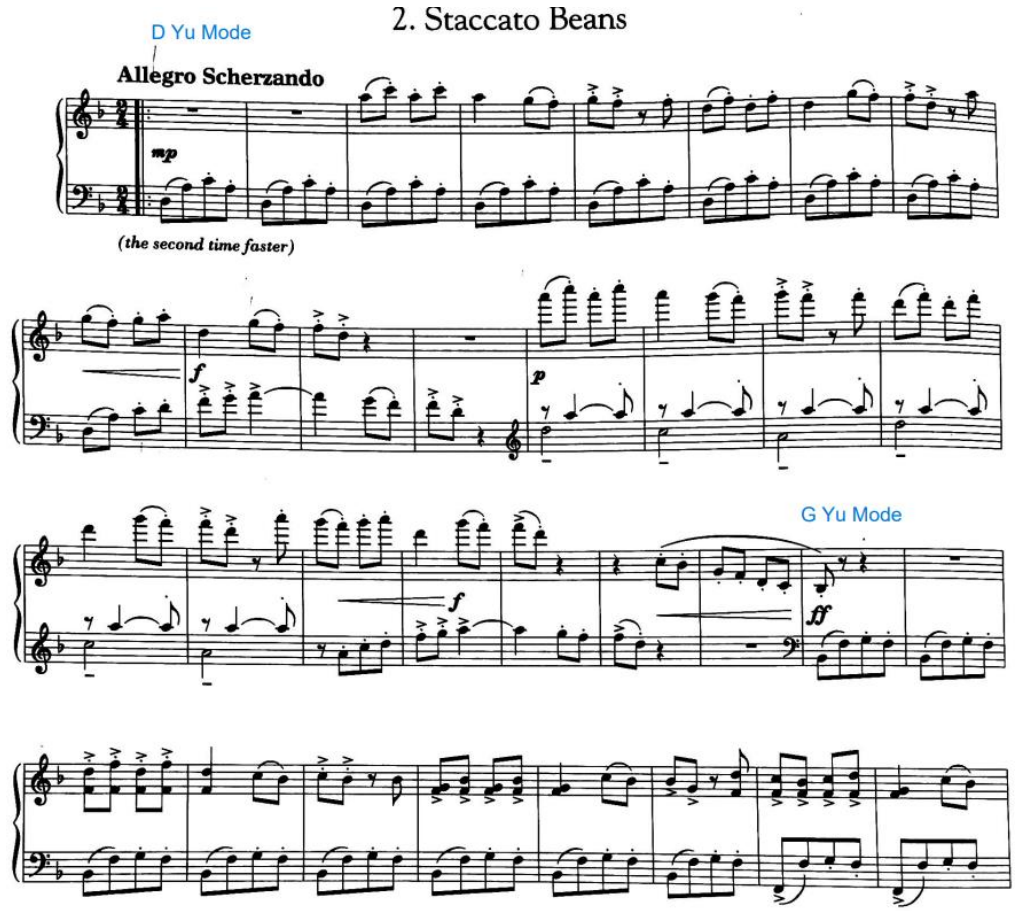
Example 6. The five modes of the A gong system.

Applications of the Chinese Pentatonic Scales and Modes

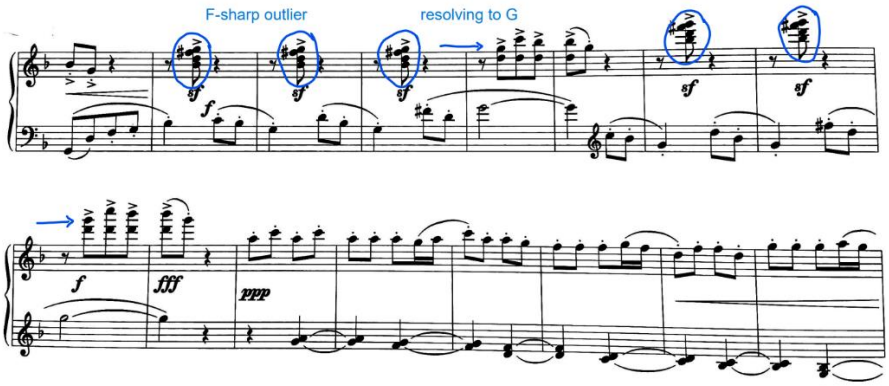
Tan Dun's *Eight Memories in Watercolor* was inspired by his recollection of childhood memories from his hometown Hunan. Pieces 2, 3, 4, and 8 are based on traditional Hunan folk songs. All these folk songs use the pentatonic scales, especially the *yu* mode (pieces 2, 3, 4), that is frequently used in Hunan folk songs.[92] For example in "Staccato Beans," the melody and the accompaniment in mm. 1-21 contains notes F, G, A, C, D when put in the order of the pentatonic scale. The repeated *ostinato* accompaniment has D that serves as the bass, while the melody in the right hand has the emphasis on D at the end of the phrase. The D pitch center thus turns the pentatonic scale into the *yu* mode D, F, G, A, C. Tan Dun then transposes the melodic contents to G *yu* mode in mm. 23-42, G, B-flat, C, D, F before it returns to the D *yu* mode in m. 43 (Example 7). Although the melodic content in the right hand suggests the G *yu* mode, the *ostinato* accompaniment in the left hand does not use G as the bass but B-flat for most of the section. Interestingly, analyzing this section using the western harmony would suggest a B-flat major triad sonority from mm. 23-28, G minor triad sonority mm. 29-31 and m. 34, and F major triad from mm. 32-33, despite the fact that the melody is in the G *yu* mode. Tan Dun includes an outlier F-sharp in mm. 35-37, which does not fit into the G *yu* mode. This F-sharp outlier reinforces the G as the pitch center by acting as the leading tone resolving to G (Example 8). Similarly, Tan Dun emphasizes the D pitch center at the end of the piece by inserting the outlier C-sharp, which acts as the leading tone resolving to D immediately in measures 62 and 63. Due to the same melodic contents throughout the piece, this transposition technique with emphasis of the tonal center gives a strong sense of sectional division and variety, allowing the listener to

[92] Meiyue Zeng, "Hunan Folk Tone in TanDun's *Memories of Eight Watercolor Paintings" Journal of Art College of Inner Mongolia University* 32nd ser., 9.2 (June 15, 2012): 108.

identify the form of the piece easily as ternary. Furthermore, the listener would be able to follow along the thematic materials clearly with this transposition technique.

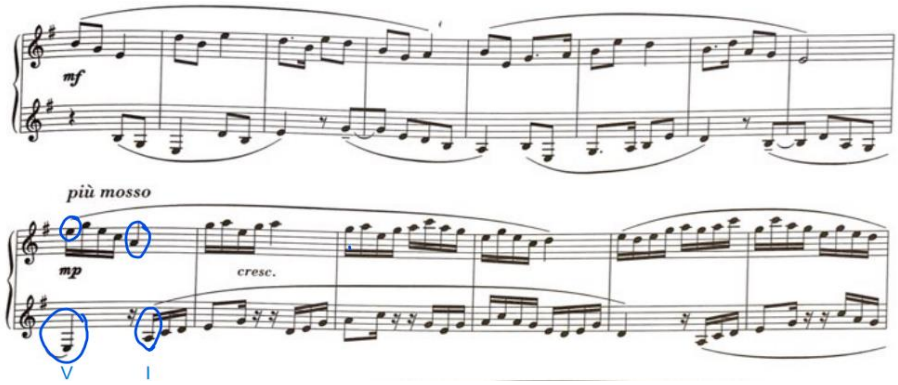


Example 7. Tan Dun, “Staccato Beans,” mm. 1-33.

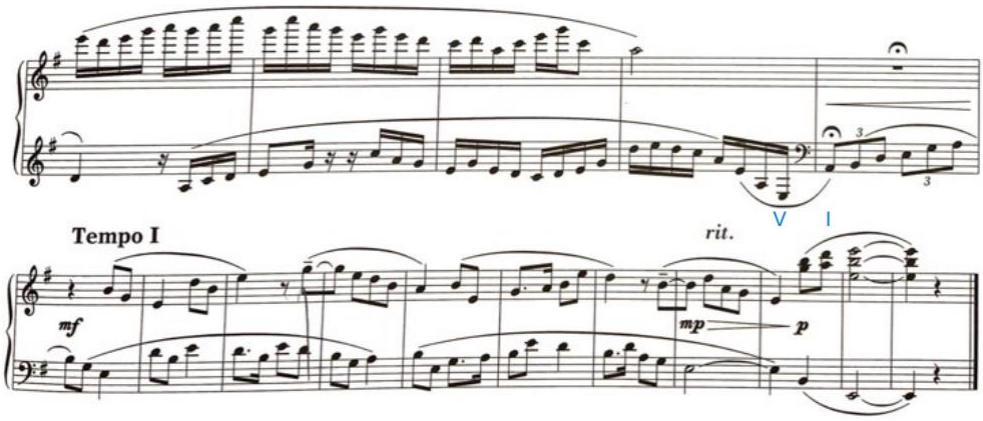


Example 8. Tan Dun, “Staccato Beans,” mm. 34-49.

In the polyphonic piece 4, “Blue Nun,” Tan Dun similarly creates a ternary form using two *yu* pentatonic scales, however he uses a different transposition approach. He uses E *yu* mode from the A section from mm. 1-16 with notes E, G, A, B, D. This mode shares four common tones with the B section A *yu* mode A, C, D, E, G from mm. 17-33. He creates a smooth transition between the two modes using the common tone E in m. 17, while E in both voices resolves to A. This E to A motion is very similar to Western harmony with scale degree five resolving to one, the dominant to tonic function (Example 9). This occurs similarly in the return of the A section in mm. 32 and 33 with the transition going from E scale degree five to A scale degree one (Example 10). This Western treatment of dominant-tonic resolution provides a smooth transition between sections.



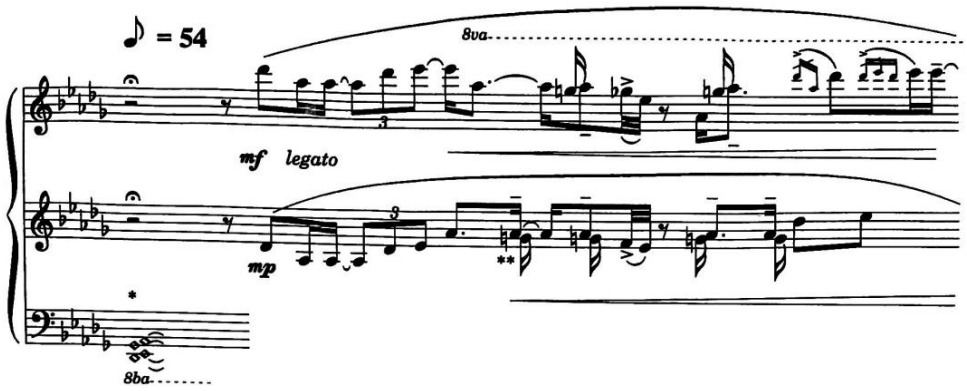
Example 9. Tan Dun, “Blue Nun,” mm. 17-28.



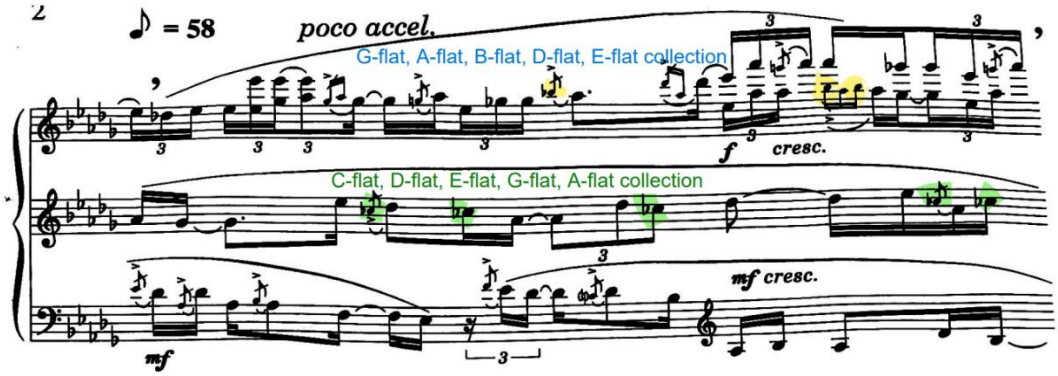
Example 10. Tan Dun, "Blue Nun," mm. 29-44.

Tan Dun uses different pentatonic scales in this piano suite, making use of simple pentatonic melodies to create sections and variety using different transposition techniques. Bright Sheng uses pentatonic scales in *My Song* for structural unity. In the first movement, Sheng instructs the pianists to depress the keys silently and use the sostenuto pedal to sustain D-flat, E-flat, G-flat, and A-flat notes with tetrachord [0257] until the end of the movement (Example 11). This pitch-class set is fundamental to the unity of the movement and other movements in the work. In her dissertation, Wendy Lee mentions that this set not only belongs to the D-flat major tonality that governs the first movement, but also has two pentatonic collections: the G-flat, A-flat, B-flat, D-flat, E-flat collection and the C-flat, D-flat, E-flat, G-flat, A-flat collection.[93] These two pentatonic collections that share four common tones appear in the first movement juxtaposed in the heterophonic style and are found at the end of each section with B-flat in one voice and C-flat in another voice (Example 12).

[93] Lee, "Unpacking Aspects of Musical Influence in Three Piano Works by Chinese Composers," 39.



Example 11. Bright Sheng, *My Song*, movement I. 1st system.

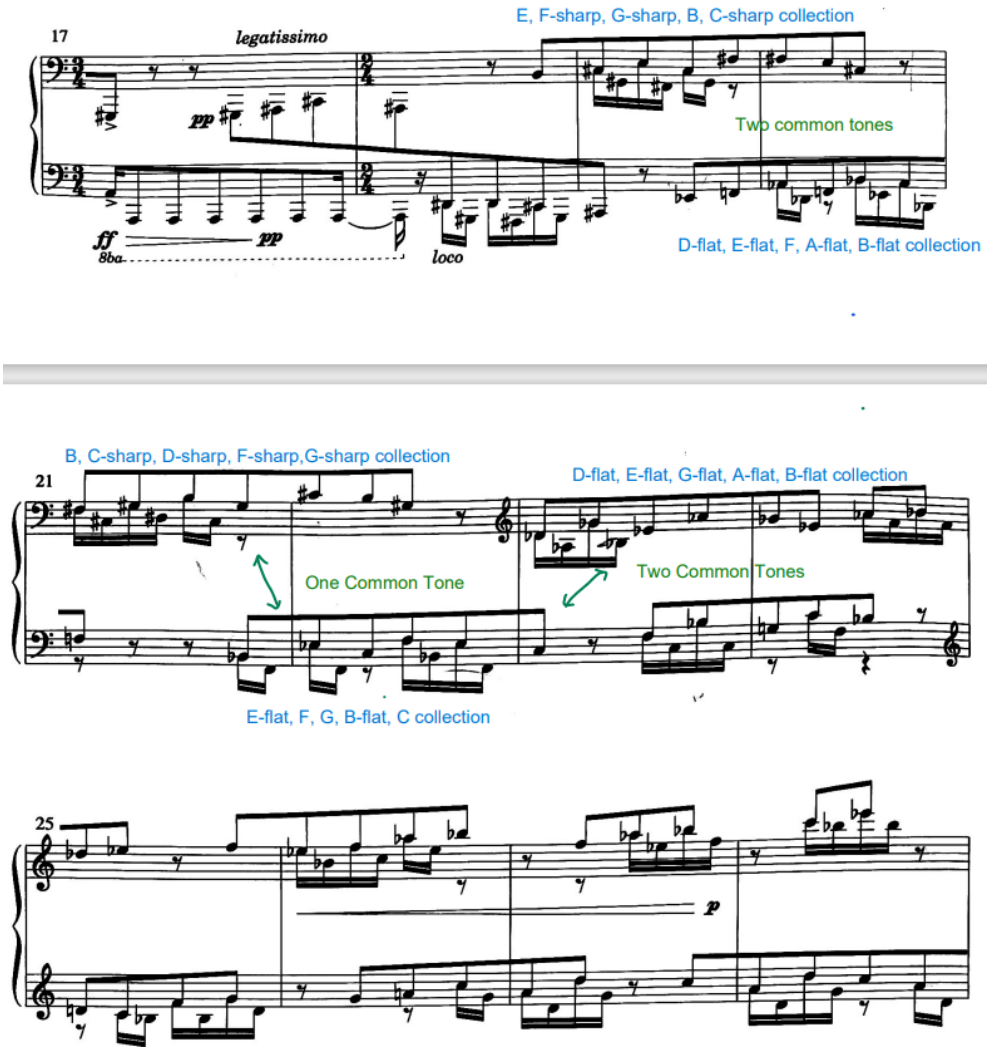


Example 12. Bright Sheng, *My Song*, movement I. 4th system.

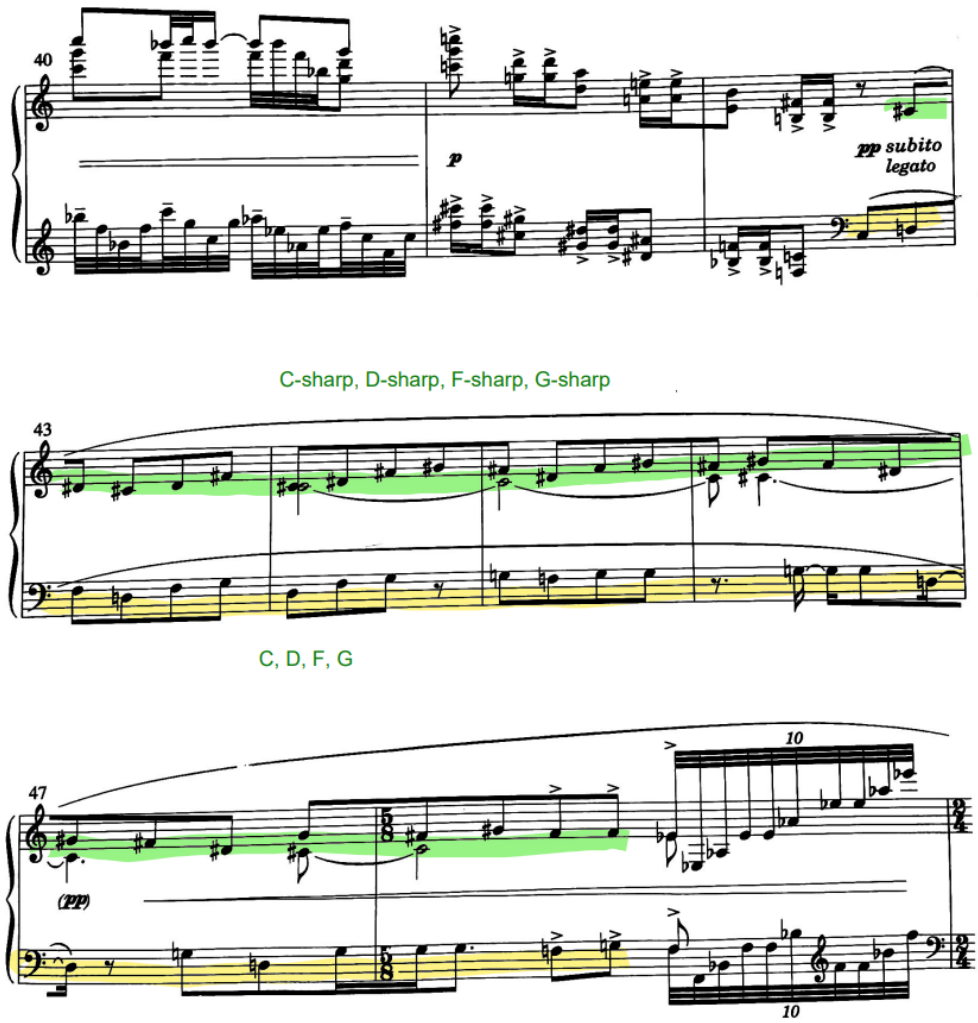
Bright Sheng also uses many different pentatonic scales to create musical tension and momentum in the music. In an interview, Sheng said, "since the nature of pentatonicism does not offer the kind of tonal tension and release essential to Western music due to the absence of half steps, one must find different ways to incorporate these in order to create a type of voice leading that can drive the music forward."[94] For example, in the second movement, Sheng reuses the pitch-class set of D-flat, E-flat, G-flat, A-flat with tetrachord [0257] at a minor third lower in the second movement. The movement begins and ends with pitch class set B-flat, C, E-flat, F. This pitch class set is often preceded and followed by tension created with overlaps and

[94] Lee, "Unpacking Aspects of Musical Influence in Three Piano Works by Chinese Composers," 33.

superimpositions of different pentatonic scales. For example, we can find pentatonic collections juxtaposed at a minor third in mm. 18-20 which share two common tones between the right and left hands. The passage then continues with collections that share one to two common tones in mm. 21-25 before it comes back to the main pitch class set of the movement B-flat, C, E-flat, F temporarily (Example 13). Although the two voices share very few common tones, Sheng makes each melodic short phrase clear with the use of rests between phrases, making each melodic line independent and easy for the listener to follow along.



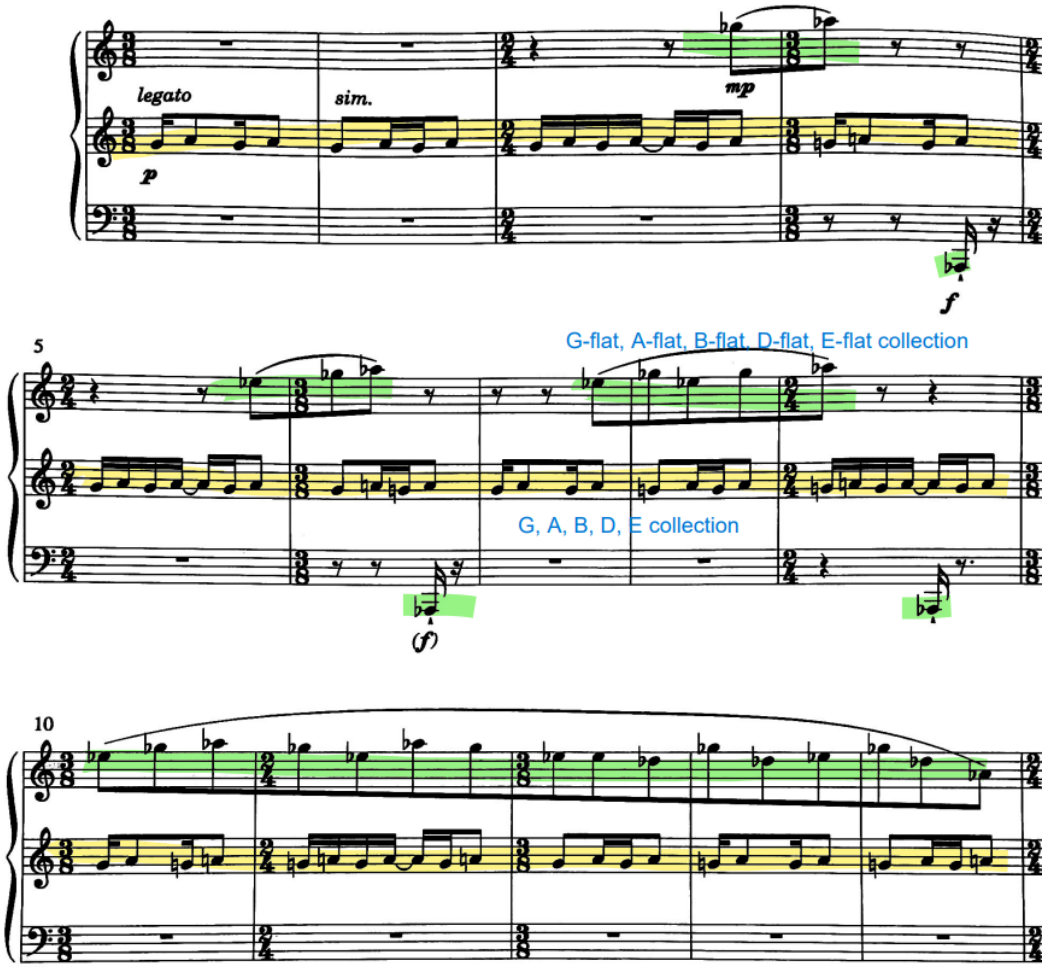
Example 13. Bright Sheng, *My Song*, movement II, mm. 17-28.



Example 14. Bright Sheng, *My Song*, movement II, mm. 40-48.

Sheng also creates musical tension and momentum by juxtaposing two tetrachords [0257] at a half step in m. 41 leading to the climax in m. 49 (Example 14). Due to the vertical dissonant intervals of minor seconds and tritones, Sheng creates highly chromatic passages here. The juxtaposition of two pentatonic collections at a half step can also be seen in the third movement. For example, Sheng continues to use pitch-class set D-flat, E-flat, G-flat, A-flat on the top layer to foster the structural unity of the entire work, while he creates the middle layer using pentatonic collection G, A, B, D, E, forming two distinct pentatonic collections between the

middle layer and the top layer (G-flat, A-flat, B-flat, D-flat, E-flat) a half step apart (Example 15). This half step juxtaposition of two pentatonic collections appears frequently in this movement, creating a great sense of chromaticism and musical tension. However, due to the distinct layers with specific rhythm patterns in the middle layer and segmented steady eighth note phrases in the top layer, as well as dynamic contrasts between the different layers, independence of voices would still be audible even with the juxtaposition of pentatonic scales. Dissonances and chromaticism can still be heard due to the frequent appearances of G-flat and A-flat in the melody on the top voice that clash with the G and A notes in the middle layer with minor seconds.



Example 15. Bright Sheng, *My Song*, movement III, mm. 1-14.

Tan Dun and Bright Sheng both uses pentatonic scales in their works, but these pentatonic scales serve different functions in the music. For example, Tan Dun uses pentatonic scales to create sections and transposes these pentatonic scales to create variety in the music. Bright Sheng, on the other hand, uses pentatonic scales in *My Song* for structural unity and creates tension and momentum in the music. One common technique he uses is the juxtaposition of two pentatonic collections, for example at a half step or tritone apart, to create tension in the music. The complexity resulting from the juxtaposition of pentatonic collections gives rise to chromaticism in *My Song*.

CHAPTER 4

CHINESE FOLK MUSIC TRADITIONS

The Use of Original Folk Tunes

During the Cultural Revolution, the three composers were sent to the countryside for labor work, where they were thoroughly exposed to folk traditions and spent significant amount of time studying folk songs around different regions of China. In addition, undergraduate and Master's programs in many Chinese conservatories require musicians to have Chinese traditional music training that includes learning folk songs of different regions and folksong collecting.[95] Tan Dun spent a significant amount of time collecting folk songs of the Hunan area; Bright Sheng was sent to Qinghai during the war, the northwestern part of China, where he extensively studied and collected folk songs of the area; Chen Yi spent her five years of undergraduate and three years in the Master's program collecting and studying folk songs of different regions of China.[96]

This similar educational and cultural background exposed these composers to the folk culture which became their musical language. The use of folk tunes is prominent in the works discussed in this dissertation. While each composer uses original folk materials and folk tunes, it's fascinating to observe their different intentions and purposes.

In the broader geographic view, folk songs can be divided into northern and southern styles with each associated with one of the two major rivers of China, the Huang He (Yellow

[95] Duffie. *Chen Yi Conversation with Bruce Duffie*, December 14, 2005. http://www.bruceduffie.com/chenyi.html
[96] Ibid.

River) of the north and the Chang Jiang (Long River) of the south.[97] According to Han Kuo-Huang, Chinese ethnomusicologists have developed the study of Han Chinese folk songs based upon geographic factors and named this study "Music Geography."[98] The environment of the two divisions plays an important role. The Huang He basin is cold, dry, and windy, and the main agricultural product is wheat. Han Kuo-Huang writes, "The rugged, intense and disjunct characteristics of the folk songs can be explained by the realities of life on the basin."[99] Due to this environment, there are many rain-evoking songs in the Huang He area. On the other hand, the Chang Jiang basin has mild weather and much rain with rice as the main agricultural product. Therefore, folk songs of this region tend to be more lyrical and gentle, with conjunct melodies. Besides considerations of the differences in weathers and seasons, local customs also play an important role in the formation of folk songs. Han Kuo-Huang mentions that in ancient times, people in the Chang Jiang were spirit worshippers. Therefore, there are still many funeral songs and piety songs being preserved. However, people in the Huang He area are not accustomed to sing when one dies, and therefore funeral songs are absent in their culture.[100] In general, the northern style features either seven-tone or six-tone scales. The melody of the Huang He area tends to be more angular in shape and moves in disjunct movement. An intervallic progression with fourth-second-fourth is prominent in the upper Huang He area due to the accent of the dialect.[101] The tessitura of all folk songs of the northern area tends to be high. On the other hand, melody in the Chang Jiang area tends to be smooth and curved in shape and moves in relatively conjunct motion.[102] The consecutive use of thirds and fifths is common. If there is a skip larger

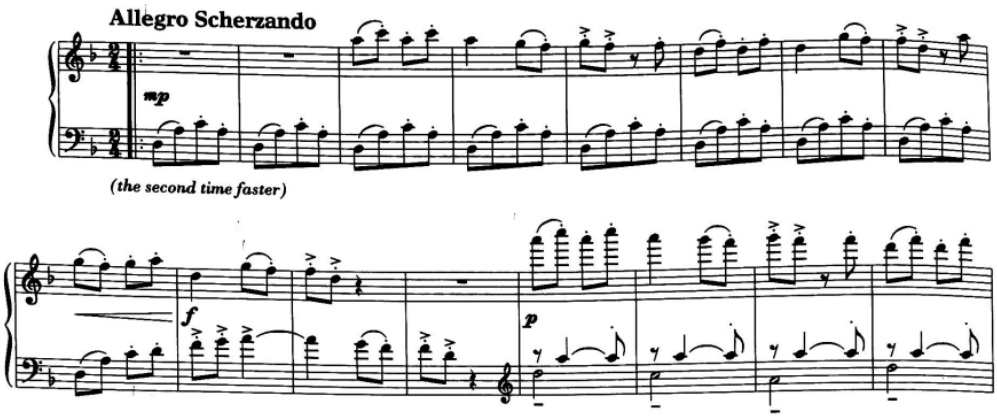
[97] Han Kuo-Huang, "Folk Songs of the Han Chinese: Characteristics and Classifications," *Asian Music* 20, no. 2 (1989): 107.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid., 108.
[101] Ibid., 109.
[102] Ibid.

than a fifth, the melody resolves immediately in the opposite direction. The tessitura of the folk songs of this region tends to be in the medium range.[103]

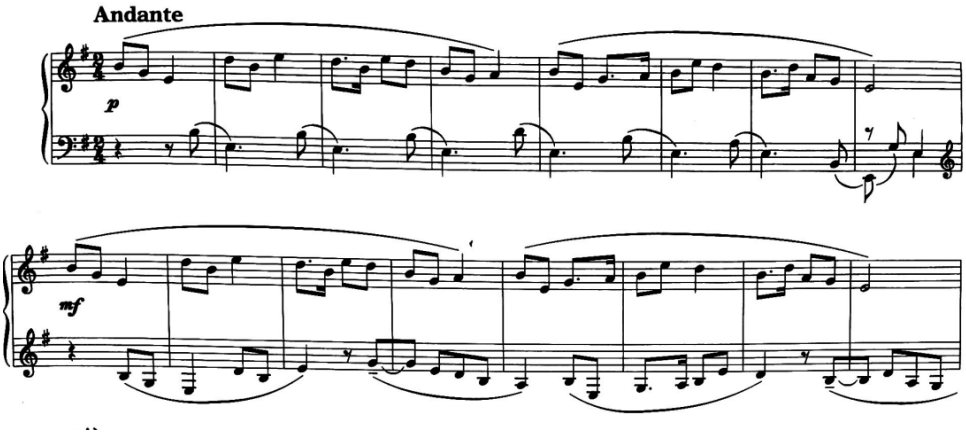
Tan Dun's *Eight Memories in Watercolor* features original folk tunes from Tan Dun's hometown Hunan which is in the southern part of China. The second piece of the set, "Staccato Beans," features the complete folk tune *新嫂嫂* "My New Sister-in-law" from Hunan Jiahe (Example 16).[104] The melody is relatively conjunct and smooth with mostly stepwise motion and thirds (Example 17). The theme of the fourth piece "Blue Nun" is quoted from the folk tune *乡里妹子进城来* "A Girl from Countryside is Coming to Town." Tan Dun makes minor changes to the folk tune, but the overall melodic phrasing and structure is close to the original tune. Writing in the southern style, the theme of "Blue Nun" features consecutive thirds and rather conjunct motions. The interval of a fifth in m. 5 in the melody is resolved immediately in the opposite direction (Example 18).

Example 16. Folk Tune, "My New Sister-in-law."[105]

[103] Ibid.
[104] "My New Sister-in-law," *Zizi Music*, https://publish.zizimusic.com/portal/score/show/id/381402.html
[105] The score uses the jianpu notation or the "numbered musical notation" which is commonly used in China. The numbers indicate the scale degrees in a diatonic major scale, while the key and the time signature of the song is



Example 17. Tan Dun, "Staccato Beans," mm. 1-16.



Example 18. Tan Dun, "Blue Nun," mm. 1-8.

The fourth movement of Bright Sheng's *My Song* features a direct quote of the folk tune *Village of Thirty Miles* "Sanshi lipu" from the Northwestern region of China, Shaanxi, in the right-hand melody in mm. 1-15 (Example 20). The left hand is the variation of the folk tune in rhythmic augmentation.[106] The theme is relatively angular in shape and disjunct when compared

indicated on the top left corner. The note value is indicated through use of dashes and underscores, while dots above or below a musical note raise or lower it to other octaves.

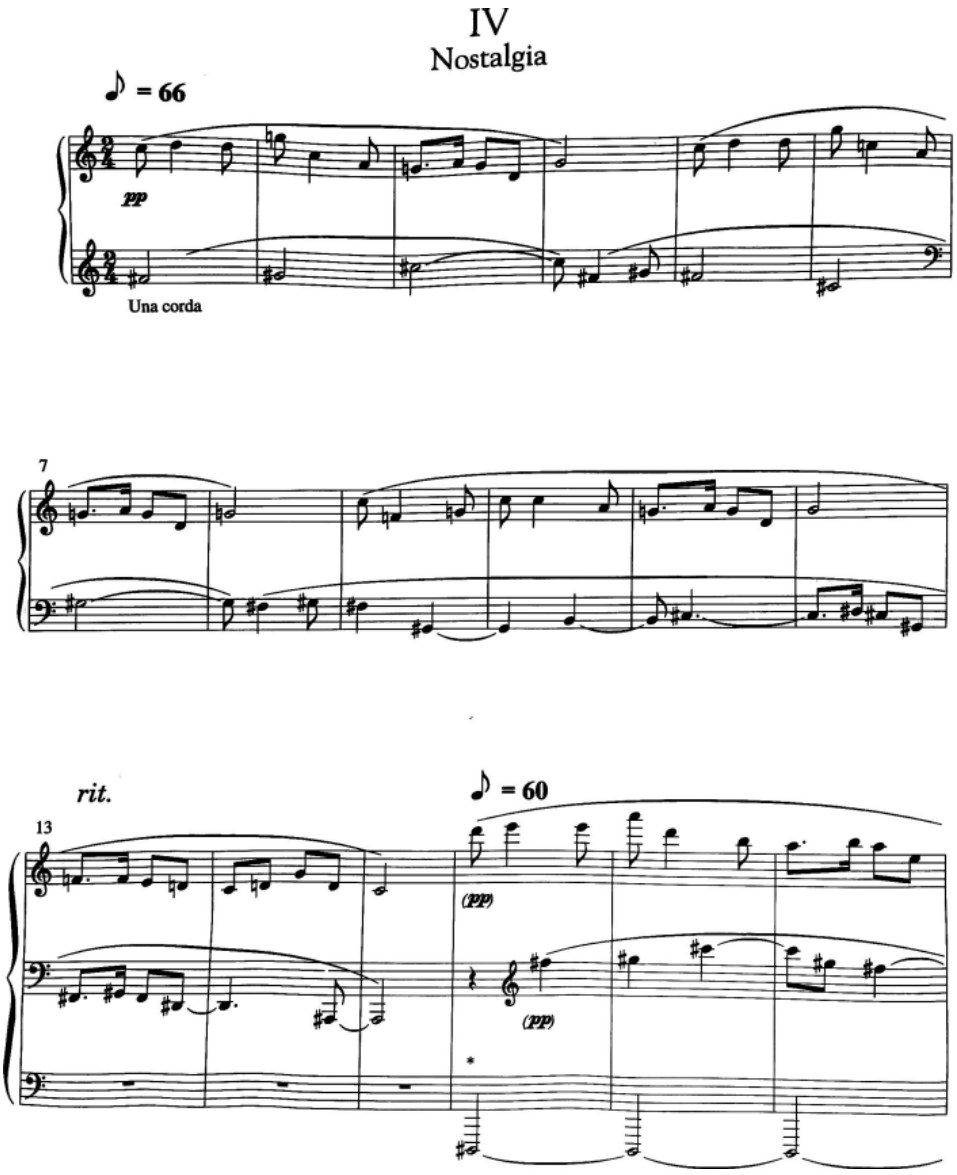
[106] Zhang, "When East Meets West," 33.

to Tan Dun's southern style folk tunes. For example, the melody in the right hand has consecutive intervals larger than a fifth going down unresolved in m. 2. There are also instances of fourth-second-fourth progression at the end of each small phrase, for example in mm. 4-5.

Chen Yi's *Duo Ye* was inspired by the Dong minority in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region which is in the southern part of China.[107] The beginning features two main themes "a" and "b" in call and response style with intervals of a minor third, perfect fourth, and major second (Example 2, p. 24). These rather conjunct passages contrasts greatly with the "c" visitor motive which imitates a Peking Opera tune with leaps of sixth and seventh. Here the contrast between the two geographical styles can be seen through the direction of melodic content and intervals.

Example 19. *Village of Thirty Miles* "Sanshi lipu."[108]

[107] Chen Yi, "Tradition and Creation": 61.
[108] *Village of Thirty Miles* "Sanshi lipu." http://www.jianpu.cn/pu/45/45133.htm



Example 20. Bright Sheng, *My Song*, movement IV, mm. 1-18.

Besides geographic classification of the folk songs, Chinese ethnomusicologists also classify folk song by type, and there are primarily three types of folk songs: *haozi* (work songs), *shange* (mountain songs), and *xiaodiao* (lyric songs).[109] *Haozi* means "crying" or "shouting" in

[109] Han Kuo-Huang, "Folk Songs of the Han Chinese," 113.

Chinese. The function of this type of song is to accompany work or to relieve the hardship during work.[110] It features strong rhythms and ostinatos. Solo, unison, duet, and call-and response are typical formats of this type of folk songs. There are five sub-types of work songs: transporting songs, construction songs, farming songs, sailing and fishing songs, and miscellaneous songs.[111]

Shange doesn't mean that songs are necessarily sung in the mountains. These songs are meant to be sung in an open area, which may be near a mountain or in an open field.[112] *Shange* are freer in rhythm and higher in pitch than the other two types of folk songs. Texts are improvised to a great extent, while vocables and falsetto are used frequently. Han Kuo-Huang writes, "*Shange* may begin and end with a high and long fermata, developed from shouting to get attention in the outdoor environment."[113] Shange can be in two, four, or even five phrases due to the improvised nature. There are three sub-types of *shange*: general, which are lyrical songs with a love subject expressing the singer's thoughts; herding songs, which are sung mainly by boys in question-answer style between two boys with a simple and free structure; and field songs, which are sung in the rice fields while planting seeds, tilling soil, etc. and are somewhat entertaining in nature.[114]

Xiaodiao means "little tune," and can be translated as popular song, folk tune, folk song, lyric song, etc. The melody of *xiaodiao* is more lyrical, the rhythm is more static, and the formal structure is relatively clear.[115] It can be divided into these sub-types: narrative songs, little songs, and popular songs. Narrative songs are somewhat functional in nature, close to spoken language. Examples include children's songs, lullabies, funeral songs, recitation of poems, etc. Little songs

[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid., 114-115.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Ibid., 116.
[114] Ibid., 120.
[115] Ibid.

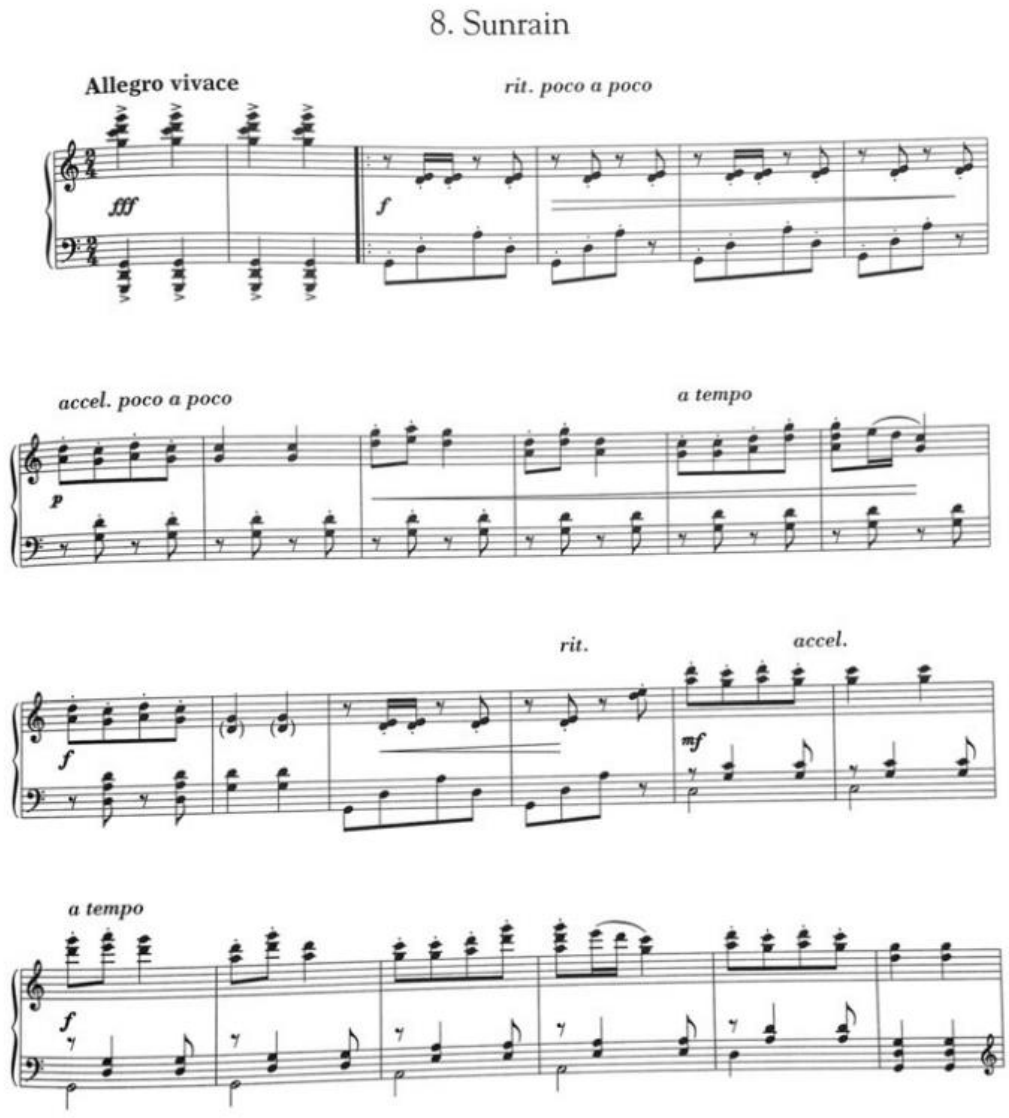
are sung in daily life; the phrases are more balanced in structure and the vocal range is narrow. Examples include laborers' songs, women's laments, and game-playing songs. Popular songs are sung mainly for entertainment at home, in teahouses, in cities, and in rural areas. Instrumental accompaniment is added to these songs in most cases. Most of the folk songs known to the people of China belong to this sub-type.[116]

Among the four folk tunes that Tan Dun borrows for the set, "Herdboy's Song" is considered in the *shange* category with freer expressions and ornamentations. The piece is unmeasured with lots of tempo fluctuations. The other three movements: "Staccato Beans," "Blue Nun," and "Sunrain" and Bright Sheng's second and fourth movements of *My Song* borrow folk tunes that are *xiaodiao* that feature lyrical tunes and songs about daily life.

Tan Dun and Bright Sheng take a different path from each other when incorporating the folk tunes into their works. Tan Dun takes a more simple and straightforward approach in the application of the existing folk tunes. In pieces No. 2, 3, 4, 8, Tan Dun unfolds the original folk tunes in the right hand on the top voice. The main melodies are often accompanied by simple harmonies such as repeated bass line *ostinatos* in "Staccato Beans" and "Sunrain," and melodic and harmonic intervals of fourths and fifths in the left hand as seen in "Sunrain" (Example 21). "The Chinese have nothing like [Western] harmony, taken in the sense of chords, counterpoint, etc. The only collection of different but simultaneous sounds recognized by them is that produced by playing two strings at a distance of a fourth, a fifth, or an octave together on the [string instruments]."[117] Like the music of the ancient Greeks, Chinese music recognizes only the fifth, fourth, and the octave as consonances. Tan Dun uses simple harmonies with intervals of fourths and fifths in many of the accompaniments in this piano suite. An undeniable reason for

[116] Han Kuo-Huang, "Folk Songs of the Han Chinese," 121.
[117] Van Aalst, *Chinese Music*, 24.

this is also due to the formation of the Chinese pentatonic scales that involves these intervals. Tan Dun stays in one particular mode between each section of the piece and does not overlap pentatonic scales. Overall, Tan Dun provides clear melodic emphasis for the listener to follow through the folk tunes. He presents the rather raw materials of the tune without many changes while keeping the accompaniment patterns in the left hand simple with ostinatos and harmonies involving intervals of the pentatonic scale. With this clear intention on presenting the folklore, listeners focus their listening on the lyrical tune and the shapes of the melodic lines.

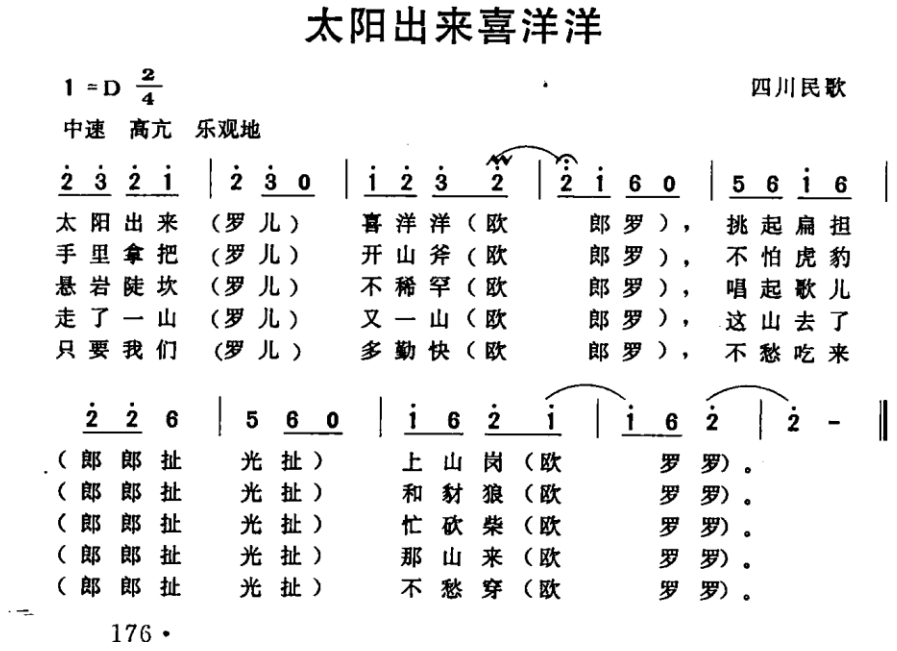


Example 21. Tan Dun, “Sunrain,” mm. 1-24.

Bright Sheng has a rather different focus with the folk materials in *My Song*: his intention is to create tension and release through the manipulation of different pentatonic collections and chromaticism. The second movement features the folk tune "Joy at the Sunrise" (Tai yang Chu Lai Xi Yang Yang) from a southwestern Chinese province of Sichuan (Example 22). With the formal design of the movement being A B A' B' A'', the folk tune is incorporated in the A sections.[118] At the first A section, the folk tune appears entirely on the top voice of the right hand notated with up stems in the E-flat, F, G, B-flat, C pentatonic collection in mm. 1-10. Similar to Tan Dun, listeners would be able to identify the folk tune easily with the melodic emphasis in the top right-hand voice. But instead of simple harmonies with intervals of fourths and fifths as accompaniment, Sheng focuses more on creating timbral effects with swift thirty-second note layers in both using the same pentatonic collection, creating an exciting and joyful wash of sonorities in the first A section. Starting from m. 10, the thematic materials slowly transition to the B section by transposing to different pentatonic collections. Section B involves a series of short melodic phrases in juxtapositions of different pentatonic collections at minor thirds and a whole step apart for greater tension buildup. Sheng reduces the second A and B sections to less than half the length of the first A and B sections.[119] Sheng develops the second half of the folk tune, mm. 5-8, at a fifth higher in the second A section. For greater intensity, Sheng juxtaposes two different pentatonic scales between the two staffs in mm. 38-39 at a half step apart: F, G, C set in the right hand versus F-sharp, G-sharp, B, C-sharp set in the left hand, which create no common tones between the two collections (Example 23). The second B section leads us to the climax in m. 49 where folk tunes in A section appears as in the D, E, F-sharp, A, B collection in

[118] Lee, "Unpacking Aspects of Musical Influence in Three Piano Works by Chinese Composers," 40.
[119] Zhang, "When East Meets West," 23.

the top voice while having F-sharp, G-sharp, A-sharp, C-sharp, D-sharp collection as a duet in the lower staff. These two collections share only one common tone: F-sharp. This chromaticism is further intensified with the vertical timbral effects of constant major and minor seconds between the two voices (Example 24). Sheng even transposes the two collections between the two hands a whole step up starting from m. 57. Yi Zhang mentions that registral contrast in the last A section also plays an important role in building up the climax.[120] The section reaches the extreme registers in mm. 63-66 with a long *crescendo* to *fortissimo* before the section settles to the low D pitch towards the end of the movement.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悬岩陡坎（罗儿） 不稀罕（欧 郎罗），唱起歌儿
走了一山（罗儿） 又一山（欧 郎罗），这山去了
只要我们（罗儿） 多勤快（欧 郎罗），不愁吃来

2 2 6 | 5 6 0 | 1 6 2 1 | 1 6 2 | 2 - ‖

（郎郎扯 光扯） 上山岗（欧 罗罗）。
（郎郎扯 光扯） 和豺狼（欧 罗罗）。
（郎郎扯 光扯） 忙砍柴（欧 罗罗）。
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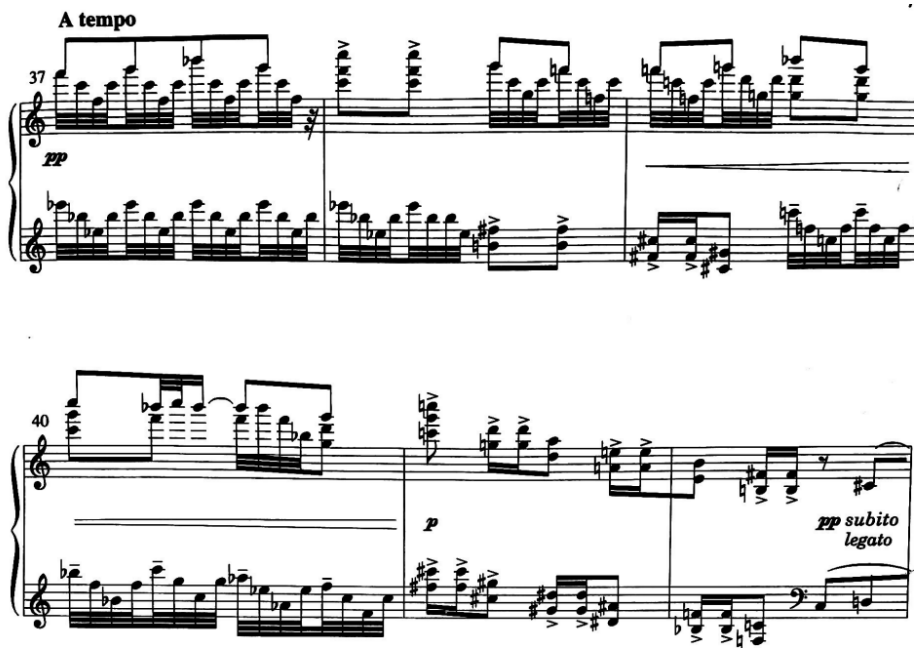
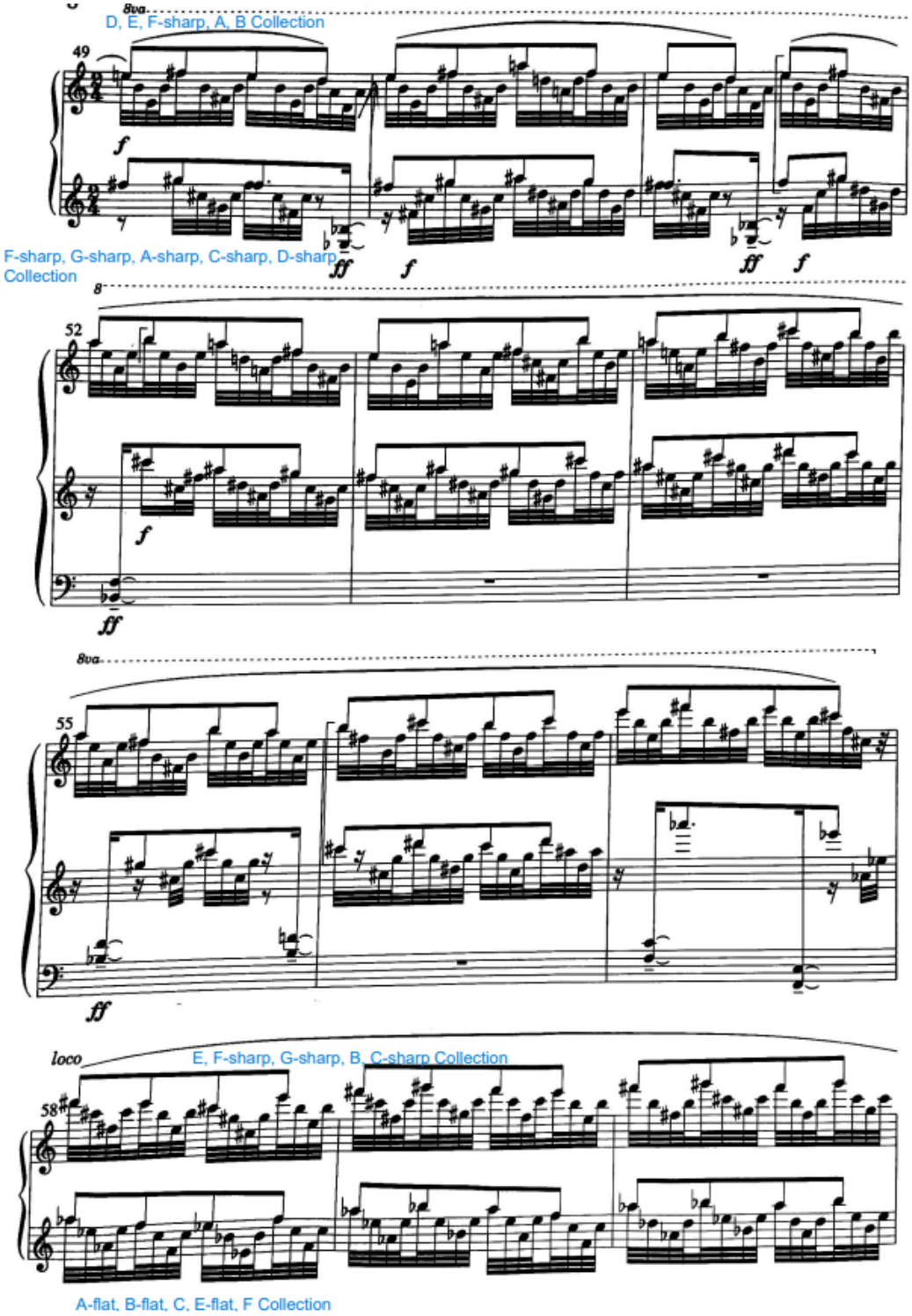
Example 22. “Joy at the Sunrise” (Tai yang Chu Lai Xi Yang Yang).

[120] Zhang, “When East Meets West,” 24.



Example 23. Bright Sheng, *My Song*, movement II, mm. 37-43.



Example 24. Bright Sheng, *My Song*, movement II, mm. 49-60.

In contrast with the rich and exciting sonorities of the second movement, the fourth movement "Nostalgia" features a rather slow and simple polyphonic texture with the clear folk tune *Village of Thirty Miles* "Sanshi lipu" in the top voice as the main theme of the movement (Example 19, p. 47). Unlike Tan Dun, who presents the folk tune as the main listening focus with simple harmonies, Sheng uses the folk tune and transposes it a tritone apart from the right-hand voice, applying rhythmic augmentation to the melody with slight changes to the original tune (Example 20, p. 48). Due to the rhythmic augmentation and transposition at a tritone in the lower staff, the folk tune becomes hard to detect. What becomes noticeable is the crashing sonorities between the two voices vertically in the downbeats with either tritone, or intervals of seconds, apart. These feelings of unease and discomfort increase as Sheng displaces the folk tunes in high registers for the two voices while adding a low D-sharp starting from m. 16 with extreme registral contrasts between voices. In addition, the indication of sustain pedal in m. 16 onwards further intensifies the uneased feelings provided by the mixed sonorities of the dissonances of tritones and seconds, invoking the nostalgic atmosphere of longing for the homeland.

Heterophony in *Shange*

Shange presents the oldest form of Chinese folk song repertory.[121] Frank Kouwenhoven writes, "The very term *shange* (mountain songs) points at 'outdoor' situations. The term is used by rural singers in many parts of China, including regions without mountains to denote local songs sung in a loud-voiced manner in open spaces. There is often a taboo on the indoor performance of *shange*, or even on performances taking place in a vicinity of villages: *shange* are preferably sung far away from inhabited areas, for example, up in the mountains, or during

[121] Frank Kouwenhoven, "Transcribing 'Time' in Chinese Non-measured Songs," *The World of Music* 47, no. 2 (2005): 145.

work in the fields."[122] Kouwenhoven notes that most *shange* are "free rhythm" which are non-measured. "By contrast, measured songs which are always in plain duple rhythm are far less important in many rural areas, and often appear to be urban-instrumental or operatic in origin."[123] Many *shange* are erotic in content, and some are sung in dialogue form to establish private contacts between men and women.[124] Singers hardly look at each other when they sing; they can stand so far apart from each other that they cannot even see each other.[125] Thus, heterophony is promoted in use with this particular context with the dialogue singing style. In fact, both Tan Dun and Bright Sheng use unmeasured *shange* in the style of heterophony in the works discussed in this document. In order to understand the style more thoroughly, one must understand the term.

The term heterophony is often used particularly in ethnomusicology to describe simultaneous variations of the same melody. Heterophony also occurs in group singing within orally transmitted monophonic traditions, as in the music of the Middle East and East Asia where instruments provide embellished or ornamented versions of the vocal part.[126] Stephen Jones writes, "Heterophony is a result of experience, sensitivity, and trust amongst musicians."[127] In Chinese instrumental and vocal music, the players embellish the melody and the more skillful ones make improvisations to the existing melody, giving rise to heterophonic effects.[128] The practice of embellishment and improvisation is to avoid monotony in ensemble playing and to show off the skills of the players.

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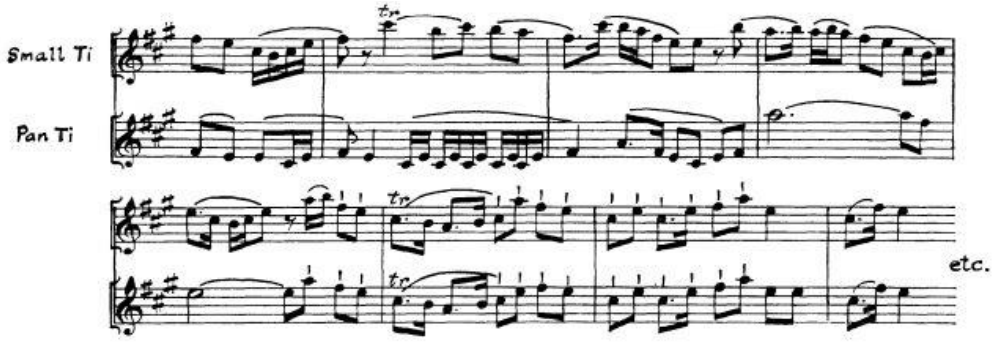
[122] Ibid.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Ibid., 146.
[125] Ibid., 150.
[126] Peter Cooke, "Heterophony," *Grove Music Online*.
[127] Jones, *Folk Music of China*, 110.
[128] Robert T. Mok, "Heterophony in Chinese Folk Music," *Journal of the International Folk Music Council* 18, International Council for Traditional Music (1966): 14.

In the past, Chinese musicians were placed in the lowest social status. A musician would play for hire whenever his services were called upon. Robert T. Mok says, "His livelihood depended much upon his ability to hold the attention of his audience and to outdo his competitors, and extemporization was one of the means for the display of his skill."[129] When several musicians play together, heterophony is inevitable. The seemingly contrapuntal and harmonic effect might occur when two instrumental parts have independent realizations, embellishment, and improvisation of the given melody.[130] Dissonant intervals formed by passing or auxiliary notes are common devices for the improvisation. Parallel fourths and fifths are acceptable in this context.[131] Here is the example of two *dizi* (transverse flutes) that incorporate embellishments on a melody (Example 25).

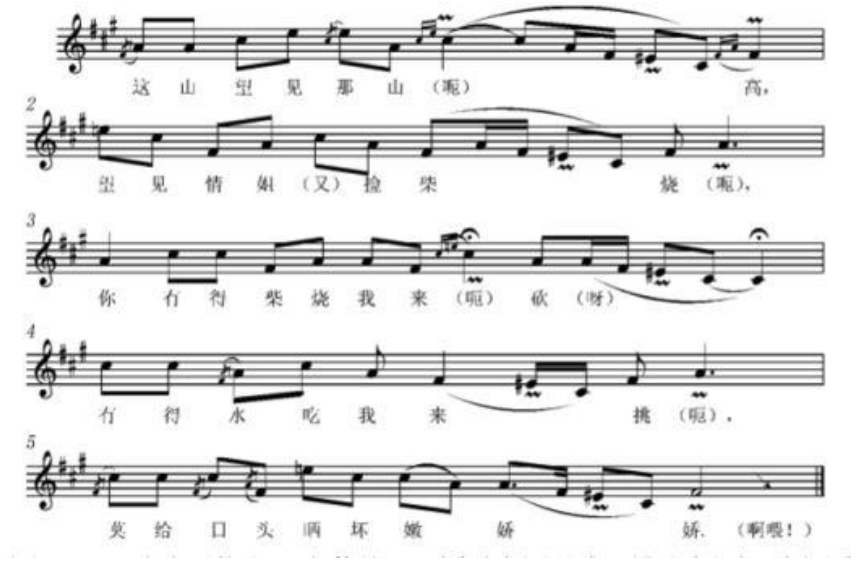


Example 25. Heterophony between two *dizi*.[132]

Tan Dun's third movement "Herdboy's Song" and Bright Sheng's first movement of *My Song* are both written in the style of *shange* using heterophony. "Herdboy's Song" borrows the melody "Grass is Greener on the Other Hill" *这山望见那山高*, a five phrase *shange* from

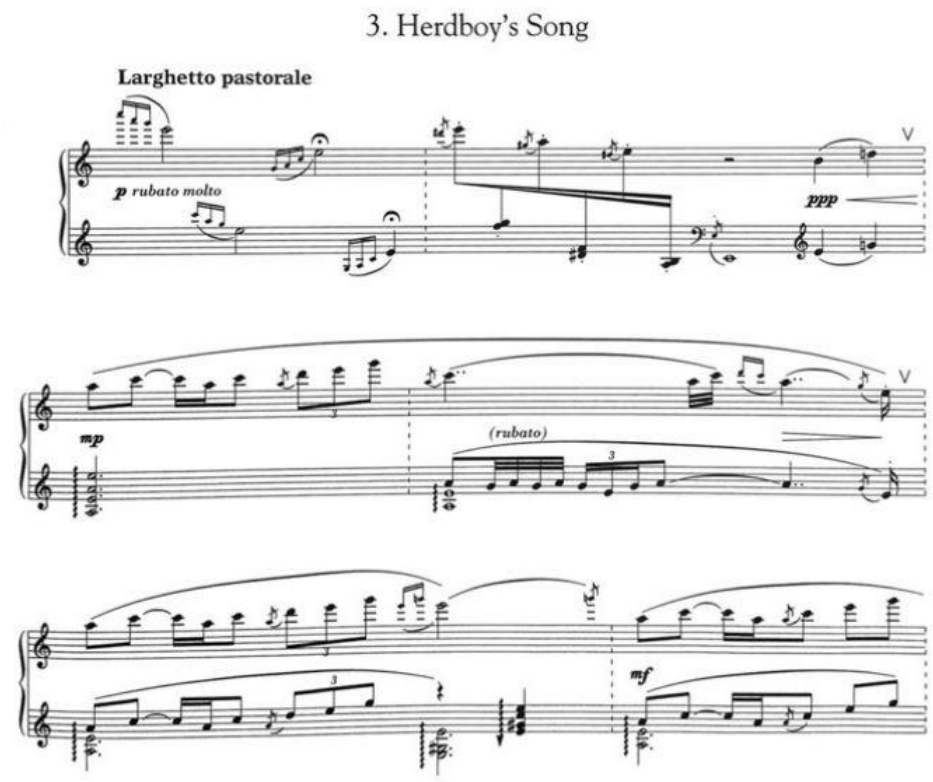
[129] Ibid., 19.
[130] Jones, *Folk Music of China*, 109.
[131] Mok, "Heterophony in Chinese Folk Music": 20.
[132] Ibid.

Hengdong (Example 26).[133] With the lack of time signature and barlines within each phrase, the original folk song and "Herdboy's Song" are both to be sung freely with *rubato* and decorated grace notes indicating the *shange* style. The popular five-phrase structure in the original folk tune is popular in the Hunan area.[134] Although Tan Dun does not follow the original tune exactly, he uses the melodic gestures of the first phrase of the folk tune in the third movement (Example 27). Starting from the second phrase in "Herdboy's Song," the left hand is in heterophony with the right-hand melody with slight variations.



Example 26. "Grass is Greener on the Other Hill".[135]

[133] Zeng, "Hunan Folk Tone in TanDun's *Memories of Eight Watercolor Paintings"*: 109.
[134] Qian Xu, "Chinese Elements and Influence in Tan Dun's *Eight Memories in Watercolor*" (D.M.A. diss. West Virginia University, 2018), 45.
[135] Xu, "Chinese Elements and Influence in Tan Dun's *Eight Memories in Watercolor*," 46.



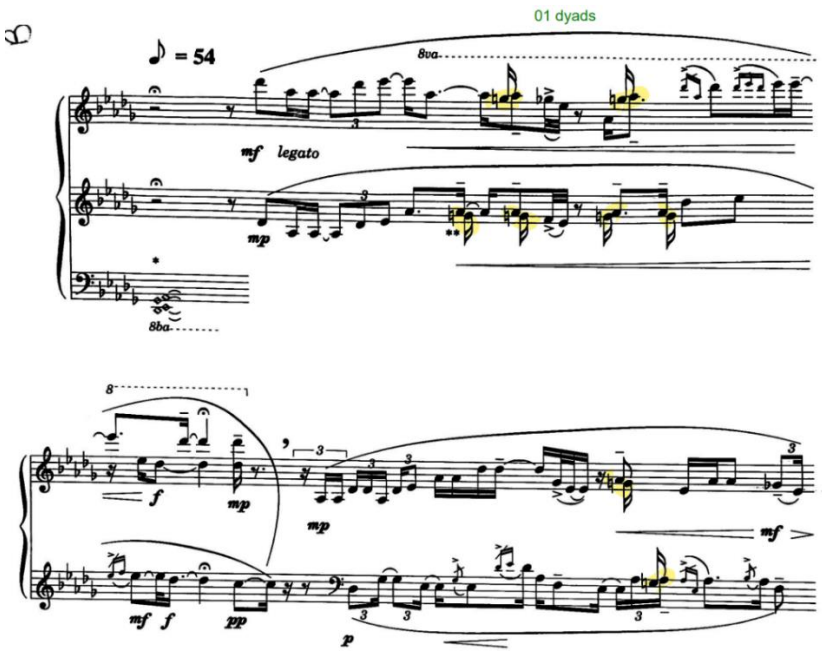
Example 27. Tan Dun, "Herdboy's Song," 1st-3rd systems.

Compared with Sheng's first movement of *My Song,* which is also written in the *shange* style with heterophony, the two voices in "Herdboy's Song" are relatively simple and in sync with little variations. Sheng recalls the first movement of *My Song* is "a love song from Qinghai"[136], and "the prelude-like first movement, in folklore style, is constructed through the development of heterophony, a typical device in oriental music."[137] "[The first movement] reflects the singing style of the regions: when one starts [singing], other people join randomly and somehow they finish together and you hear the lingering echoes over the mountain

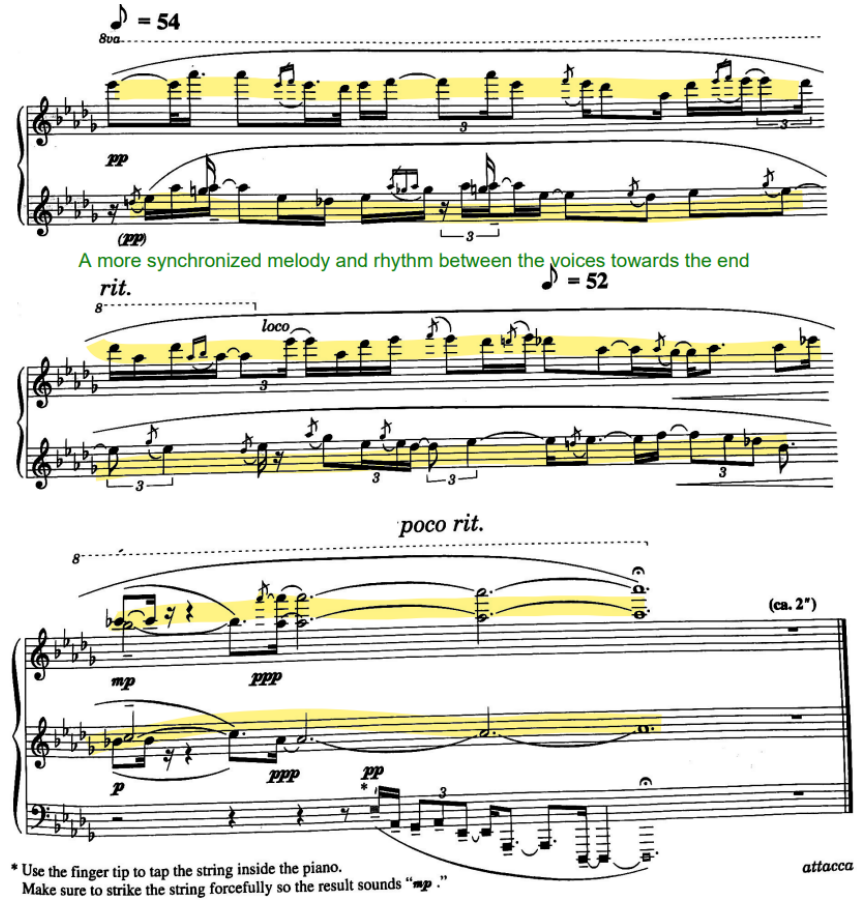
[136] Bright Sheng, "The Last Train: Bright Sheng at TEDxUofM." *TEDxTalks*. 2014. www.youtube.com/watch?v=sw2DzzGwrQ
[137] Sheng, Program Note from *My Song*.

valleys."[138] Wendy Wan-Ki Lee mentions in her dissertation that the frequent use of semitone dyads does not just serve as decorations to the melody, but "provide an important function of imitating the 'pulsating voices' commonly heard in Chinese singing."[139] Unlike Western music where half steps or minor seconds are resolved to consonant intervals, the 01 dyads here in the movement are non-functional and do not resolve (Example 28).[140] Sheng gives further instructions on how to play these semitone dyads on the score: "This notation is an attempt to imitate the *glissando* effect of the voice. The duration of the shorter note should be played exactly, and the dynamic of the longer note should be slightly louder than the shorter note." Although the movement is unmeasured, Sheng gives clear phrase markings as well as indicating phrasing with long notes and rests at the end of each phrase. Sheng gives clear indications of heterophony for the first phrase, with both voices outlining the same melodic contents two octaves apart with slight variations. However, as the heterophony develops onwards from the second phrase, the two voices each have different unpredictable rhythmic patterns and embellishments, indicating improvisations between two separate voices. Later, the movement develops into more than two voices with simultaneous improvisations, suggesting group singing that is typical in Chinese folk singing and instrumental ensemble playing.[141] This written out improvisation between voices with intricate rhythmic interactions and grace notes in the style of *shange* would pose a challenge to the pianist when learning the movement. Sheng only returns to a more synchronized melody and rhythm between the voices at the end of the last two phrases, which portrays the folk singers finishing the folk tune together (Example 29).[142]

[138] Sheng, "The Last Train: Bright Sheng at TEDxUofM."
[139] Lee, "Unpacking Aspects of Musical Influence in Three Piano Works by Chinese Composers," 36.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Mok, "Heterophony in Chinese Folk Music": 14.
[142] Sheng, "The Last Train: Bright Sheng at TEDxUofM."



Example 28. Bright Sheng, *My Song*, movement I, 1st and 2nd systems.

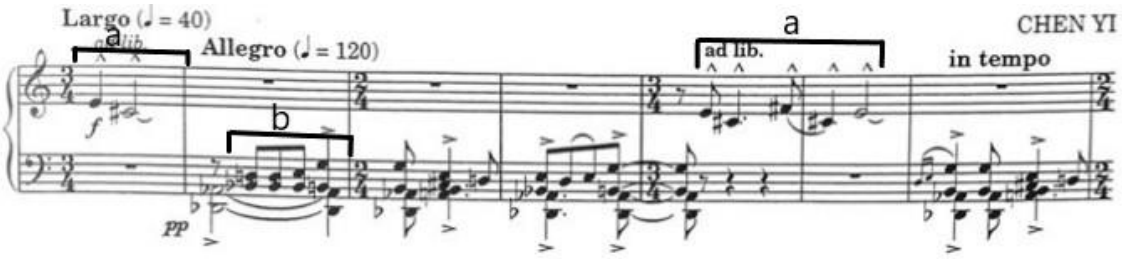


Example 29. Bright Sheng, *My Song*, movement I, 9th-11th systems.

Call and Response in Folk Singing

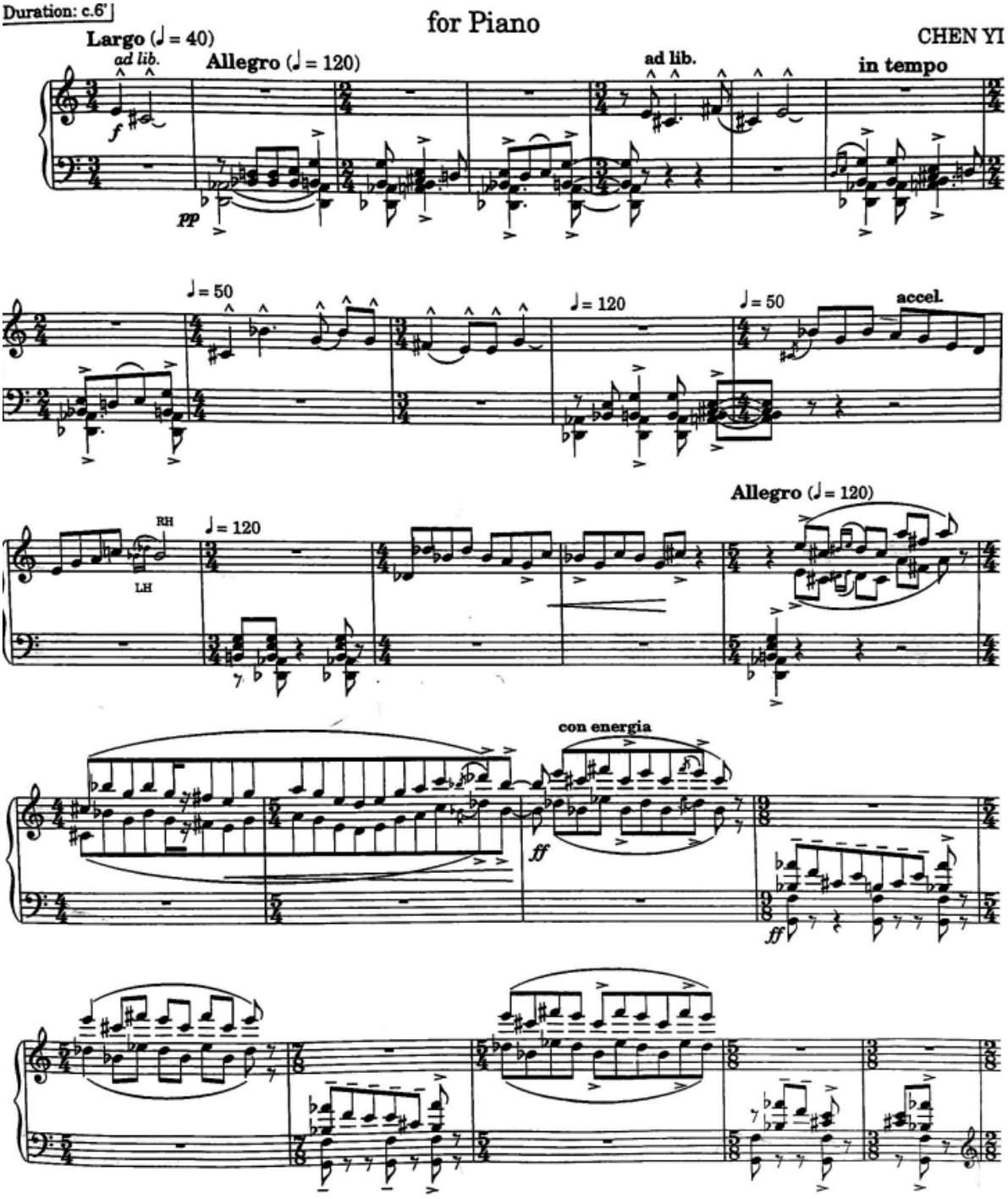
Barry Kernfeld describes call and response as a "performance of musical phrases or longer passages in alternation by different voices or distinct group, used in opposition in such a way to suggest that they answer one another."[143] In addition, it may involve spatial separation of the groups, and contrasts of volume, timbre, and pitches.[144] The term originated in descriptions of the singing of African American work-songs, in which a leader and a chorus respectively sang verse and refrain or successive phrases in alternation.[145] This kind of exchange of melodies is also popular in many rural areas, tribes, and minorities in China. For example, Chen Yi's *Duo Ye* was inspired by her experience interacting with the Dong minority group.[146] "Duo Ye is a form of age-old traditional song and dance of the Dong minority nationality in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region of China."[147] The beginning of the work features the call and response between the lead singer, often the tribune of a village, who extemporizes the words of a song with improvised short tunes and the chorus who dance in a circle with a bonfire in the center and sing.[148] Chen Yi takes the pitch materials from the original refrain as the melodic motive "a" and develops these pitch materials as the dancing rhythmic chorale motive "b" in the call and response style (Example 30).

[143] Barry Kernfeld, "Call and Response." *Grove Music Online.* 2003.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Ibid.
[146] Chen Yi, "Tradition and Creation": 61.
[147] Ibid.
[148] Ibid.

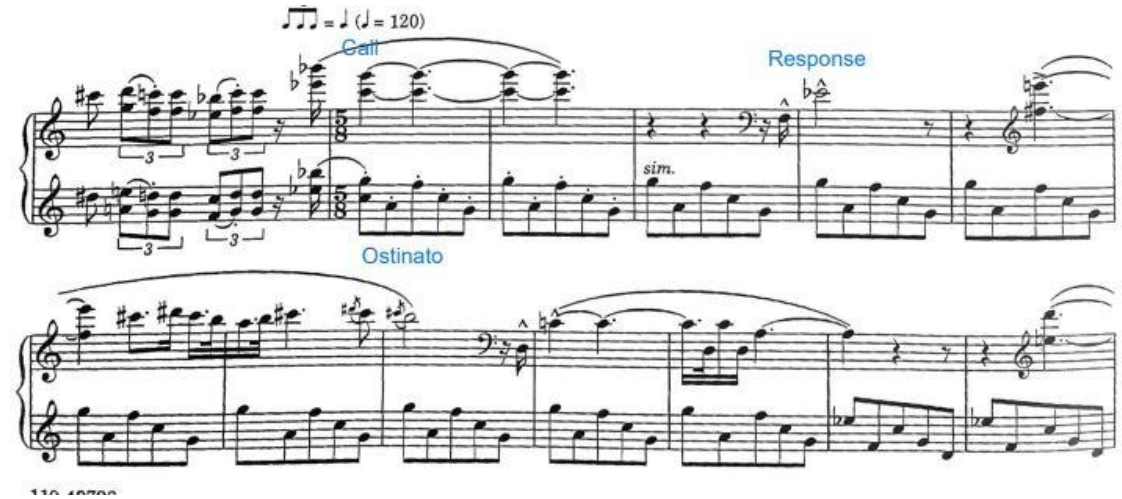


Example 30. Pitch materials of motive “a” and motive “b” of *Duo Ye*, mm. 1-6.

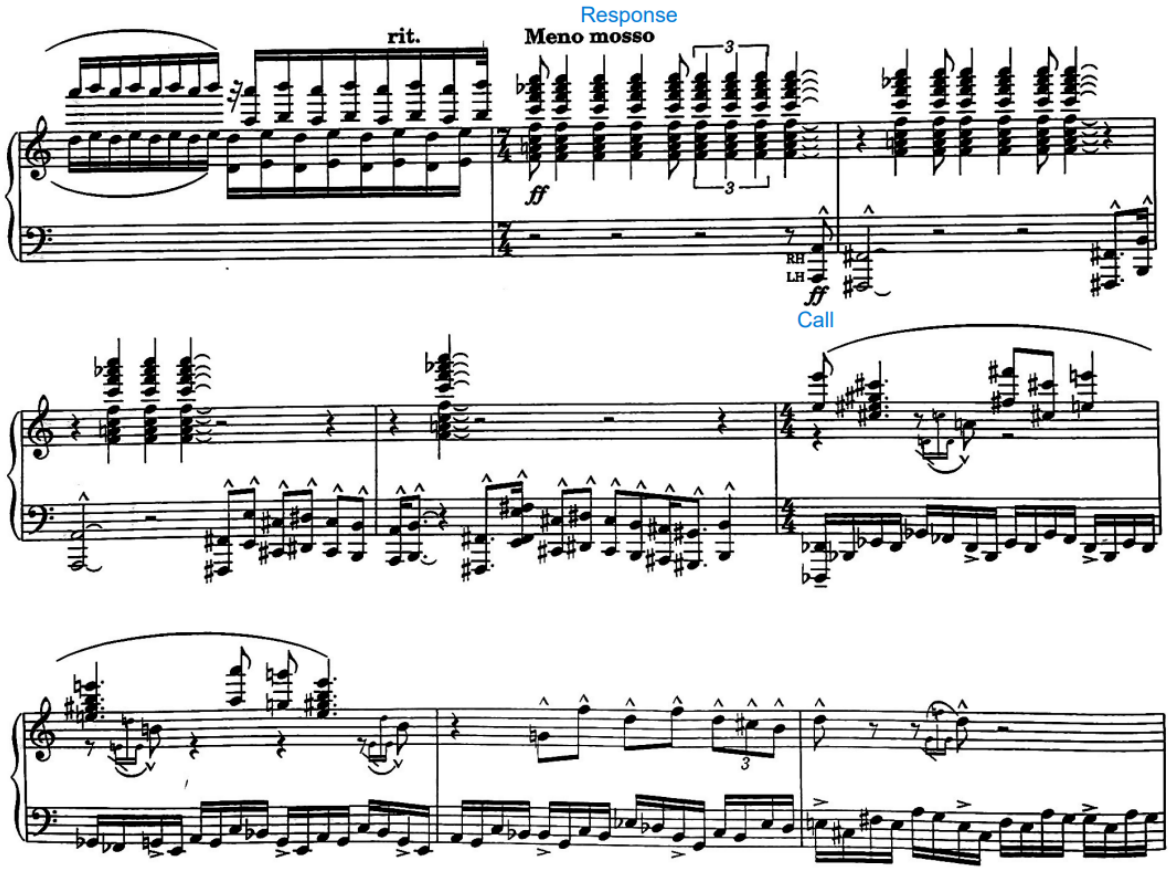
Chen Yi uses registral contrasts as a compositional device to demonstrate instances of call and response in the work. For example, in the A section from mm. 1-27, there are alternations of segments between treble and bass clefs that distinguish the two distinct groups, the leader and the chorus (Example 31). In mm. 87-116, Chen Yi provides the ostinato accompaniment while having the call and response on the top staff alternating between treble and bass clefs (Example 32). In the climax section starting from m. 116, she incorporates the percussive ensemble imitating drums and gongs as the response part while having the call part in the bass clef, demonstrating registral as well as textural contrasts (Example 33). The listener would be able to distinguish the different roles (call and response) easily with extreme registral and textural contrasts.



Example 31. Chen Yi, *Duo Ye*, mm. 1-26.



Example 32. Chen Yi, *Duo Ye*, mm. 86-98.



Example 33. Chen Yi, *Duo Ye*, mm. 115-123.

These three composers shared similar cultural and educational backgrounds and collective experiences, such as the Cultural Revolution and labor works during this period. Thus, they were exposed to folk culture since it was the only music acceptable to the Chinese government when Western music was discouraged at the time. All three became very knowledgeable about folk music culture, and folk music became part of their musical language. Therefore, we find commonalities in their music in terms of folk tune applications, folklore types, and textures. However, as we can see from the examples above, their compositional styles and focuses are different and unique, forming their own personal styles.

CHAPTER 5

IMITATIONS OF CHINESE INSTRUMENTS

Despite new generations of Chinese people in current times who are exposed to urban city lifestyles, Tan Dun, Chen Yi, and Bright Sheng grew up in an environment that exposed them to folk traditions. These experiences have shaped their unique musical languages featuring Chinese folk musical elements, imitation, and adaptation of Chinese instruments in their works.

These three *New Wave* composers were knowledgeable about different Chinese instruments and folk genres as they went through systematic training in conservatories settings. At first, Tan Dun self-taught himself the Chinese instruments *dizi*, the traditional bamboo flute, and the *erhu*, the Chinese two-stringed knee-fiddle when he was little.[149] During the Cultural Revolution, Tan Dun was sent to plant rice on a commune and was recruited to play erhu with the provincial *jingju* Beijing Opera Company.[150] Sheng was sent to Qinghai, a Chinese province bordering Tibet where he performed as a pianist and percussionist in the provincial music and dance theater,[151] while Chen Yi won a position as a composer and concertmaster in the Beijing Opera Troupe Orchestra in Guangzhou for eight years.[152] After the Revolution, these composers were enrolled in conservatories that provided Western and Chinese musical training. Chen Yi described her training in Chinese traditional music, "we have forty different categories to train our composition students. This includes folk songs that would cover the whole country — different provinces, different styles and minority groups — and you've got to

[149] Kouwenhoven, *Composer Tan Dun.*
[150] Lau, *Music in China*, 103.
[151] "Biography,*" Bright Sheng: Composer, Conductor and Pianist*. http://brightsheng.com/bio.html
[152] Duffie. *Chen Yi Conversation with Bruce Duffie*. December 14, 2005. http://www.bruceduffie.com/chenyi.html

memorize all of them. You sing two stanzas at least of each piece in dialect. Then you also have opera. The opera includes singing, reciting, acting, lighting, mask, make-up, costumes, everything."[153] These composers were also required to learn about traditional instrumental music, and different categories of Chinese instruments like plucking, wind, and percussive instruments. After this training, they all went to the countryside to collect folk songs from different regions. Chen Yi recalled her experience as "two years of hardship."[154] Their diverse educational background and childhood experiences with extensive Chinese music training led them to write solo, ensemble, orchestral, and mixed ensemble works that incorporate Chinese instruments. She said, "Most commonly I use Western orchestras to play Chinese style of writing. I use their fingerings written for Chinese orchestra instruments on Western instruments, so they sound differently from a normal Western orchestra."[155] This suggests Chen Yi and perhaps composers who share similar backgrounds like Tan Dun and Bright Sheng compose works with similar approach: writing works for Western instruments imitating Chinese instruments and timbral effects.

"Civil" and "Martial" in Chinese Music

Chinese folk musicians use common terms to distinguish different styles, as well as differences between parts of the repertory. These two terms derive from the dramatic content of the repertory and are used specifically for opera. The civil instruments are melodic, while the martial instruments are percussive.[156] For example, depending on the context of the plot in an opera, different melodic and percussion instruments are used to enhance the scenes.

[153] Ibid.
[154] Ibid.
[155] Ibid.
[156] Jones, *Folk Music of China*, 94.

Stephen Jones writes, “A basic attribute of the martial section is *re’nao*, ‘bustling, lively, noisy’.”[157] The martial percussion section is also used to portray battle scenes in operas.[158]

Example 34. Chinese Instruments.

Chinese Melodic Instruments

While it is impossible to introduce all the Chinese instruments in this document, some instruments are commonly used in folk traditions and other major genres such as Peking Opera.

Aerophones

There are different types of ensembles in China, resulting in some regional differences in instrumentation in folk music. For example, double-reed instruments like the shawm, *suona*, and

[157] Ibid.
[158] Ibid.

quan dominate northern ensembles.[159] The more intimate end-blown flute, *xiao*, is used mainly in the south especially in silk-and-bamboo ensembles.[160]

The *suona*, a double-reed aerophone, has been the most popular folk melodic instrument since the Ming dynasty.[161] The timbre of *suona* is similar to the Western instrument trumpet. It has eight basic finger holes and its range can cover two octaves and a whole step.[162] It came from Central Asia, and was used for miliary music and official ceremony before becoming popular in folk ceremonial like funerals and festivals.[163] It is also an important instrument in Peking Opera as an accompanying instrument for singing, and it is used for processional and ceremonial events. However, the *suona* is usually grouped together with the martial section due to its vibrant and loud timbre.

The *dizi*, a transverse flute with kazoo membrane, is a leading instrument in different ensembles such as the wind-and-percussion ensembles without double-reeds or in the silk-and-bamboo ensembles in the south.[164] The use of *suona* and *dizi* respectively distinguishes between the "martial" and "civil" parts of the music.[165]

The *xiao*, a vertical bamboo flute with four or five finger holes in the front and one in the back, has a delicate and mellow timbre. It has a range of two octaves and is used mainly in the south in the silk-and-bamboo traditions.[166]

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[159] Ibid., 97.
[160] The ensembles of strings, winds, and percussion that are popular in the southern Jiangsu areas. "Silk-and-bamboo" refers to stringed and wind instruments.
[161] Jones, *Folk Music of China*, 97.
[162] Isabelle Huang Streng, "A Study of the Relationship between Traditional Peking Opera and Contemporary Western Percussion Music in *Mu Kuei-Yin* in Percussion by Chien-Hui Hung" (D.M.A. diss., Bowling Green State University, 2012), 66.
[163] Jones, *Folk Music of China*, 97.
[164] Jones, *Folk Music of China*, 99.
[165] Ibid.
[166] Lau, *Music in China*, 11.

The *sheng*, a free-reed mouth-organ, is one of the oldest Chinese wind instruments. It is the only Chinese wind instrument capable of producing two or more tones simultaneously.[167] The *sheng* is made up of a bundle of bamboo pipes of various lengths mounted on a small gourd-shaped wind chamber.[168] In most places it has seventeen pipes. The *sheng* is said to be the basic instrument to learn: it is played everywhere in the north, but rather little in the south.[169] It is used as both a solo instrument and an accompanying instrument to the leading reed-instrument, the flute.[170]

Chordophones

The bowed and plucked string instruments are the two kinds of chordophones among the Chinese instruments. Chordophones are used rarely in the core repertoire in the northern instrument ensembles, although they often accompany narrative singing and operas. In the south, chamber genres are dominated by both plucked and bowed instruments.[171]

Two-stringed bowed fiddles, *huqin*, are the most important bowed strings in Chinese music. *Huqin* ("barbarian lute") is an instrument imported into China via the Silk Road trade and has been sinicized over the years.[172] The construction of *huqin* consists of a round and fretless pole mounted perpendicular onto a small round or hexagonal-shape resonating chamber with one side covered with snakeskin.[173] The bow is placed between the two strings and is made of horse hair. Sound is produced by pushing or pulling the bow against the inner or outer string.[174] The strings are tuned in fifths (i.e. D-A, C-G, or A-D).[175] *Erhu* is considered the most popular and

[167] Lau, *Music in China*, 12.
[168] Ibid.
[169] Jones, *Folk Music of China*, 98.
[170] Ibid.
[171] Jones, *Folk Music of China*, 103.
[172] Lau, *Music in China*, 4.
[173] Ibid., 5.
[174] Ibid.
[175] Ibid.

significant *huqin* among the category. It is used as a solo instrument as well as with chamber and orchestral instruments. When Tan Dun started learning violin, he described the violin timbre "just like an *erhu*, only a little bit different in sound."[176] The instrument has come to represent the sonic signature of Chinese music, especially with its characteristic glissando. Different varieties of *huqin* can be found across the country. The standard *erhu* and high-pitched *jinghu* are used as the leading instrument in Peking Opera. Local types of bowed fiddle, such as Cantonese *gaohu* and Chaozhou *erxian*, both high-pitched instruments, are often the leading instrument in ensembles. The slightly larger *zhonghu*, tuned an octave lower than the *erhu*, is used as a secondary instrument to provide a thicker sound complement or texture to the high-pitched *huqin* in ensembles and orchestras.[177]

The *pipa*, a pear-shaped four-stringed fretted lute, was introduced to China via the Silk Road prior to the Tang dynasty (618-907 AD).[178] It is an important instrument in many southern ensembles. It often accompanies narrative singing and has a major solo repertory.[179] The Western guitar and the *pipa* are distant relatives and both share many commonalities in their technique and construction.[180] The instrument's name is derived from the finger techniques: pi for plucking in a forward motion, pa for plucking in a backward motion.[181] Performance techniques for the *pipa* include glissandos, tremolos, and harmonics. The right hand plucks the strings to produce sound, while the left hand is engaged in pressing and bending.[182]

[176] Kouwenhoven, *Composer Tan Dun*.
[177] Ibid., 5.
[178] Jones, *Folk Music of China*, 95.
[179] Ibid., 103.
[180] Wen-Tzu Lo, "A Comparative Study of the Guitar and the Chinese Lute-Pipa: An Overview of their Origins, Construction, and Techniques" (D.M.A. diss., Ball State University, 1999).
[181] "Pipa." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, May 28, 2018. https://www.britannica.com/art/pipa-musical-instrument.
[182] Ibid.

The *sanxian*, a three-string fretless plucked lute, has snakeskin stretched over a small rectangular sound box.[183] It is widely used in the southern regions for accompaniment, orchestra, and solo performances due to its rich tonal quality and wide range.[184]

The plucked zither *zheng* or *guzheng* is believed to have existed before the Qin dynasty (221-207 BC).[185] The number of strings varied in different historical periods, and the modern standard *zheng* has twenty-one strings. It has a movable tuning bridge and is tuned to a pentatonic scale with a range of four octaves.[186] The right hand plucks strings while the left hand alters pitches by pressing and pulling the strings. In earlier times, it was used in folk music ensembles, local operas, and to accompany vocal music. In the twentieth century, it has gradually become a solo instrument with large solo repertory.[187]

The *yangqin*, the struck stringed dulcimer, was introduced to the south China coast in the seventeenth century.[188] It is used widely in the southern part of China and plays an important role in Cantonese music, Jiangnan silk-and-bamboo music, and Sichuan string music.[189] It is played with bamboo beaters having rubber or leather heads. The range of *yangqin* covers one octave below middle C and two and a half octaves above it.[190] The folk forms of *yangqin* and *zheng* are smaller and have fewer strings than the modern improved versions of these instruments.[191]

Chinese Percussion Instruments

Stephen Jones mentions in his book *Folk Music of China*, "Percussion is basic to Chinese ensemble music, indeed to Chinese life: it accompanies ritual, opera, narrative singing, dance,

[183] Lau, *Music in China*, 7.
[184] Ibid.
[185] Ibid., 56.
[186] Ibid.
[187] Ibid., 57.
[188] Jones, *Folk Music of China,* 104.
[189] Ibid.
[190] "Yangqin." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, December 22, 2017. https://www.britannica.com/art/yangqin.
[191] Jones, *Folk Music of China,* 104.

even political campaigns…Even the poorest village will have its percussion ensemble for festive and ritual use."[192]

The numbers of percussion instruments and players can change depending on the type of music and group that is involved. The small percussion section that accompanies the silk-and-bamboo music is usually led by two high-pitched instruments played by the same percussionist, such as clappers and woodblock, or clappers and a small single-headed drum (*bangu*, *danpigu*, etc.).[193] The larger "martial" ensembles involve a more complex percussion section. The basic ensemble would include a double-headed bass drum (*da gu*, *tang gu*, etc.), small cymbals, and single gong. Other instruments such as gongs and cymbals of different sizes can be added to the percussion sections.[194] "Martial music" is led by the drum master who is the leader of the percussion section, and often also of the whole ensemble. Small cymbals are commonly used as a basic metrical marker.[195] There is also a percussion ensemble, *luogu* or "gong-and-drum," which involves primarily percussion instruments such as drums, gongs, and cymbals.[196]

Music in the Peking Opera

Peking Opera arose in the eighteenth century during the Qing dynasty. It consists of various elements including music of Chinese instruments, singing, miming, dancing, acrobatics, martial arts, and history. Today, Peking Opera is regarded as the country's cultural treasure.[197]

The Peking Opera orchestra is traditionally divided into two sections: *wenchang* (the civil section) and *wuchang* (the martial section). The main instruments used in *wenchang* are string instruments such as *jinghu* (high-pitched *erhu*), *jingerhu*, *yueqin* (a lute with a round, hollow

[192] Ibid.
[193] Ibid.
[194] Ibid.
[195] Ibid., 106.
[196] Ibid., 92.
[197] "What is Peking Opera?" YouTube. *China Matters*, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ka5z3uYctug

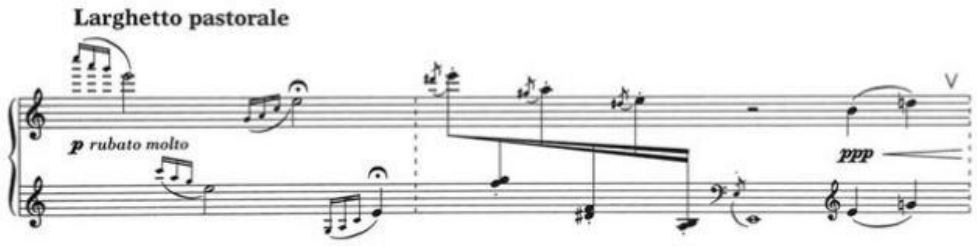
wooden body), and *sanxian* (a three-stringed fretless plucked instrument), and wind instruments such as *suona*, *sheng*, and *dizi*. *Wuchang* includes percussion instruments like *danpigu* and *ban* (bamboo sticks) which are played by the drum master, *daluo* (large gong), *xiaoluo* (small gong), and *naoba* (a set of Chinese crash cymbals).[198] *Wenchang* often features the accompanying of strings or winds to the solo singers and occasional use of the chorus in unison. Monophonic and heterophonic textures are used primarily in Peking Opera.[199] On the other hand, percussion instruments also have a significant role: they are used throughout the whole composition such as in the singing, miming, and battle scenes.

Imitations of Chinese Instruments in *Eight Memories in Watercolor* and *My Song*

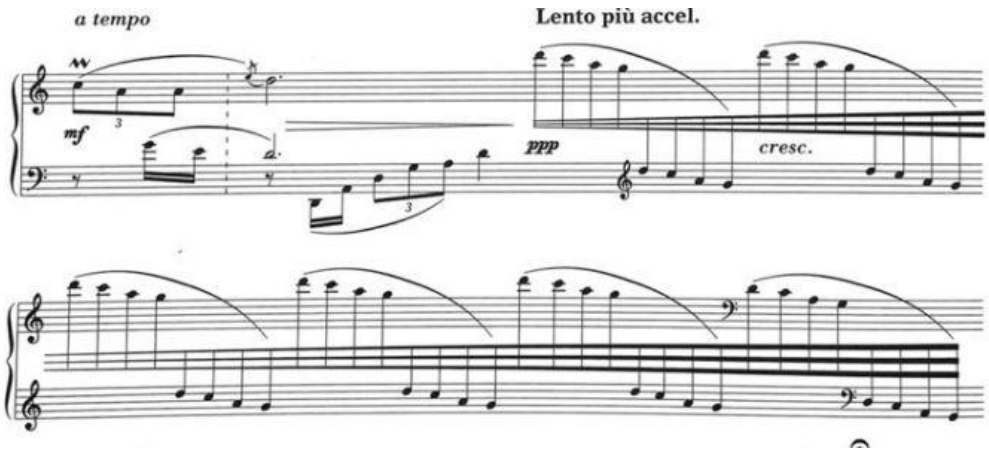
Tan Dun's *Eight Memories in Watercolor* conveys Chinese timbre and atmosphere with the use of Chinese pentatonic scales and grace notes projecting the imitation of folk singing and Chinese instrumentation. Chinese instruments are often tuned according to the Chinese pentatonic scales and intervals involved from the scales. Strong connotations of imitation of Chinese instruments can be found through the whole piano suite. Baolu Chen's and Qian Xu's dissertations provide some insights on imitations of Chinese instruments for some of the movements. With my focus on folk elements in this document, I will explore the Chinese instrumentation in movements 2, 3, 4, and 8. Although Chen Yi and Bright Sheng do not especially hint at any imitations of Chinese instruments, they both claim their work to be influenced greatly by folk music and dance. Dance would typically involve percussion instruments and some melodic instruments, which are likely imitated in parts of these works.

[198] Ibid.
[199] Hai-Hsing Yao, "The Use of Martial-Acrobatic Arts in the Training and Performance of Peking Opera" (D.M.A. diss., University of Minnesota, 1990).

In Tan Dun's *Eight Memories in Watercolor*, imitations of the Chinese instrument *zheng* can be found in "Herdboys' Song." For example, the introduction in the first system suggests the imitations of *zheng*: the grace notes in m. 1 imitates the plucking sound of the right hand playing the *zheng*, while the half step grace notes in m. 2 imitate the bending or pushing of the left hand on the strings creating slight alteration in pitches (Example 35). There are also glissando effects of *zheng* throughout the movement. The glissando on *zheng* is produced by sliding across the strings. "Herdboy's Song" uses heterophony to create a *shange* duet between the two hands. With the glissando effects of *zheng* frequently appearing in the left hand, this would explain the possibility of having the heterophony between two folk singers accompanied by *zheng*, or simply a heterophony between a folk singer and *zheng.* Since *zheng* is tuned to pentatonic scales, staying in a particular pentatonic scale would favor the imitations of this Chinese instrument. Another clear example of glissando of *zheng* is at the *Lento piu accel*. section towards the end with the repetition and acceleration of the eighth note descending patters using notes which are tuned to the A *yu* mode (Example 36).



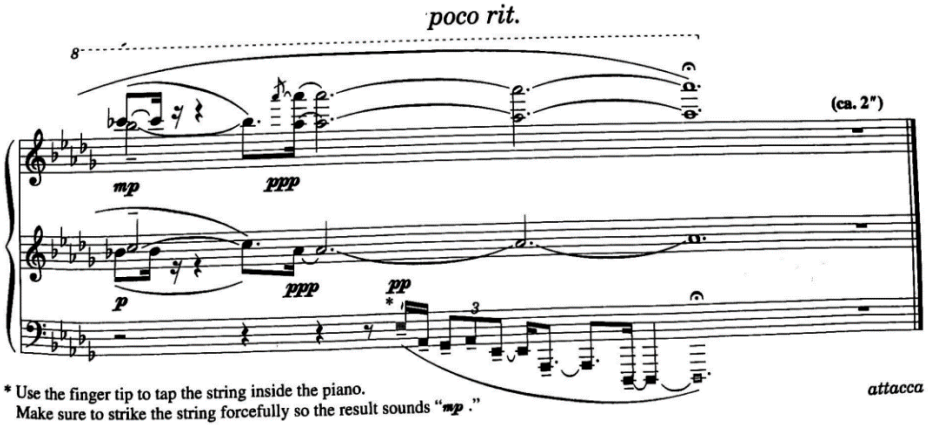
Example 35. Tan Dun, "Herdboy's Song," 1st system.



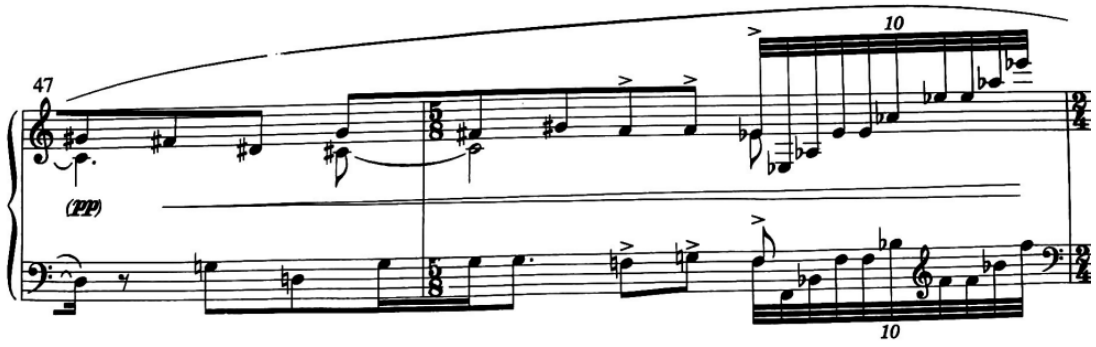
Example 36. Tan Dun, "Herdboy's Song," 7th and 8th systems.

In Bright Sheng's *My Song*, imitations of *zheng* can be found in the first and second movements; however, they are written in a different style than Tan Dun's. The first movement features an unmeasured mountain song *shange* between folk singers in heterophony. The last system uses an extended piano technique in the bass clef with the instruction to "use the finger tip to tap the string inside the piano", thereby imitating the plucking sounds of the *zheng* (Example 37).[200] This extended technique with the tapping on the string provides a closer sonic imitation of string instruments. In the second movement, imitations of glissando effects on the *zheng* can be found in the upward fourths and fifths in mm. 48 (Example 38) and 70 (Example 39). Although notes are not arranged in the order of the pentatonic scale used in *zheng* in mm. 48 and 70, they both feature intervals of fourths and fifths from the same pentatonic scale with pitches A-flat, B-flat, C, E-flat and F in the upward gestures of glissando in the *zheng*. The swift upward gestures with the two hands in the same pentatonic scale would create a timbral effect similar to the glissando made from the *zheng*.

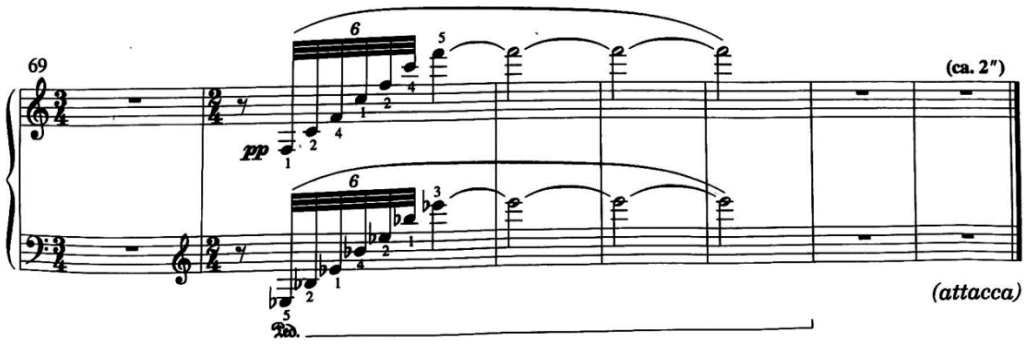
[200] Sheng, Program note from *My Song*.



Example 37. Bright Sheng, *My Song*, movement I, last system.



Example 38. Bright Sheng, *My Song*, movement II, mm. 47-48.



Example 39. Bright Sheng, *My Song*, movement II, mm. 69-75.

The title "Sunrain" of the last movement of Tan Dun's *Eight Memories in Watercolor* suggests the celebration of the Water Splashing Festival of the Dai ethnic minority. The Chinese title of the movement is different from the English edition with the translation "happiness" or "joy."[201] The Water Splashing Festival is a festival celebrating traditional New Year in some southeastern countries such as Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. It is also celebrated by ethnic minorities in China such as the Dai people. It occurs in April every year and is one of the most celebrated festivals in the Yunnan province. During these three days of celebration, the Dai people showcase their Dai culture with music, dance, food, and events.[202] Percussion instruments like drums have a significant role in the Dai people's culture. "If there are always sounds of the drums in the tribe or village, it means people are happy and healthy."[203] The goblet-shaped drums *Klong yao* are the traditional percussion instruments used by the Dai ethnic groups. The Chinese term 象腳鼓 "Elephant-foot Drum" is derived from the shape of the drum that look like an elephant's foot (Example 40). The "Elephant-foot Drum" is a long drum that comes in different sizes as well as low and high pitches.[204] It is generally slung over the shoulder and played with the hands by hitting the drumhead. The Dai people accompany dancing with drum music (Example 41). Other percussion instruments like gongs and cymbals are also used in dancing and festivals of the Dai minorities.

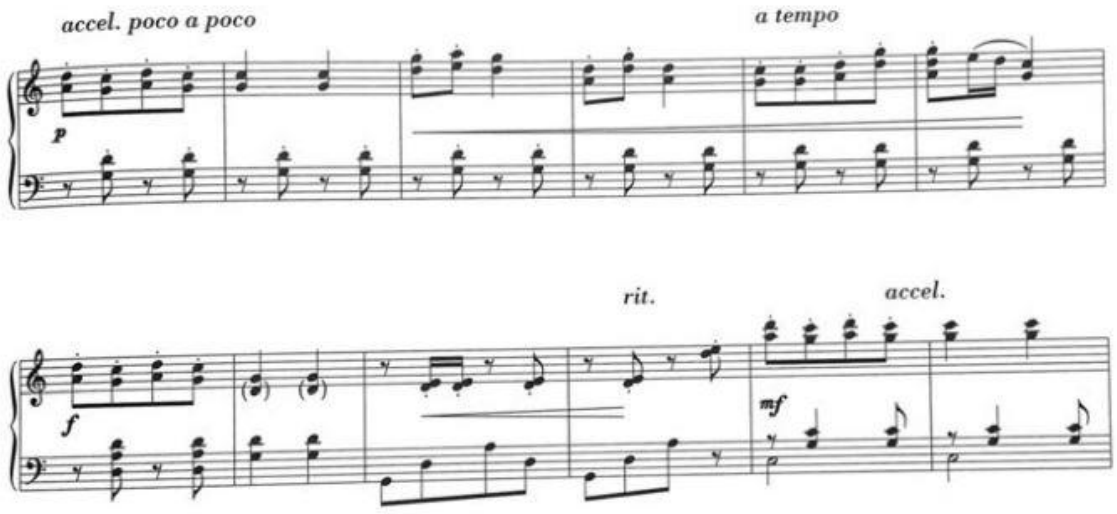
[201] Baolu Chen, "Tan Dun's *Eight Memories in Watercolor, Op. 1*: Strategies for Pianists and a Version Comparison" (D.M.A. diss., The Ohio State University, 2016), 66.
[202] "The Water Slashing Festival." *Baike Baidu*. https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E6%B3%BC%E6%B0%B4%E8%8A%82/72649
[203] "Folk Instruments of the Dai People from Yunnan Province," Youtube. *Travellution*, 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dm38C7AJzv0
[204] Ibid.

Example 40. The Chinese “Elephant-foot Drum”.[205]

Example 41. Dancing with the Chinese “Elephant-foot Drum”.[206]

[205] “Dai Ethnicity,” *YUNNAN.CN*, 2019. https://m.yunnan.cn/system/2019/09/19/030383003.shtml
[206] Ibid.

This rhythmic, joyful movement "Sunrain" opens with four strong chords with harmonic sonorities of fourths and fifths and *fff* dynamics, imitating the drums, gongs, and cymbals. The introduction continues with rhythmic patterns of intervals of seconds in the right hand played *staccato*, imitating the drumming of the hands, while the left hand has steady eighth notes with melodic fifths, suggesting other drums with different pitches (Example 42). The folk melody is introduced in parallel fourths throughout the whole movement, suggesting the imitation of *lusheng*, a type of *sheng* that is popular among the minorities in the southwest regions of China and is also capable of producing two tones simultaneously (Example 43). The movement alternates the folk melodies with the short percussion music similar to the beginning for variety.

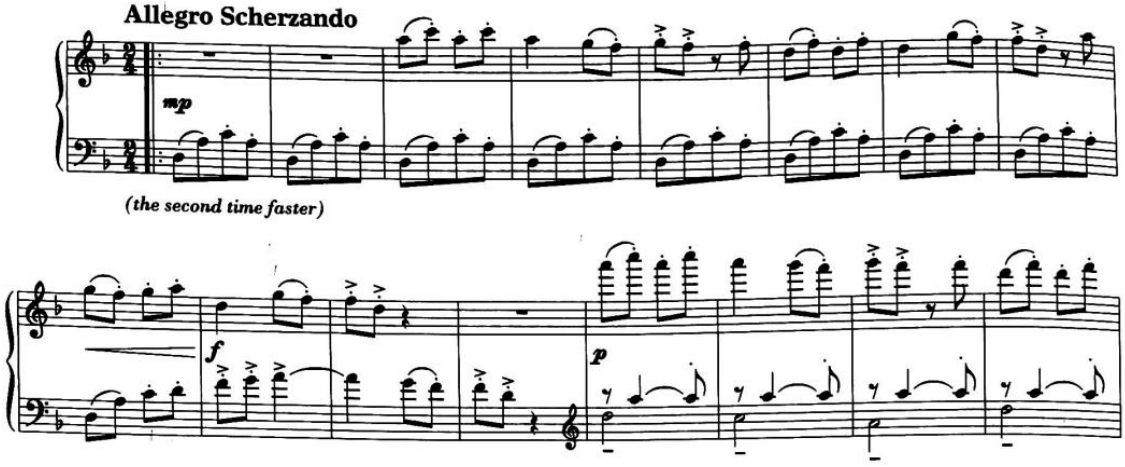


Example 42. Tan Dun, "Sunrain," mm. 7-18.

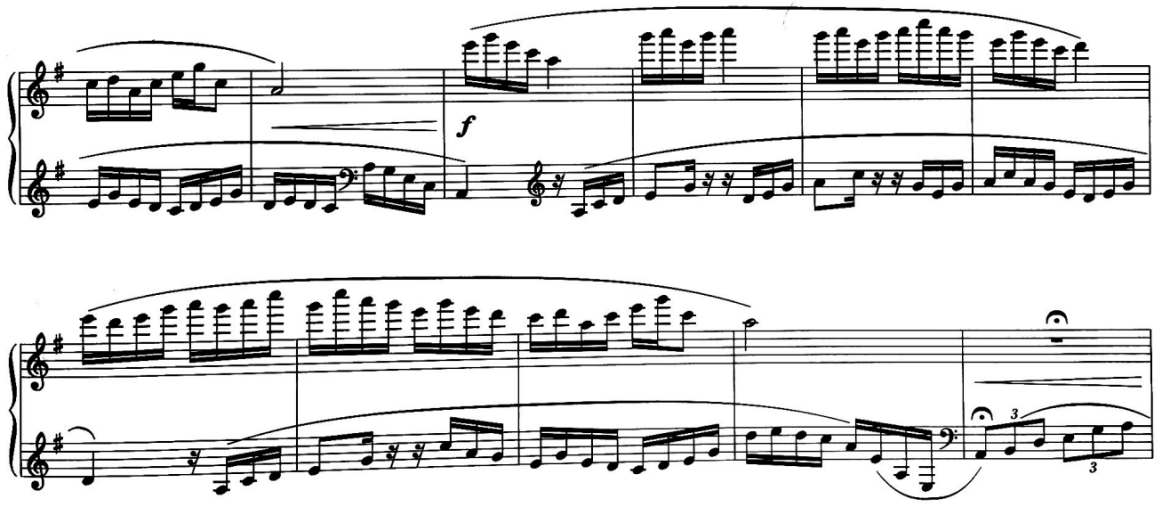
Example 43. *Lusheng*.

"Staccato Beans" and "Blue Nun" from *Eight Memories in Watercolor* and the fourth movement "Nostalgia" from *My Song* suggest the imitation of "civil" melodic instruments such as the wind instruments like *dizi* and bowed instruments like *erhu*. "Staccato Beans" features a fast tempo *Allegro Scherzando* inspired by a children's folk song. The simplicity of the folk tune with intervals spanning mostly seconds and thirds, its playful character with a fast tempo, and articulations with two-note slurs followed by light *staccatos* suggest the melody can be played by instruments like *dizi* and *erhu* which are capable of performing these elements (Example 44). Due to the extreme range in the right hand starting from m. 53, the *xiao di* ("small flute") would be ideal for the section, since it is a shorter version of the *dizi* with higher registral range which can play from A4-D7. Compared to "Staccato Beans," "Blue Nun" has a relatively slower tempo *Andante* for the first two eight-bar phrases and *più messo* for the sixteenth note passages. Similar to "Blue Nun," the fourth movement of *My Song* also features a slow tempo with smooth and connected passages with slurs imitating a human singing voice. The melodic phrases are relatively short with four bar phrasing with soft dynamics. These elements suggest the melody of

the *Andante* section can be played by the wind instrument *xiao,* which has a soft volume and a graceful and mellow sound, or a bowed instrument like the *erhu*. Similar to "Staccato Beans," the *xiao di* or other instruments with high registral range would be recommended for the extreme range in the *più messo* section of "Blue Nun" (Example 45).

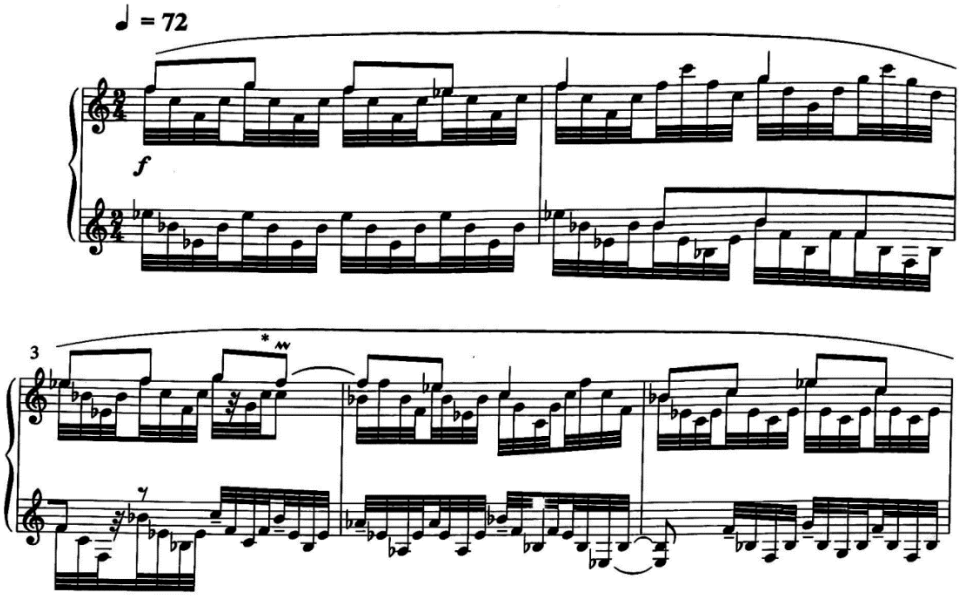


Example 44. Tan Dun, "Staccato Beans," mm. 1-16.



Example 45. Tan Dun, "Blue Nun," mm. 17-28.

The second movement of *My Song* features the folk tune written with up-stemmed notes. The thirty-second note rhythm tied to the melody provides the momentum and drive for the folk tune with rich sonorities (Example 46). Due to the fast thirty-second note rhythm and layers of voices, it is possible that Chinese instruments like the struck stringed dulcimer, *yangqin*, would be capable of creating such a texture at a fast tempo.

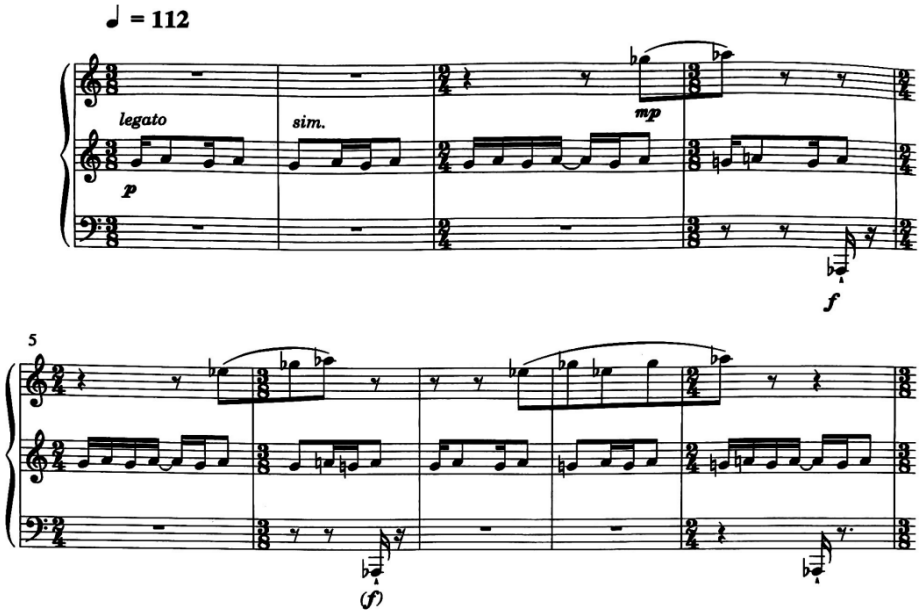


Example 46. Bright Sheng, *My Song*, movement II, mm. 1-5.

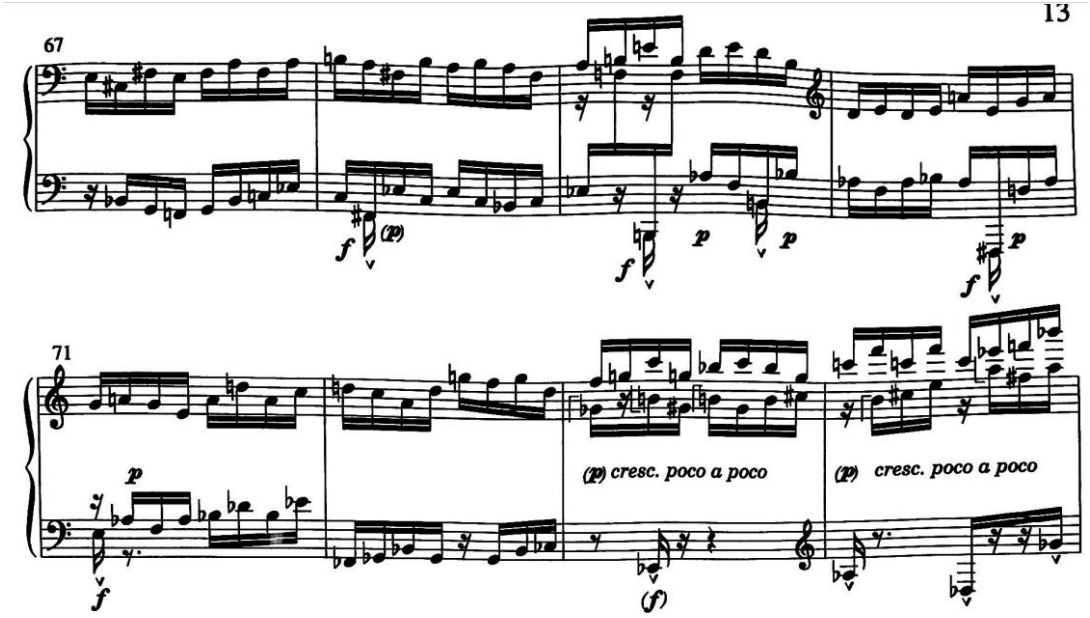
Bright Sheng describe the third movement of *My Song* as a "savage dance" with additive melodic notes and rhythm.[207] It is a movement with a strong rhythmic pulse that features imitations of Chinese percussion instruments. The beginning features a rhythmic pattern of six measures in the middle staff, imitating the sounds of the single-head drum *bangu* or *danpigu* played by the leader or the drum master of the ensemble (Example 47). The additive melody in

[207] Sheng, Program note from *My Song*.

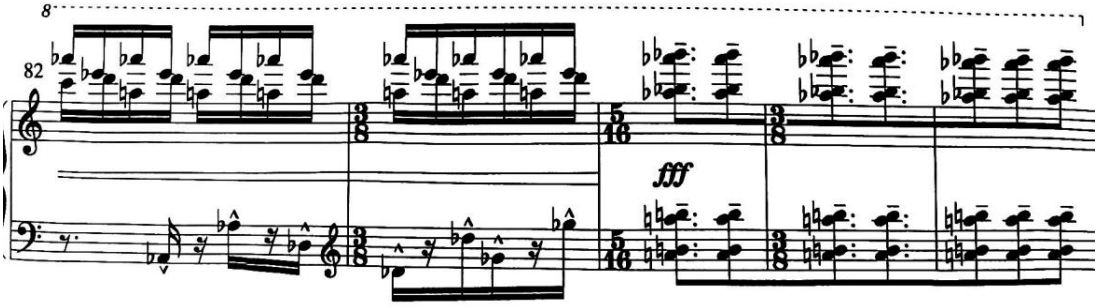
the top staff can be played by *suona*, which is typical in the shawm-and-percussion ensembles, or other Chinese melodic instruments. There are also indications of *martellato* playing of bass notes with *forte* dynamics, imitating the *da gu* ("large drum") in the low registers (Example 48). Other clear examples of imitations of percussion instruments are the half step clusters in mm. 84-86 (Example 49) and clusters using the pentatonic scale pitches D-sharp / E-flat, F, G, B-flat and C in mm. 94-97 (Example 50) in closed positions. These clusters in *fff* and *ffff* dynamics with strong rhythmic pulses imitate the percussion ensemble with Chinese cymbals, gongs, and drums playing together. The alternations between the fifths and seconds from mm. 98-104 also give rise to the imitation of rhythmic patterns alternating between Chinese cymbals, gongs, and *bangu*, as they are always used together in the ensemble setting. Towards the end of the movement from mm. 112-127, Sheng has written clusters of notes of the pentatonic scale and intervals of seconds alternating between the two hands rhythmically with *staccatissimo* and *fffff* dynamics, imitating the drumming between the hands with two wooden sticks (Example 51). The writing also provides a visual connotation of drumming.



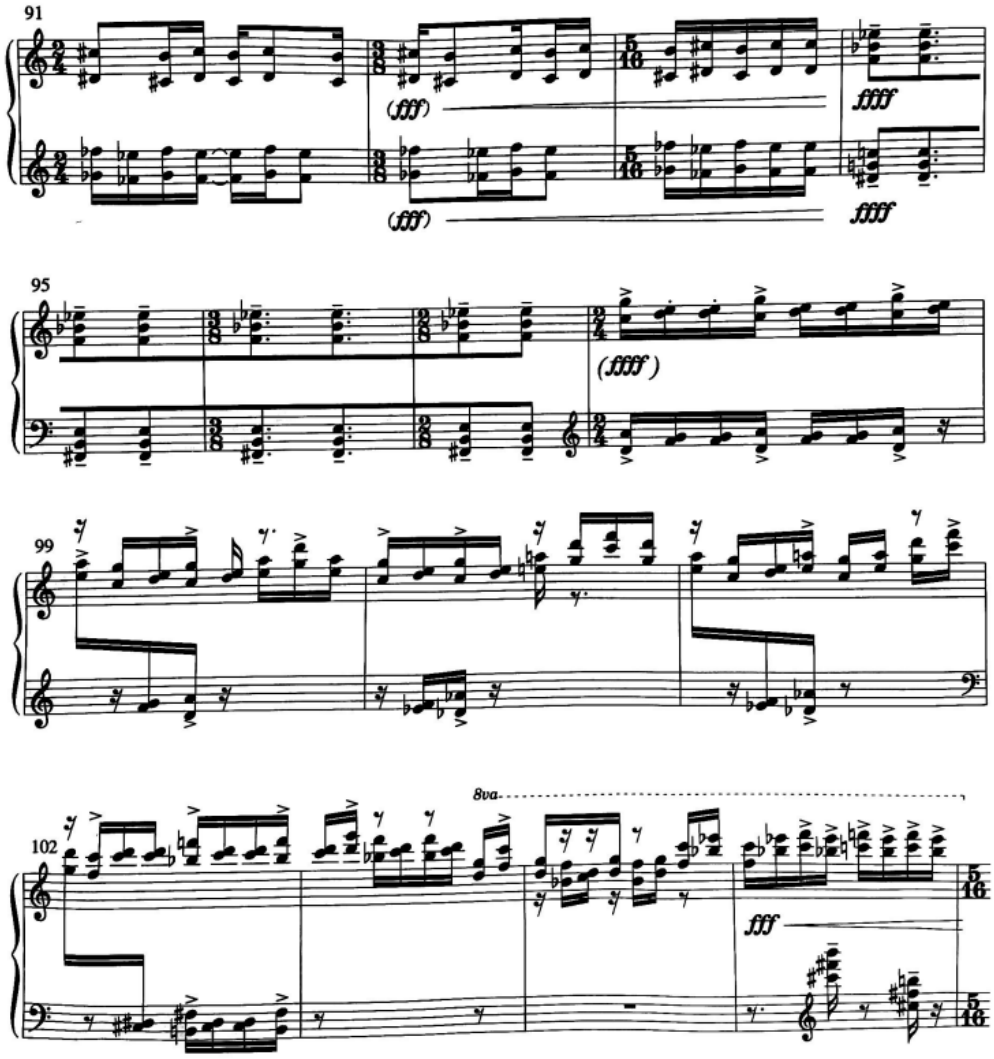
Example 47. Bright Sheng, *My Song*, movement III, mm. 1-9.



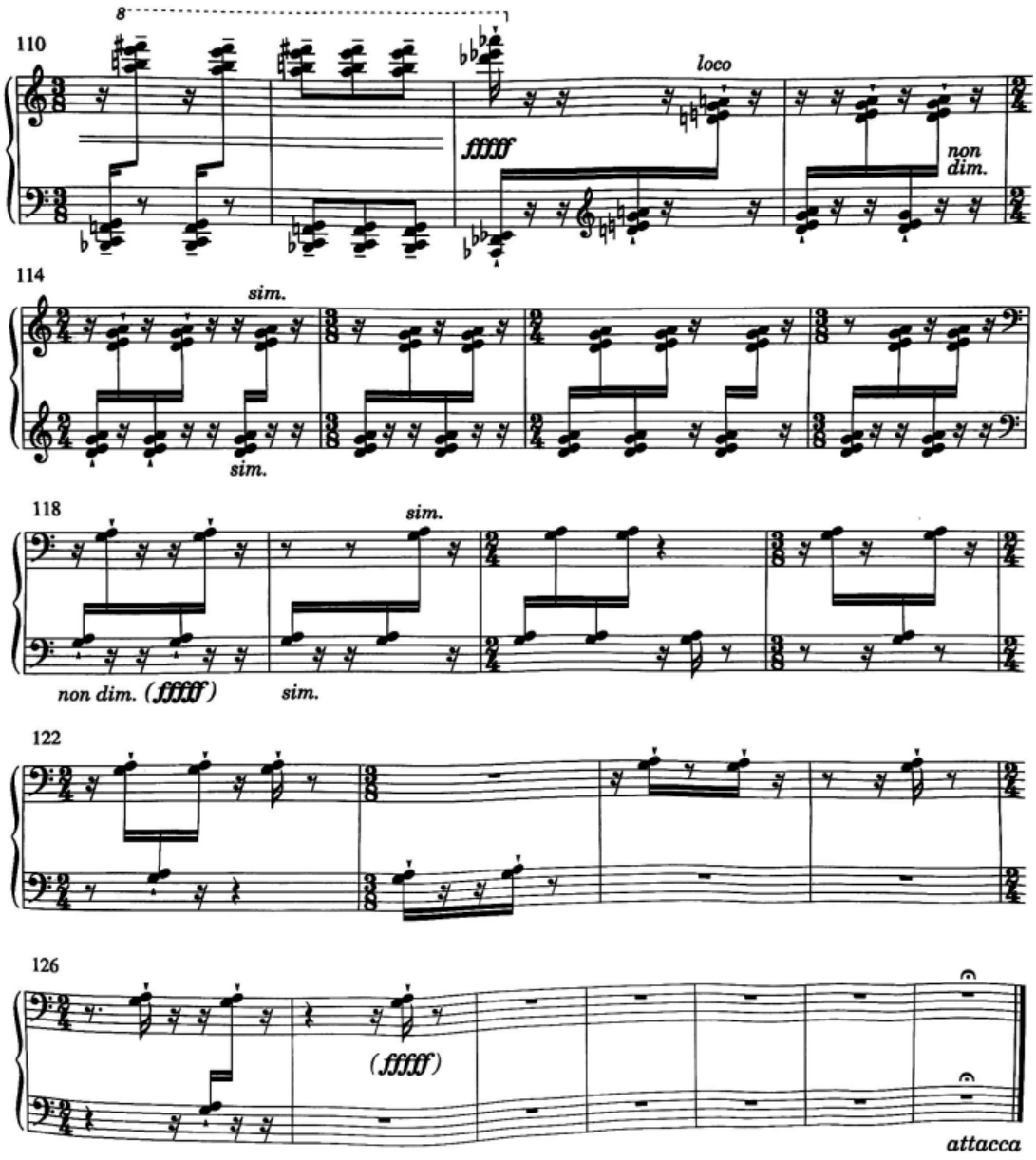
Example 48. Bright Sheng, *My Song*, movement III, mm. 67-74.



Example 49. Bright Sheng, *My Song*, movement III, mm. 82-86.



Example 50. Bright Sheng, *My Song*, movement III, mm. 91-105.



Example 51. Bright Sheng, *My Song*, movement III, mm. 110-132.

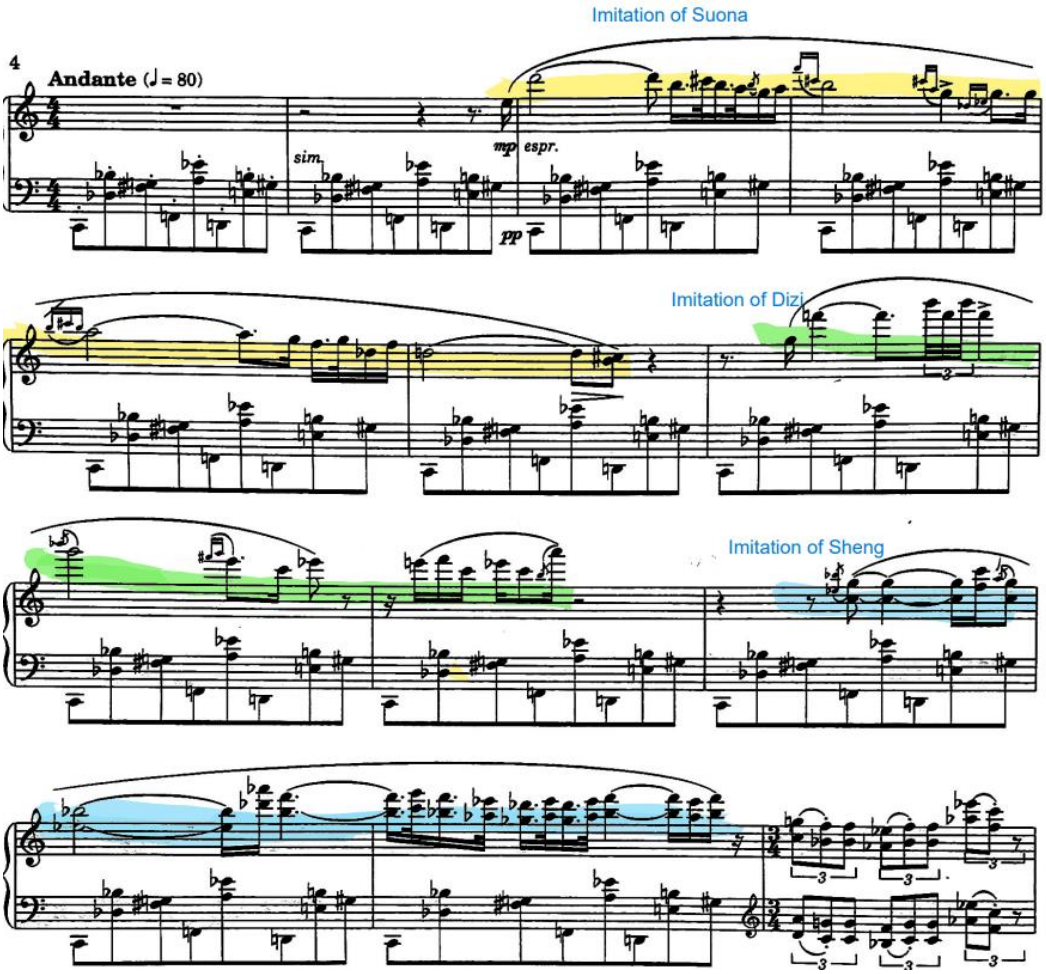
Imitations of Instruments from the Peking Opera in *Duo Ye*

Duo Ye, for piano, is inspired by Chen Yi's field trip to the Dong ethnic minority. The music incorporates strong rhythmic pulse, as the original *Duo Ye* tune is from a traditional song

and dance of the Dong people.[208] Chen Yi also mentions that one of the thematic pitch materials was inspired by imitation of tunes from the Peking Opera.[209] Chen Yi has abundant experience with, and knowledge about, Peking Opera as she was the composer and concertmaster in the Beijing Opera Troupe Orchestra in Guangzhou for eight years during the Cultural Revolution in the 1970s. Traces of imitations of the instruments from Peking Opera orchestra can be found, especially from observing her other arrangements of *Duo Ye* including the adaptation for chamber orchestra (1985) and full orchestra, *Duo Ye No. 2* (1987).

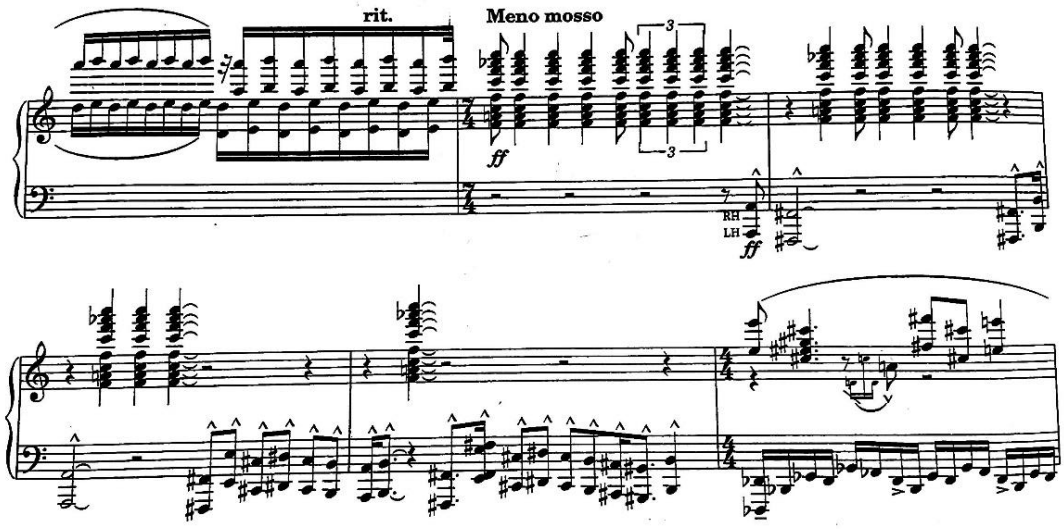
In the *Andante* section of *Duo Ye*, Chen Yi brings out the motive "c" Peking Opera tune with the imitation of different Chinese instruments from a Peking Opera orchestra. Both versions of the chamber orchestra and full orchestra feature the tune first played by oboe, then flute, and lastly followed by two clarinets. The consistent use of wind instruments suggests the imitation of Chinese wind instrumental combinations rather than the traditional string combinations of *jinghu* and *jingerhu* in Peking Opera. The first tune in the piano version from mm. 74-78 is played by the oboe which imitates the *suona* which is also a double-reed instrument. The second melodic phrase is played by flute in a third higher than the first phrase, imitating the high-pitched *dizi* used in Peking Opera. The third tune in mm. 82-85 features harmonic fifths; this is presented with two clarinets in the chamber orchestra and the full orchestra versions of *Duo Ye,* which imitates the *sheng* in Peking Opera (Example 52).

[208] Chen, Yi. "Tradition and Creation": 60.
[209] Ibid., 61.

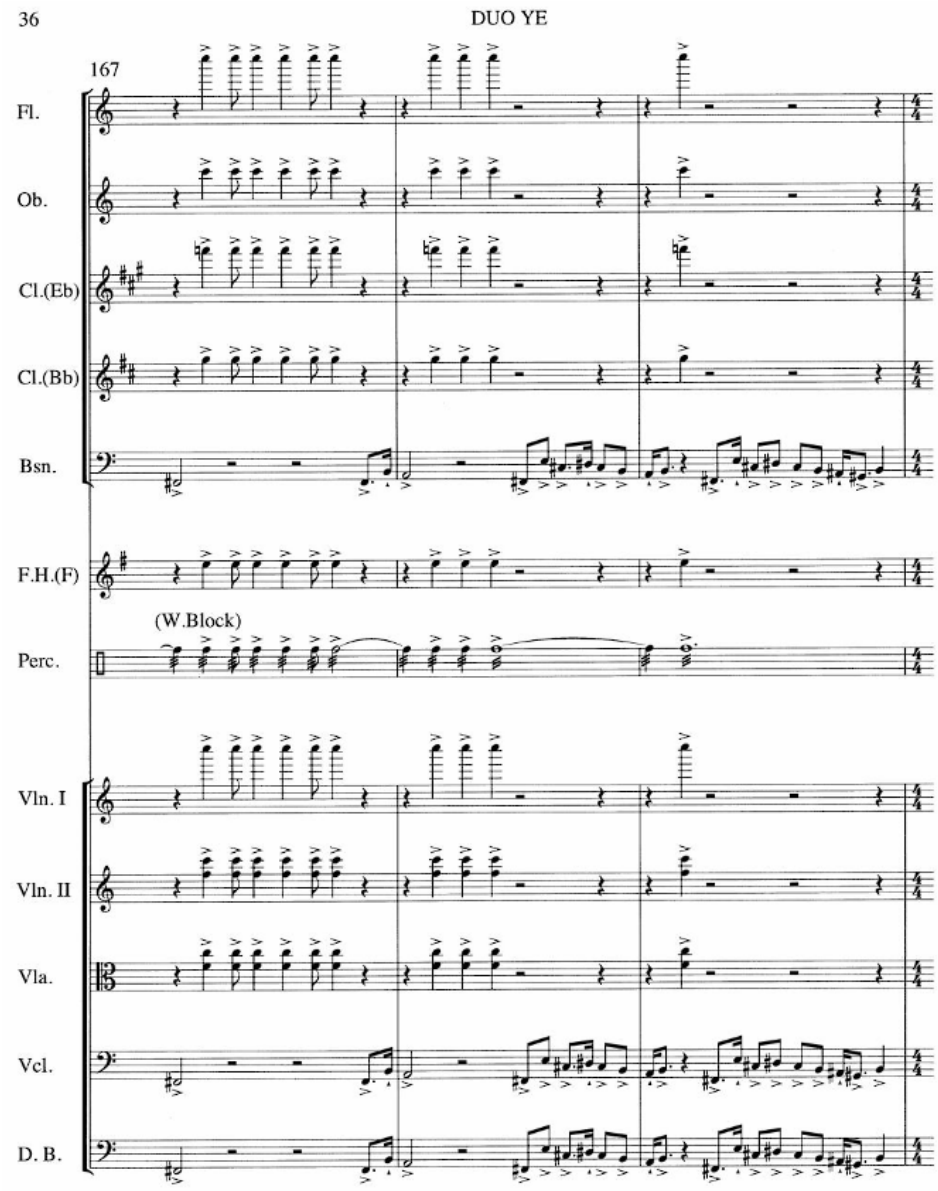


Example 52. Chen Yi, *Duo Ye*, mm. 73-86.

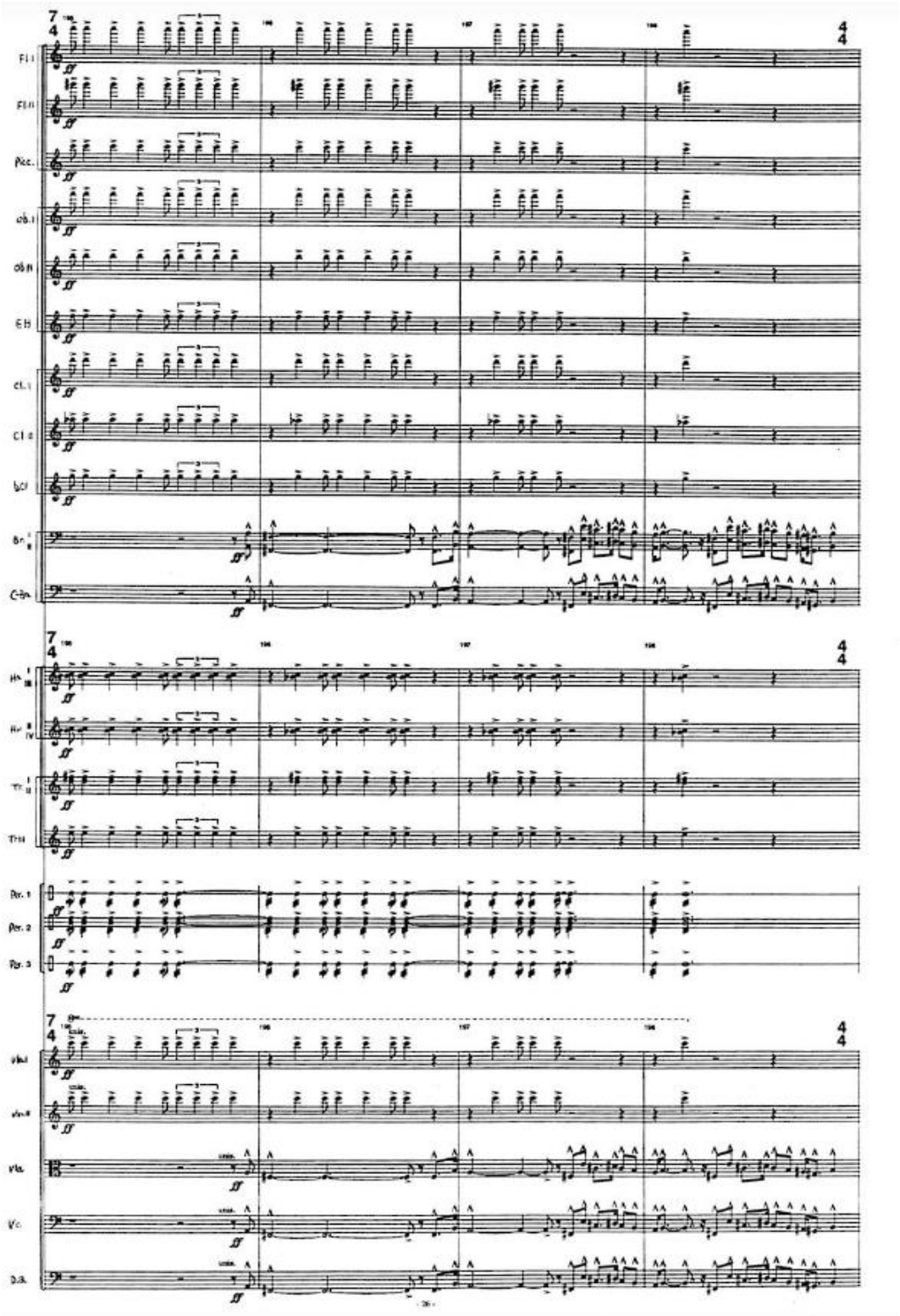
The climax, which starts at m. 116, is a clear example of the imitation of percussion ensemble playing. The strong, dancelike, rhythmic pulse with two hands playing blocked chords and clusters along with *ff* dynamics indicate the percussiveness of the passage (Example 53). Also, both the chamber and full orchestra versions use the full percussion section in the climax (Examples 54 and 55). With the above analysis, the usage of repeated blocked chords and clusters become an indicator of the imitation of percussion ensemble playing in *Duo Ye*. Another example of imitation of percussion can be found in mm. 131-133, with the repeated blocked chords and accents (Example 56).



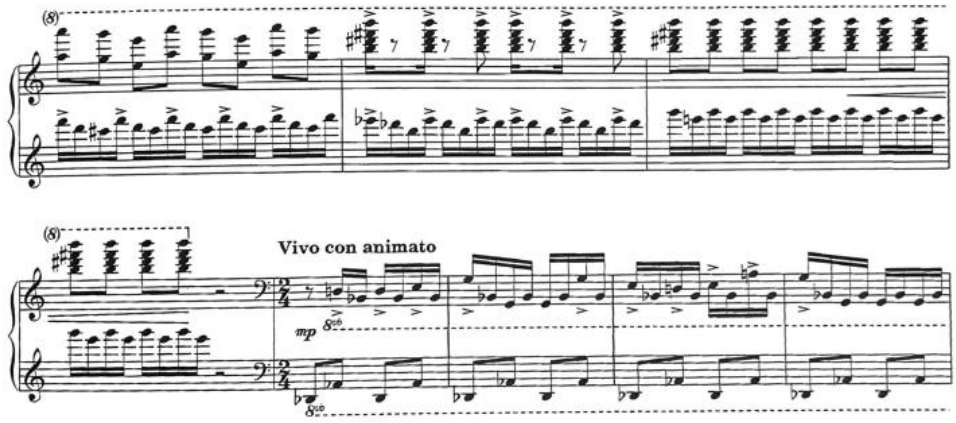
Example 53. Chen Yi, *Duo Ye*, mm. 115-120.



Example 54. *Duo Ye for Chamber Orchestra*, mm. 167-169.

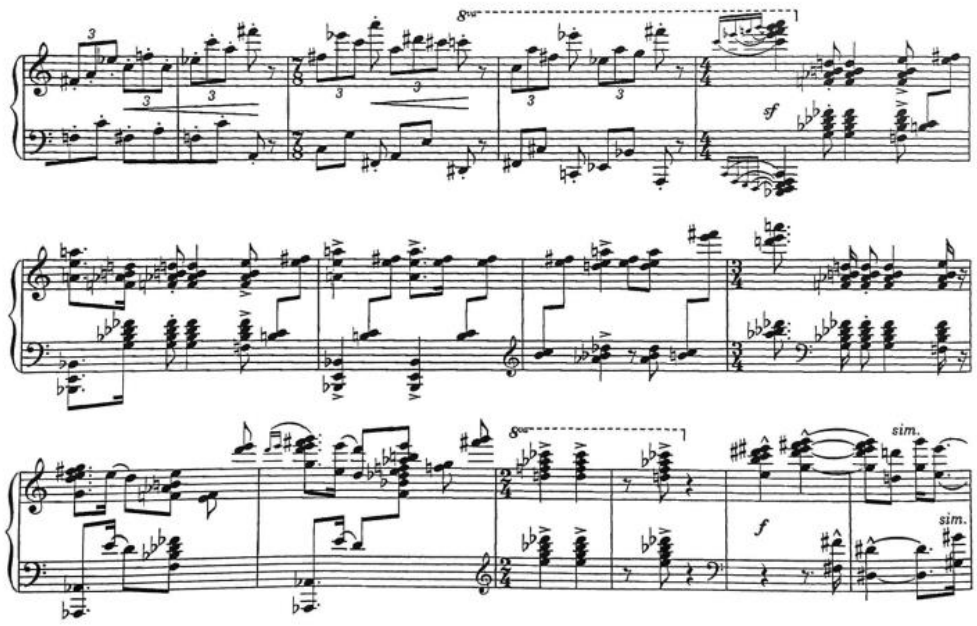


Example 55. *Duo Ye No. 2*, mm. 196-198.



Example 56. Chen Yi, *Duo Ye*, 130-137.

Another "martial" section can be found starting from m. 47, featuring clusters and blocked diminished chords in the two hands as well as seconds in a strong dance rhythm (Example 57). The alterations between blocked chords in the two hands and the eighth notes with intervals of seconds suggest different combinations of Peking Opera percussion instruments such as gongs, *danpigu*, cymbals, and *ban*. Registral placement of the chords also plays a significant role in providing different timbral effects of the percussion section here.



Example 57. Chen Yi, *Duo Ye*, mm. 43-57.

It is interesting to see the similarities between Bright Sheng and Chen Yi's imitation of percussion instruments. Obvious similarities would be their use of clusters and blocked chords as well as loud dynamics. Also, they create rhythmic and motivic patterns for the imitation of percussion ensemble playing. Bright Sheng focuses on using clusters and intervals of seconds to create strong rhythmic pulses with attention to the percussive rhythm and timbre, while Chen Yi uses blocked chords with triads and diminished chords to create percussive passages, possibly with the intention of creating a sense of melodic emphasis in addition to the percussiveness.

CONCLUSION

Tan Dun, Chen Yi, and Bright Sheng, internationally renowned contemporary Chinese-American *New Wave* composers, share commonalities in their use of Chinese folk musical elements in their piano works. It is particularly striking to see the similar journey of these three composers in terms of cultural and educational background, and how this background reflects their fusions of Chinese folk musical elements and Western compositional techniques. With their extensive experience in folk music, Chinese instruments, and Chinese musical structures, they use common folk elements throughout their piano works, including Chinese pentatonic scales and modes, original folk tunes, and imitations of Chinese instruments. There are areas of intersections and differences observed in how they use these elements in the piano works, which make each of the composers' musical styles unique.

Regarding the use of pentatonic scales and modes, we observe regional preference for modes used in folk songs. For example, in Tan Dun's *Eight Memories in Watercolor*, the *yu* mode is found in pieces 2, 3, and 4 due to the frequent use of this mode in Hunan folk songs. Tan Dun uses different pentatonic scales and transposition techniques to create sections and variety in the music. Meanwhile, Bright Sheng uses pentatonic scales in *My Song* for structural unity and to create musical tension and momentum in the music, for example, by using a juxtaposition of two pentatonic collections at a half step or tritone apart.

The three composers incorporate original folk musical contents into these works. Chen Yi takes the original refrain of the dance tune "Duo Ye" from the Dong ethnic minority and develops different thematic materials from the tune. Tan Dun uses original folk tunes from

different regions of the country in pieces, 2, 3, 4, and 8 in *Eight Memories in Watercolor*. Bright Sheng uses folk songs in the second and the fourth movements of *My Song*. The geographic classification of folk songs - southern and northern styles-can also be observed among these three works. With the use of an original folk tune, Tan Dun takes a more simple and straightforward approach in the application of the existing folk tunes by having simple harmonies for the accompaniment, making the folk tune easily recognizable and audible. In contrast to this, Bright Sheng embraces chromaticism and creates harmonic tension with the existing folk tune. For example, Sheng transposes the folk tune a tritone apart and creates a polyphonic texture with rhythmic augmentation in the fourth movement of *My Song*. In addition to these compositional techniques, Sheng also uses registral contrasts between voices and mixed sonorities of the dissonances of tritones and seconds to create intensity and timbral effects.

Common textures used in Chinese folk music can be found in the three works: heterophony in *shange* in "Herdboy's Song" from *Eight Memories in Watercolor* and the first movement of *My Song*; and call and response in *Duo Ye*. Both are unmeasured. The *shange* with heterophony in "Herdboy's Song" is relatively simple and in sync with little variation compared to Bright Sheng's. The heterophony in the first movement of *My Song* features unpredictable rhythmic patterns and embellishments with indication of improvisations between two separate voices. Chen Yi uses registral contrasts as a compositional device to demonstrate instances of call and response in the work, making the different roles, call and response, easily audible.

Imitation of Chinese folk instruments can be found in the three compositions. Imitation of "civil" melodic instruments such as *zheng*, *dizi*, *erhu*, *suona*, *sheng*, and *xiao* are common in the three works, often associated with the melody in the treble clefs in high registers and relatively *legato* playing. General characteristics in imitation of "martial" percussion instruments such as

Chinese gongs, drums, and cymbals, include the use of relatively louder dynamics, accented articulations, clusters, and chordal passages.

Each of these composers embrace their identities with their Chinese heritage and leave traces of Chinese folk musical elements in their works with unique personal styles. With the wonderful legacy of Chou Wen-chung, and the continuing contributions to the realms of music composition and cultural exchange by Chen Yi, Tan Dun, Bright Sheng and other Chinese-American composers, I hope that musicians will continue to explore these valuable works of art.

There are areas of exploration not covered in this dissertation which would benefit from further research. For example, rhythmic organization in relation to Chinese folk musical elements is a significant area that warrants greater study. The three *New Wave* composers explored in this document all migrated to the United States and have similar educational backgrounds. It would be worthwhile investigating the works of other *New Wave* composers who share similar cultural backgrounds as Tan Dun, Chen Yi and Bright Sheng, but migrated to a different country other than the United States. For example, Chen Qigang studied composition at the Beijing Central Conservatory around the late 1970s, then went to France for further study with French composer Olivier Messiaen, and eventually settled in France.[210] It would be interesting to perform a comparative study on the piano works of *New Wave* composers around the world and how they fuse aspects of Chinese folk musical elements in light of their respective global locations and influences.

[210] "Biography" *Qigang Chen (1951). http://www.chenqigang.com/biography.php*

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