Analyzing And Comparing Selected Works For Violin And Piano By Chen Gang, Chen Guoquan And Bright Sheng

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ANALYZING AND COMPARING SELECTED WORKS FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO
BY CHEN GANG, CHEN GUOQUAN AND BRIGHT SHENG

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DEDICATION

To my loving parents, Donglin Zou (1959-2017) and Jiqing Liang. Without you I would not be here today, having completed this dissertation and graduating with my Doctor of Musical Arts degree. You have been there with me every step of the way towards this point in my life and career. Words cannot express how thankful I am for your constant and never-ending support, help, presence, patience, and love. I love you both so much!
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ABSTRACT

Cross-cultural musical synthesis plays an important role in the creation of musical progress in the twentieth century. This dissertation is a study on the development of the use of Chinese folk elements in Western-style compositions by Chinese composers. Through analyses of different compositions by traditional Chinese composers, Chen Gang and Chen GuoQuan, as well as Chinese-born American composer Bright Sheng, the aesthetic variations produced by the synthesis of Western and Eastern music is examined.

Chapter One focuses on the development of Chinese violin music promoted by the efforts of several generations of composers. Chapter Two presents the background information of Chen Gang and analysis of his violin piece *Morning in the Miao Village*. This chapter introduces the reader to the early development of Chinese music based on Western practice and the characteristics of the violin piece *Morning in the Miao Village*. Chapter Three is the introduction of composer Chen Guoquan and his violin piece *Seeing Somebody Off*, inspired by traditional Flower Drum opera. Chapter Four introduces Bright Sheng and his violin piece *A Night at the Chinese Opera*, inspired by the melody of the Beijing opera *Farewell My Concubine*. Through the analysis of this contemporary piece, we can learn about how the Chinese-born American composer pursued his own relationship with the musical sounds based on the elements drawn from traditional Chinese opera. Chapter Five is the analysis of Bright Sheng’s piece *Three Fantasies*. In this work, Sheng approaches new sonic effects through the combination of the Kazak and
Tibetan folk songs with advanced contemporary compositional techniques. Finally, through this comparison, we can understand the difference between the approaches made by traditionally oriented composers and a composer versed in contemporary musical idioms.
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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND OF CHINESE VIOLIN MUSIC

The origin of Chinese violin music can be traced back to the first violin solo piece Xing Lu Nan [Very difficult road] composed by a famous geologist Li Siguang (1889-1971) in 1920 in Paris during the period of the May Fourth Movement.\(^1\) According to Chinese musicologist Chen Lingqun, “Li Siguang graduated from University of Birmingham and was invited to deliver an academic speech in Paris.”\(^2\) There he composed this piece inspired by the patriotic emotions among local Chinese communities that was concerned about the colonial status of China. Lingqun estimates that “This romantic-style violin piece is not academically perfect in terms of the compositional techniques.”\(^3\) However, the deep thoughts and the model of the violin solo piece had a profound influence on the development of violin music in China. Meanwhile, the intellectual and political development associated with the May Fourth Movement became

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\(^1\) According to Encyclopaedia Britannica the May Fourth Movement was an “intellectual revolution and sociopolitical reform movement that occurred in China in 1917-21. The movement was directed toward national independence, emancipation of the individual, and rebuilding society and culture.” “May Fourth Movement,” Encyclopaedia Britannica, accessed December 6, 2017, https://www.britannica.com/event/May-Fourth-Movement.


\(^3\) Ibid.,
the main catalyst for the establishment of national music based on western practice.\(^4\)

Thus, the May Fourth Movement was considered the earliest attempt to combine Chinese music with formal principle based on Western harmonization. For instance, musician Liu Tianhua, one of the leaders of the reform group, standardized the repertoire for *erhu* and *pipa*, added new compositions and established this repertoire as the new national music.\(^5\) This historical context also promoted the development of Chinese violin music.

In the field of music, Xiao Youmei (1884-1940) is regarded as the pioneer and founder. He studied the knowledge of Western music at the Tokyo Imperial University and the Leipzig Conservatory. His String Quartet in D major was composed when he studied in Germany and was regarded as the first string quartet work composed by a Chinese composer. This piece explored the styles of Baroque and early classical periods with a fluent melody line, obvious tonal characteristics, and rigorous form structure. This piece is also regarded as a model of later chamber musical creations. Meanwhile, he was a friend of Li Siguang and helped Li to revise his violin piece *Xing Lu Nan*. The manuscripts of the composition were found among Xiao’s possessions after his death.

After the attempt of Li Siguang and his contemporaries, Chinese composers such as Ma Sicong (1912-1987) and Xian Xinghai (1905-1945), student of Xiao Youmei, also composed excellent violin pieces in succession. Zhang Jingwei states that “Ma Sicong


studied composition in his early time in Paris.” His violin compositions were influenced by western music style and technique, and Chinese national style is also reflected in his composition. He emphasized that musical compositions should reflect the unique national spirit rather than simply imitate the western style. The melody of his violin pieces is based on the Chinese folk songs, therefore incorporating a unique national flavor. For example, the origin of the melody theme of his Si Xiang Qu [Song of Nostalgia] (1937) comes from a folk song from Inner Mongolia, Riders of the Great Wall. He expands the original melody line, switches it to the lower register, and turns it into passionate homesick music. Generally, the style of the traditional Chinese music has the tendency to be smooth and expressive, which can be seen in Si Xiang Qu. Also, the theme of his violin piece The First Rondo comes from the Suiyuan (area in Inner Mongolia today) folk song Say Goodbye to Lover. His re-creation makes the mood of this melody more happy and exciting. With the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War, he promoted the composition of a new style of Chinese violin pieces with heavy orchestration. In his music, we can see the special historical aesthetic characteristics. Affected by Ma Sicong’s inspiration, the later composers tend to combine characteristic folk songs with an element of certain historical and social contexts which influenced the variation in the aesthetics of violin music.

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8 Ibid., 22.
Another composer, Xian Xinghai (1905-1945), studied violin and composition in the Shanghai National Conservatory of Music (the predecessor of today’s Shanghai Conservatory of Music) and Conservatoire Supérieur de Paris. He accepted systematic and rigorous music training. His international perspective helped him to explore the Chinese style based on western compositional techniques, including the use of tonal harmony, traditional forms, and motivic development. He attempted to use western instruments to express Chinese flavor. For example, his violin piece *Hong Mai Zi* [The Red Wheat] is arranged from the Kazakh nation’s folk song. Xian Xinghai keeps the original flavor of this music in violin performance by using western compositional skills.

Additionally, Sang Tong (whose original name is Zhu Jingqing, 1923-2011), educator, composer and music theorist, was a special composer during that time. His violin piece *Ye Jing* [Night Scene] (1947) was the first Chinese atonal violin piece that includes Schoenberg’s twelve-tone serial technique. This is also a programmatic music piece which conveys sad and exciting emotions as it tries to describe the scene of a lonely poet wandering the quiet lakeside. Then this scene disappears and leaves the background of the poet and the chirp of the nightingale at the end. This piece has some characteristics of impressionism. The semitone and tritone play the main role in shaping the element of the atonal organization. Using atonal and twelve-tone serial technique in the process of composing created the precedent for future violin music composing and represented a brave fusion of Western and Chinese music. These composers such as Li Siguang, Ma Feng Xi, “Chen Gang xiaotiqi zuopin chuangzuo jiedu” [the Interpretation about Chen Gang’s violin compositions], (Master’s thesis, Nanjing shifan daxue [Nanjing Normal University] 2005), 4.
Sicong, Sang Tong and Xian Xianhai could be regarded as the first generation of composers combining Chinese elements with Western compositional techniques.

After the birth of the Republic of China in 1949, in addition to the works of the individual composers, the introduction of Western-style education helped Chinese people and musicians develop Western-style music. These curricula had exposed Chinese people to western culture and music, which never happened before. Many excellent composers benefitted from these curricula and were trained with these new thoughts and emerged in prominent roles in Chinese Music during this period. One of them is Chen Gang (b.1937). He studied at the Shanghai Conservatory of music in 1955 and composed famous violin pieces such as *Butterfly Lovers* (1959), *Morning in the Miao Village* (1975), *the Sun is Shining over the Tashkuergan* (1976), and other works. Another composer Chen Guoquan (b.1937) studied music at the Hubei Art Institute (the predecessor of the Wuhan Conservatory of Music). His violin piece *Seeing Somebody Off* reflected a happy scene of life in his words. (“may be seeing somebody off to join the army or seeing somebody off to go to University”). This piece synthesizes elements from a regional Chinese opera (the Flower Drum Song of Mianyang in Hubei province) and the tonal color of the violin.

Li Zili (b.1937) is also an important composer who drives the development of violin music. He composed a series of excellent violin music that greatly enriched the Chinese violin music repertoire. His violin pieces include *Fengshou Yuge* [Fisherman’s Song], *Happy to See the Hope, Memories of Yan’an*, and so on. His music style is full of the power of life and inspiration because his music focuses on the synthesis of certain

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scenes and the connection in mind. For instance, in his violin piece *Fisherman’s Song*,
the theme describes the scene of fisherman going fishing on the sea and coming back
with a good harvest of fish. At the beginning of this piece, the melody is elegant and
emotional in order to portray the night scenery of the gulf. Another descriptive part is the
end, which is also the climax of this piece, expressing the happy harvest. This piece
influenced a contemporary composer Chen Yi (b.1953) who wrote a violin piece also
named *Fisherman’s Song*. Chen Yi added more advanced compositional techniques in
this piece such as a polyphonic texture and more complex harmonic structure. These
traditional violin music composers provided a firm foundation and room to develop for
later composers.

The Cultural Revolution in China that happened from 1966 to 1976 had a terrible
influence on education, science and culture. The Cultural Revolution brought China's
education system to a virtual halt for some time. Many intellectuals were sent to rural
labor camps. Many survivors and observers suggest that almost anyone with skills over
that of the average person was made the target of political “struggle” in some way.
People were forbidden to accept western spirit and thinking. After the Cultural
Revolution, composers were once again encouraged to create works for people using
traditional Chinese folk materials. Also, after the Chinese Economic Reform starting in
1978, a flood of young composers and musicians entered the Central Conservatory in
Beijing to resume their musical studies. The young composers seized any possible
opportunities to travel abroad and absorb Western avant-garde musical idioms.¹¹ These
new generation composers, including Tan Dun, Chen Yi, and Sheng Zongliang (Bright

Sheng), further contributed to the cultural communications between Western music and Chinese traditional music by using contemporary compositional skills.

Chinese pioneering composers already realized the importance of using western instruments and applying western compositional skills to provide the basis for the musical synthesis. By Chen Gang and Chen Guoquan’s time, the awareness of applying the combination of western tonal harmonization, Chinese folk musical elements, and Chinese pentatonic mode as a synthesis technique had reached maturity. Analyzing the historical background, compositional structure, and the method of combining western musical style and Chinese traditional folk songs in Chen Gang and Chen Guoquan’s representative works can help us understand the development process of the Chinese tonal violin piece in the mid-twentieth century.

In her essay, music theorist Yayoi Uno Everett states that “with the development of the contemporary composition techniques, Chinese composers turn to adopt prevalent structural principles of Western contemporary music, which are characterized by twelve-tone composition, serialism, and indeterminacy with sources indigenous to China in an effort to develop an individual musical voice.”\(^{12}\) Bright Sheng is one of the representatives of contemporary composers. In the program notes to his violin piece *A Night at the Chinese Opera*, Sheng states that “the basic materials in this work are derived from an instrumental interlude of the well-known Peking Opera, *Farewell My Concubine*, while the piano part often gives the rhythm of the Chinese opera.”\(^{13}\)

\(^{12}\) Ibid., 8.
\(^{13}\) Bright Sheng, Program Notes to *A Night at the Chinese Opera* (New York: G. Schirmer, 2005).
However, the compositional choices Sheng adopts is vastly different from the method used by Chen Gang and Chen Guoquan in their earlier compositions.

The development of western-style music in China unfolded over several generations of composers’ endeavors and innovations. They enriched the diversity of Chinese violin compositions. Exploring and analyzing representative violin pieces helps us understand the aesthetic changes and shifts under different social contexts and the technique of combining (synthesizing) cultures.
CHAPTER TWO

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF CHEN GANG AND ANALYSIS OF MORNINGS IN THE MIAO VILLAGE

Biographical Sketch of Chen Gang

Chen Gang (b. 1935) is one of the most famous Chinese composers of the last century. Throughout his life, he experienced many significant historic events including the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), the Chinese Civil War (1945-1949), the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), and the Economic Reform (starting in 1978), which were all important periods in China. These unique background experiences influenced his life and musical composition. Before his time, first-generation composers such as Li Siguang and Xian Xinaghai built the foundation of traditional Chinese violin music. Ma Sicong took further steps in exploring violin music based on traditional Chinese folk songs and ballads. After the May Fourth Movement (1911-1922), a few composers got the opportunity to receive systematic music education, which laid a basis for Chinese violin music to flourish later. Chen Gang was one of the representatives of this new generation of composers and he was influenced by this historical context.

In the 1920s, Chinese people were simultaneously suffering from western invasion and being influenced by more positive western ideas. Specifically, in terms of music, different music genres came to China during this time. Hon-Lun Yang states that, especially in Shanghai, had become a center of western musical activities, where not only Westerners but also a good number of Chinese engaged with Western music as practitioners. Shen Bao, the local Chinese newspaper, documents the complexity of Shanghai’s musical soundscape, characterized by
the coexistence of musics of diverse origins——Chinese musical genres from different geographical regions as well as different kinds of Western music, classical, pop, jazz, Russian, Jewish, and so on.\textsuperscript{14}

This unique background boosted Shanghai’s cultural attraction, which potentially promoted the Shanghainese’s recognition of Western music. Shanghai became the root of \textit{Haipai Culture}\textsuperscript{15} that was defined by “a group of Beijing writers in 1920 to criticize some Shanghai scholars and the styles of embracing or admiring western capitalism and western culture. \textit{Haipai} culture is always open and generous, which fuses some elements of western cultures with the ancient cultures of the Yangtze River.”\textsuperscript{16} It is based on the synthesis of Wu and Yue (the area of Jiangsu and Zhejiang) cultures and includes some foreign cultures. Also, it fosters a remarkable artistic environment that nurtured artists.

The compositions of Chen Gang’s father Chen Gexin (1914-1961) are a very significant component of \textit{Haipai} culture. He is a famous composer of popular songs, whose pieces were always sung by popular singers. Even though he never obtained the professional musical education that would have perfected his orchestration, his compositional ideas represented a synthesis of Chinese and Western flavors. For example, his song \textit{Rose, Rose, I Love You} (which was often misunderstood as a western song), was the interlude song in the 1940 Chinese film \textit{The Wandering Songstress}. This became his most popular song and was later translated into English, helping make


American singer Frank Laine (1913-2007) a star. He also was talented in conducting and singing.

Influenced by his father Chen Gexin, Chen Gang took systematic music courses such as piano, harmony and composition after the Chinese Civil War, and he became a student at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music in 1955. Chen Gang and his contemporaries explored and broadened violin art comprehensively, based on the foundation created by first-generation composers like Xian Xinghai and Ma Sicong. Chen Gang made adjustments and additions to tonality, structure, technique, music connotation, and the artistic conception in compositions. Through this series of explorations, traditional Chinese violin music forged ahead rapidly. He and his colleague He Zhanhao’s representative violin piece Butterfly Lovers was composed in 1959 and is the most famous Chinese violin piece in the world. It was the synthesis of Chinese Yue opera, the western harmony system, and the Chinese pentatonic scale.

Chen Gang and his contemporaries’ compositional careers can be separated into three periods: before the Cultural Revolution, during the Cultural Revolution, and after the Economic Reform. According to Yayoi Uno Everett, “During the Cultural

Revolution, the Ministry of Culture prohibited public performance of music by contemporaneous Western composers, such as Bartok, Debussy, and Rimsky-Korsakov and Stravinsky.” In 1966, Lin Biao (1907-1971) and Jiang Qing (1915-1991) invited people from the troops to have a meeting, aimed at the fields of literature and art (the authorities thought the fields of literature and art were the “sally port” of the Cultural Revolution), after which they edited the document Comrade Lin Biao Entrusted Jiang Qing to Hold a Symposium on the Literature and Art Work (also known as the “February Symposium”), which fabricated the conclusion that in the fields of literature and art exist a large number of anti-communist and anti-socialism works. They decided to carry out a socialist revolution on the cultural front. By then, the whole music circle had become totally paralyzed: the Chinese Musicians Association and its different regions’ chapters were forced to stop working, music journals were forced to stop publishing, all the music performance groups (except “Model Opera” group) stopped performing, and a large number of musicians suffered insults and criticisms. All the music schools were closed to carry out this revolution. Many excellent music compositions that were composed before the Cultural Revolution were labelled as representatives of feudalism, capitalism, and revisionism, including

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21 According to Encyclopaedia Britannica, Lin Biao, Chinese military leader who, as a field commander of the Red Army, contributed to the communists’ 22-year struggle for power and held many high government and party posts. He played a prominent role in the first several years of the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), but in 1971 he allegedly sought to remove Chinese leader Mao Zedong and seize power; his plot was discovered, and he died under obscure circumstances. “Lin Biao” Encyclopaedia Britannica, accessed February 18, 2018. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Lin-Biao.
Chen Gang’s *Butterfly Lovers*. Meanwhile, many famous musicians such as Li Guoquan (1914-1966, composer), Gu Shengying (1937-1967, pianist), and Tian Han (1898-1968, playwright; opera writer; lyricist of the Song *the Great Wall*, of which the first stanza was used as the national anthem of China) were persecuted and tortured to death. Ma Sicong had no choice but to leave China. Chen Gang was put into prison and suffered persecution. Chinese composers were prohibited from composing western-style music.

As a western instrument, the violin was also affected by this political issue. Fortunately for the violin, Jiang Qing (1915-1991), known as “the chief advocate and engineer of the transformation from traditional operas to revolutionary ones” had chosen “the Beijing opera as her ‘laboratory experimentation’ for accomplishing this radical change in theater art.” Jiang Qing screened all the musical activities and promoted art reformation, claiming that western instruments enable greater musical technique and expression, while some traditional Chinese instrument ensembles are not consonant and have a narrower register. So, the “Model Opera” could be played on the violin. At that time, the violin served as an accompanying instrument that was played in the orchestra for Model Opera. Under the encouragement of the authorities, many art groups started rehearsing opera. Many people wanted to be members of these art groups to obtain a better life in that period. As Chen Gang recalled, “these violinists had extra special

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subsidies in addition to the normal stipends. And during that time, almost 100,000 violins per year were produced by the factory in Shanghai. The ‘violin study fever’ was all over China.”  

This unique social context promoted people’s enthusiasm for studying violin and laid a foundation for training musicians and educators. After the Cultural Revolution, these students continued to study music, and many of them became active and accomplished musicians. This “violin study fever” stimulated the development of violin art to some degree.

Another aspect that had influence on the growth of violin art was that all the violin performance repertory was limited to the “Model Opera” and some songs with approved political themes. Violinists had no pieces to play except the “Model Opera.” Playing, studying, and composing any Western and Western-style pieces was prohibited. The existing Western-style violin pieces, such as Chen Gang’s Butterfly Lovers, were criticized and forbidden. Chen Gang himself suffered persecution. Many violin learners could not access Western violin treatises and etudes, which inhibited the development of their technical progress.

During this period, music compositions had several essential requirements. For example, the material should come from and have some relevance to the masses. More explicitly, the material should be about the masses and be favorable towards them. Also, these compositions’ subjects should not be contrary to political rules, and they should have very clear descriptive themes and content. 

Performers’ activities were also

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restricted during this period. For example, the concertmaster of Shanghai Symphony Orchestra, Pan Yinlin (b.1947) was only able to play the piece *The Emancipated Buffalo Boy* in his recital, which describes the progress of the poor fighting for their rights and standing up to cruel exploitation from the old society.\(^{29}\)

Deficiency of violin repertoire and his own sense of commitment to music inspired Chen Gang to begin composing violin pieces again. It was not easy to compose high quality and technical pieces. Influenced by the Party’s policy, composers had to limit their musical ideas within limited range, and that resulted in the song-like thematic subject becoming an important characteristic of the composing model, since song was the most popular musical form for Chinese people.\(^{30}\) Chen Gang’s violin compositions during that time had a tendency to arrange folk songs that described the regional flavor and characteristics of national minority groups.\(^{31}\) During 1972-1975, Chen Gang composed nine solo violin pieces, such as *Sunshine on Tashkurgan* - a piece which embodies some special features of the Tadzhikistan people who live in the east of the Pamir mountain which is surrounded by continuous mountains topped with snow - *Morning in the Miao Village*, and *Golden Grate*. Some of his violin pieces contain descriptions of gorgeous natural scenery and diligent, good people, such as *Sunshine on Tashkurgan, Morning in the Miao Village*, and others. Another part of his pieces’ melodies were arrangements of songs that praised the leader Chairman Mao, such as *Golden Grate, Loving-kindness. Beating the Tiger Climbs Mountain* is arranged from the

\(^{29}\) Chen Gang, *Hudie shi ziyou de* [Butterflies are free], (Shanghai: Wenhui chubanshe [Wenhui Publishing house], 2005), 37.

\(^{30}\) Guozhong Sun, “Zhu Jian-er’s Symphonies: Context, Style, Significance” (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1997), 79.

same title “Model Opera” that describes the story of the Eighth Route Army soldier annihilating the leader of bandits, Zuo Shandiao, in the Mudanjiang River area successfully, under the guidance of the Communist Party. Chen Gang recalled that these pieces expressed people’s expectations for a better life and appealed to people not to give up hope; in other words, these pieces could also be regarded as the ‘sunshine’, ‘morning’ and ‘gold color’ in that black time.\textsuperscript{32} Since his pieces did not conflict with the current political direction, Chen Gang’s violin pieces spread successfully in that harsh political environment. Also, these violin pieces were in addition to that music resource deficient period, which inspired people to appreciate music that differed from “Model Opera.”

\textbf{Analysis of Morning in the Miao Village}

The violin piece \textit{Morning in the Miao Village} composed by Chen Gang in 1975, was based on the Miao nation’s traditional folk song \textit{Flying Song} and Bai Chenren’s piece for whistler with the same name.\textsuperscript{33} This piece is in a clear ternary form structure with descriptive and narrative characteristics. It seems to depict two gorgeous pictures: one is a peaceful scenery during morning in the valley, where the birds chirp through the thick forest; the other one is a scene of happy Miao people dancing and singing.

\textsuperscript{32} Chen Gang, ed., [Xiezouqu: Chen Gang he ta de pengyoumen] (Concertos: Chen Gang and His Friends) [Shanghai dongfang chubanshe] (Shanghai: Oriental Press, 2010), 243.

\textsuperscript{33} According to Baidu the whistler is invented by famous Bamboo flute master Yu Xunfa (1946-2006) in 1971, which is made of short bamboo tube cut from the rest part of making bamboo flute. It can play the note register from d1- d2. “Whistler,” Baidu. Accessed February 12, 2018, https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E5%8F%A3%E7%AC%9B/733061?fr=aladdin.
“the Miao live primarily in southern China’s mountains, in the provinces of Guizhou, Yunnan, Sichuan, Hubei, Hunan, Guangxi, Guangdong and Hainan.”\(^{34}\) Miao people’s folk songs are rooted in the people’s daily work and life from ancient times to the present. They reflect the simple aesthetic consciousness of the Miao people.\(^ {35}\) Miao nationality does not have their own characters to write. For thousands of years, they preserved their history by recounting it as sagas, legends handed down from one generation of storytellers to another and turning these legends into folk songs. *Flying Song*, spread from southeast of the Guizhou province, is representative of Miao folk songs characterized by the broaden register and sonorous bold timbre. The traditional melody of *Flying Song* can be affixed to different lyrics. For example, around the 1950s, an influential song named *Chairman Mao Comes* was the most representative *Flying Song*.\(^ {36}\)

The introduction of Chen’s violin piece starts with a free tempo that is very typical traditional Chinese music, transmitting the potential intensity through the leisurely melodic line. Also, it consists of two sections. The first section (example 2-1) of the introduction is based on the basic melody of the Miao people’s *Flying Song* (example 2-2). The melody is based on the Chinese pentatonic mode, the Chinese pentatonic scale


\(^{36}\) Zhou Miaochen. “Lun miaozu feige yinyue shenme yu yanchang tese——yi miaozu xinge 《miaoling haodifang wei li》” [Discussion the music aesthetic and singing features of Hmong Song——take the new Miao song *Miao village, a good place* as an example] (Master’s thesis, Shanghai yinyue xueyuan [Shanghai conservatory of music], 2014), 5.
consists of Gong (do), Shang (re), Jue (mi), Zhi (sol), and Yu (la). Furthermore, each note in this scale can function as the tonic to build five different pentatonic modes. The melody of *Flying Song* is D Zhi (G is the gong note) mode surrounding by the unstable Jue (B) note and Gong (G) note. Using the logic of “movable do” system, we can see the skeleton chord is “do-mi-sol,” with an addition of “la,” which has the obvious characteristics of Zhi mode.

The violin part of Chen’s piece starts in the E Zhi mode. The violin part and the *Flying Song* both are in Zhi mode with different tonics and final notes. The tempo marking of violin part is “Ad libitum” that is typically used in traditional Chinese instruments music, folk song, and opera. Meanwhile, the dotted bar lines suggest that, in playing this phrase, it is not essential to precisely emphasize the strong and weak beat. However, the dynamics still need to be observed. Starting from the comparatively high bright register on the note E with the glissando back and forth, and adding the long and freedom melody line, the opening depicts the peaceful dawn of the Miao village morning. The piano accompaniment part consists of flowing arpeggio figures borrowed from the playing style of the Zheng, one of the traditional Chinese instruments, a plucked string within a stringed instrument family. Its articulation is clear accompanying for long violin melody line. The use of “glissando” is common in traditional violin pieces that try to imitate the characteristic articulation of some traditional instruments, such as erhu.

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37 According to the *Encyclopædia of China: Music and Dance Volume*, the Chinese pentatonic scale is Gong (do) - Shang(re) -Jue (mi) - Zhi (sol)-Yu (la). Each note in this scale can be the tonic to build mode, so it could be five different pentatonic modes. Committees of editorial board of Encyclopædia of China, ed., *Music and Dance Volume*, (Encyclopædia of China Publishing House, no.1, 437).
bamboo flutes, *suona*, and so on. The glissando at the beginning is same-finger glissando that produces a natural and smooth effect and results in exquisite timbre, peculiar charm, and elegant tone.

Ad libitum

Example 2.1. The first section of the Introduction, mm.1-12.

Example 2.2. The melody of Miao nation’s *Flying Song*.38

The second section (example 2.3) (mm.13-22) of the introduction part is the famous “bird chirp” section that depicts the different kinds of birds happily chirping in the morning mountain. This section applies some the *Hua She* techniques of bamboo flute

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38 The melody of the *Flying Song* is taken from Li Jie “《Miaozhaifeige》 yinyue fenxi ji yanzou tanji ji yanzou jifa fanxi” [The research of the analysis of music, performance and performance techniques of *Miao Flying Song*] (Master’s thesis, Wuhan yinyue xueyuan [Wuhan Conservatory of Music], 2009), 5. In the work, the melody appears with multiple texts, but the author does not specify the source. Here it is shown with the musical notation only.
to imitate birds’ different mood chirps. Specifically, the *Hua She* sounds like high-pitched trill that is very close to bird’s chirps. *Hua She* effect is created by impacting the tongue in the mouth cavity through the breath, causing the friction between the tip of the tongue and the upper part of the tooth to achieve a crushing effect.\(^{39}\) In fact, similar effect also could be found in Romanian composer Grigoras Dinicu (1889-1949)’s violin piece *Ciocarlia*.\(^{40}\)

In Chen’s composition, in measure 13, the violin part has three small slide markings, making different figures slide to same A three time, to produce the effect of a bird chirping lightly in a quiet village. Then the piano accompaniment part plays the same note-group. Obviously, the piano cannot reproduce the glissando effect to make the echo of this bird’s chirp in the open village. Then the violin plays the same glissando notes group that sounds like another bird’s chirp to responds the first bird’s chirp. Also, the piano accompanying provides another echo. In the development of the music, two birds’ chirpings cause a flock of birds’ lively chirps. From measure 15-23, Chen Gang marks “↑”, “↓” above several notes to indicate that these notes should be played a little higher or lower than the notes normally indicated. As Chen Gang recalled, this piece was written for a violinist Tang Yun (b.1950) who cooperate with Chen Gang to compose this piece. Tang Yun plays the erhu, and she applied the performing style of erhu (two-stringed bowed instrument) to violin performance. They found the “chirp” should be played using microtones since playing in tune will not be similar to bird songs. An


interesting story is that when Tang Yun played this “chirp” section in Beijing Concert hall, a bird flew over the stage and chirped with her music.\textsuperscript{41}

In this section, Chen Gang combined many western violin performance techniques with characteristics of the articulations of traditional Chinese instruments. For example, he used double-stop trills that we can find the model in Guiseppe Tartini (1692-1770)’s famous violin sonata in G minor (\textit{Devil’s Trill Sonata}). The difference of double-stop trills between these two pieces is that Chen Gang added glissandos following the double-stop trills to emphasize the strong level of the noisy chirps, which gives the passage a heavy Chinese musical flavor. The following staccato and glissando four-sixteenth notes with tempo marking “\textit{accel.}” imitates the whistler’s \textit{Hua She} techniques to expose the feature of clear and tactful chirp. In measure 20, is a “ricochet” passage with a succession of descending half-steps, which could be found in Henryk Wieniawski (1835-1880)’s violin pieces. Wieniawski’s \textit{Variations on an Original Theme Op.15} contains such a “ricochet” measure in the cadenza part (tempo marked “\textit{ad libitum}”) (example 2.4). It is not essential to make every note clear, but the real purpose is to make the music virtuosic and humorous.

The \textit{ricochet} can make the melody more humorous and lively, promoting the clarity of sound and the ringing tone in this section. At the end, the birds’ chirps disappear on a series of elegant and humor long notes embellished by grace notes.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 56.
Example 2.3. The second section of the introduction, “chirp” section, mm.13-23.

Example 2.4. The ricochet measure in Wieniawski, Variations on an Original Theme Op.15.

Following the introduction, the main section of this piece has four sections. The music picture changes from the birds to the Miao people. The first section (mm.24-41) is faster with the expression markings, “happy and ardency.” Starting with the A Gong system mode, the melody is still based on the main five notes of the Flying Song. The agitated accompanying arpeggios convey the exhilaration in the piano part, which seems
to express the scene of Miao people’s dancing and singing. The strong rhythmic drive with the *forte* dynamic marking depicts the exciting dancing rhythm.

Example 2.5. *Morning in the Miao Village*, mm.24-29.

The second section (mm.42-65) starts with accented and dotted sixteenth double stops in the lower register increasing the volume and producing an unmelodic and percussive effect. The mixing of the accents and staccatos intensifies the even rhythmic pattern that depicts the celebrative dance emotions that grows into a climax. Also, during the process of the build-up of passionate rhythm, the composer decorates the phrase to make the musical line smoother and more fluent. For example, in mm 49, when the strong double-stops proceed to the *ff* dynamics, the piano plays the echo as a response to the violin part instead of playing the same notes and rhythm together with violin as before. After the transition (four trilled-quarter notes with glissando), the melody line reappears again.

The third section (67-80) is the emotional, lyrical part that creates a tremendous contrast with the intense and fast rhythmic section. The lyrical melody starts in D Gong mode and all the harmonies are based on the D-F#-A triad, that expose the typical flavor of Chinese folk song. It strikingly gives expression to a praise of happiness, life, and hopes for the future. The melody line is simple, fluid and full of humor reflected in the ornament trill-note, glissando triplet and harmonics, which sounds like the description of Miao nationality’s the positive attitude towards life for thousands of years. The measure 81 is a virtuosic part, the left hand pizzicato and with the note that are produced by bow stroking the string, which serve as the preparation for the fourth section. This virtuosic measure could be found in Niccolò Paganini (1782-1840)’s 24 Caprices for Solo Violin, Op.1, No. 24, Variation 9. The bow stroke with left-hand pizzicato is one of the iconic violin techniques in Paganini’s compositions. Again, the theme synthesizes nineteenth-century virtuosic techniques with Chinese folk materials.

In the fourth section of his piece (mm.83-123), Chen Gang suddenly turns around the direction of music to the traditional roots of Chinese music. Generally speaking, the fourth section (mm.83-123) also describes a scene in which Miao People are dancing, singing, and playing instruments, but this scene is more varied compared to the first and the second sections. Tempo speeds up five times to elevate the passion of the music. Starting with the phrase in example 2.7, the violin part includes accented quarter notes, ricochet, and harmonics, which are repeated and gradually sped up to express the dance with large range of dance motions. The dance might be the “Lusheng Dance” accompanied by a lusheng (a reed-pipe wind instrument), which is a competitive and
technical dance. The expressive mark is “bold and strong” that meets the higher register in the solo part to express the agitated mood.

The section starting from measure 97 to 103 is the diminution of the passage from measure 82 to 85. Chen Gang states that he used a special technique of playing the same note with different fingerings to imitate the *Hua She* techniques in flute. The violin technique could be found in Antonio Bazzini (1818-1897)’s *Dance of the Goblins*, Op.25. Bazzini is an Italian composer-violinist who was inspired by Paganini to become a member of virtuosic performers in the nineteenth century. This piece is full of flying staccatos, ricochets, double-stop harmonics, and large-ranged shifts depicting the image of a goblin’s happy dance. Chen Gang was inspired from this piece, but the comparison between these two pieces still demonstrates some different aspects. Chen Gang uses different fingers to play the same note at the same position since he just needs the slight glissando effect produced by the shifts to express the vivid and rapturous mood. However, Bazzini requires that the note should be played in the same register on different strings resulting in the larger shifts in the timbres of the pitch.

Example 2.7. *Morning in the Miao Village*, mm. 82-85.

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42 Ibid., 64.
Finally, the development part ends in A gong mode. Then, after a short rest, the recapitulation restates the theme from the beginning of the whole piece. The section suggests that the dancing and singing have ended, and the village resumes the scene of calm and peacefulness. The melody ends in *tempo ritardando* and in harmonics with glissandos that depict the birds flying into the forest with softening echoes of their chirps. The tonality returns to E Zhi mode.

This piece features several vivid images in the Miao village. At the same time, Chen Gang was inspired by western composers and their works. He struck a careful balance between the flavor of Chinese music and the virtuosic violin techniques in order for the violin to express the musical characteristics of the Miao nation.
CHAPTER THREE

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF CHEN GUOQUAN AND ANALYSIS OF SEEING SOMEBODY OFF

Chen Guoquan (b. 1937) is one of the representative Chinese academic composers in modern China. He is a composer, choir director, and music theorist. His creative style reflects the characteristics of Chinese academic style and is influenced by a special social context.

Chen Guoquan is representative of Academism. The concept of “academism” was introduced to China at the early twentieth century from the West accompanied by its particular forms and meanings. In fact, Academy of Bologna, a fine art institution and the earliest academy, marks the beginning of systematic art education. As a result, this type of arts academies cultivated a great deal of talented artists in the painting and music areas. For instance, through the serious training of basic techniques in classrooms, many students mastered knowledge of composition of a picture, modelling, and the ability to reflect the emotion of the object. Also, the painter’s social status improved from humble workman to knowledgeable scholar.


45 Zheng Longyin. “Xueyuanpai yinyue yu wenhua ruanshili — jianlun xueyuanpai yinyue de xingshi tezheng” [Academic music and the cultural soft power — Discussion about the formal characteristics of academic music], Xinjiang yishu yanjiu [Research of Xinjiang Art], no 2 (2014): 4-8.
the mode of instruction between master and apprentice became normalized, and systematic teaching established a fast road for the development of western music. In 1927, the first professional institution of musical education, Shanghai National Conservatory of Music (the predecessor of Shanghai Conservatory of Music), was built in Shanghai. Shanghai was the city that, at that time, had the earliest connection with the West in China to absorb the essence of Western culture and arts. The first president of the school was Xiao Youmei (1884-1940), a noted Chinese music educator and composer. Under his leadership, Shanghai National Conservatory improved the serious teaching and training mode in the areas of performance, composition, theoretical research, and so on, which made an obvious contrast with the method of traditional style of teaching in which music was handed down by means of oral instruction and rote memorization. With the establishment of Shanghai National Conservatory of Music, the Western model became the foundation of music education. The conservatory became the standard for academism music in China regarding music education, training, research, and achievement. Also, it became a model for the subsequent establishment of nine conservatories of music spread throughout China on which Chinese music academism is based.

Chen Guoquan studied in Music Academy in Central-South China (the predecessor of Wuhan Conservatory of Music). His most famous violin music is Seeing Someone Off [Song Xing] (1959), which fortunately was composed during the period when composers were frequently combining the traditional Chinese musical elements with Western musical elements. As Everett states, with the birth of the Republic of China, Chinese schools opened western-style courses and accepted Western tunes.  

responded to the policy of “Down to the Countryside Movement” that began in 1956 to collect the folk materials in hinterland. “Down to the Countryside Movement” is slogan calling the educated youth to support and help the development of the agricultural and borderland construction. The purpose of this policy is to narrow the wide wealth gap between rural and urban areas. This movement prompted Chen Guoquan to contact with the masses and learn about different kinds of folk music. Chen Guoquan said that, during that time, China advocated that young people to go to rural areas for reeducation. In the field of music, musicians were encouraging to collect musical elements from the masses, with abundant diversity of music.

Chen Guoquan’s Seeing Somebody Off includes materials of the Flower Drum opera (one of the Chinese operas) in Mianyang, today named Xiantao city of Hubei Province area that he saw in performance. Music scholar Liang Luo states that,

*Xiqu*, loosely translated as “Chinese opera,” was reinvented in the early to mid-twentieth century and represented the convergence of at least three preoccupations of modern intellectuals, Chinese or otherwise. Packaged as “traditional,” it carried immediate cultural prestige for some but just as reflexively suspected of being “feudal” by others; its popularity meant pedagogical value to some and vulgarity to others; and insofar as it was perceived as expressing the “national essence”

The Flower Drum opera is one of the Chinese operas which has a long history and was distributed mainly in Hunan province, Hubei province, Shanxi province, Anhui

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48 Personal communication with Chen Guoquan, [December 20, 2017].
province, and so on.\textsuperscript{50} “Unlike other forms of Chinese opera, Flower Drum opera originally has only two roles and most of Flower Drum opera plays were originally \textit{Xiao Xi} that short plays lasting an hour or less.”\textsuperscript{51} Also, different areas’ Flower drum operas have different characteristics. The Mianyang Flower Drum opera originates from Qing Dynasty (1636-1912). According to the official document of Mianyang area history, the performance style of Mianyang Flower Drum opera was based on the combination of folk singing and dancing as well as Flower Drum (one of the ancient Han nation’s dances) created by laborers during their work and daily lives. Additionally, many of the plots of Flower Drum opera depict the lives of peasants and some love stories. The accompanying instruments includes bamboo flute, moon flute, and copper clappers.\textsuperscript{52} The repertory of Flower Drum opera expresses a positive attitude toward life and features plots with twists and turns that have satisfying outcomes.

Chen Guoquan’s violin piece \textit{Seeing Somebody Off} was inspired by a \textit{Xiao Xi} from a Flower Drum opera, named \textit{Zhan Huaqiang} [Standing by the flower wall]. The plot depicts a story that took place in feudal China. The princess Meirong’s fiancé Yang Yuchun is rejected by his relatives when he goes and seeks refuge with them. The princess Meirong feels depressed about that. Her servant girl knows about this issue and invites the princess to enjoy blooming flowers and takes her to the place nearby the inner

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\textsuperscript{50} \textit{Zhongguo dabaike quanshu} [Encyclopædia of China] 2nd ed. (Beijing: zhongguo dabaike quanshu chubanshe) [Beijing: Encyclopædia of China Publishing House, 2009, Volumn:10], 84


\end{flushleft}\n
wall. At that time, her fiancé has been waiting outside of the wall, and they meet each other. Finally, they decide to get married. The plot’s vivid twists and turns and memorable characters make a profound impression. There are also some dialogues that promote the plot’s development in this opera.

Chen Guoquan chooses a melody from this opera as the theme of the violin piece. *Seeing Somebody Off* has three main section. At the beginning of this piece, with the expression marking “Allegro,” he presents two identical groups of a perfect-fifth, open-string pizzicato pattern. These pizzicato groups (Example 3.1) are played by the violin alone, which focus on the rhythm consisting of dotted eighth notes, a down-beat eighth rest, an eighth note, and a quarter note. It imitates the traditional percussion instruments, a gong and a drum, which are usually used in folk music and opera. With its lively tempo and the bouncy feel produced by dotted notes, the rhythm shapes the foundation of happy mode at the beginning. Chen Guoquan said, we can imagine somebody leaving to study at the university or to see somebody joining the army. Generally speaking, *Seeing Somebody off* reflects a cheerful scene. In the *Zhan Huaqiang* opera, the percussion part is played during the pause in characters’ conversations. This is a typical performance practice in traditional opera. In this piece, pizzicatos are played on perfect-fifth open strings, which will produce the most resonance and ringing effects.

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\text{Allegro}
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53 Personal communication with the composer over the phone on February 8\textsuperscript{th}, 2018.
After the pizzicato passage, the first main theme of this piece is presented. The first theme (mm.5-23) is repeated two times in the first section (mm.1-116). The first theme based on the D Zhi mode, which also includes some upward glissandos, downward glissandos and slight slide between major second. These slides increase the sense of humor and are characteristic of Chinese folk music (Example 3.2).

Example 3.2. Chen Guoquan, *Seeing Somebody Off*, mm.5-12.

Through my observation, the “glissando” effect appears in many traditional violin pieces and is a representative technique in Chinese folk music performance. The use of ascending glissando is more frequent than down-glissando in Chinese violin pieces. Similar glissando effects also exist in many western pieces, especially in Hungarian and gypsy style violin music. These include Poblo de Sarasate (1844-1908)’s *Carmen Fantasy, Zigeunerweisen*, Op.20, and Vittorio Monti (1868-1922)’s *Csárdás*. However, in many western works, composers prefer using down-glissando than ascending glissando. Another characteristics of the use of glissandos in western pieces is that the ascending glissando and descending glissando do not appear one after another. They are separated by other notes. In Chinese traditional violin pieces, composers prefer to use more ascending glissando, such as Chen Gang’s composition which contains more ascending glissando. At times there are no intervals between up and down glissando patterns. There is a key point to differentiate the two different styles.

The first theme exposes a lively dance-like melody that reminds me of a scene describing a happy seeing-off. Then Chen Guoquan adds a transition section (mm.24-46)
based on the first theme and added more double-stops staccatos to exaggerate the harmonic effect (Examples 3.3 and 3.4). Following these double-stops is the expressive melody line that is transformed from the opera.

Example 3.3. Chen Guoquan, Seeing Somebody Off, mm. 28-30.

In the repetition of the first theme (mm.47-76), the accented perfect-fourth melodic intervals are played in octaves which will amplify the sound and move the music to its climax (Example 3.5).

Example 3.5. Chen Guoquan, Seeing Somebody Off, mm. 52-55.

From measure 71-75, the tempo slows down. The piano accompaniment echoes the violin melody. Then the music enters the second theme (mm.77-116) of the first section with expressive mark “dolce” and tempo mark “Andante.” The key of this slow
theme switches to D Yu mode. (That means the Gong note will be F, Shang will be the G, Jue will be the A, and Zhi should be C, which has one flat since the Gong note decides the key.) The melody line, based on the standard traditional pentatonic mode, is flowing and expressive. Furthermore, the ornamentations of mordent and glissando in the lyric line imitate the singing style in Flower Drum opera (Example 3.6).

Example 3.6. Chen Guoquan, Seeing Somebody Off, mm. 93-95.

The second theme is repeated from measure 97, which keeps the same melody but switch to the low register (measure 97 marked sul G, measure 107 marked sul D). The change of the melody registration causes the music to be heard with more emotion and power. This lyrical melody ends at a sustained D tonic note. The transposed section (mm.117-183) starts with the piano accompaniment part’s energetic staccatos with structured rhythmic pattern, followed by the violin playing the same melody. From measure 146-152, the melodic fragments are expanded by the slow tempo and intense sound (Example 3.7). The time signatures switch back and forth between 3/4 and 2/4. With the tempo slowing down and the dynamics becoming more intense, the melodic fragments are broadened, which serve as the preparation for the climax part of this section.
Example 3.7. Chen Guoquan, *Seeing Somebody Off*, mm.146-152.

The climax of this section starts at measure 153 marked “a tempo” in a high register and employs strong dynamics. The violin’s grace note figure is also played as a double stop in G tonic chord, that extends the strong and heavy acoustic effect. At this time, the following four sixteens notes group played *detaché* are flowing and full of tension.


Then piano and violin play fast sixteenth notes alternatively. Gradually they play the sixteenth notes together making the passage more intense. Then, the violin plays a succession of exciting *martelé*, and piano plays accented half notes that help to emphasize the violin part in every measure. From this part (mm.159-174), we can observe that the piano accompaniment part plays a significant role in shaping the mood of the music (Example 3.9, Example 3.10, and Example 3.11).
Example 3.9. Violin and piano playing sixteenth notes alternatively, mm.159-162.


The section from measure 178 to 183 is the most exciting part. This is also the transition for the recapitulation part. The violin is in counterpoint to the accompanying part. The recapitulation (mm184-261) contains elements of the first and the second
theme, creating a synthetic recapitulation inspired by western music. Chen made some changes from the first section. For example, after the pizzicato section starting with the octaves chords, the first theme just appeared one time (in the first section of this piece, the first theme was repeated two times). Also, the part that connect the first and the second theme is a piano transition, which uses a typical rhythmic pattern (eighth rest and the syncopation). This rhythmic pattern introduces the element of traditional Chinese folk opera melody indicative of the sense of humor and is always used as the interlude between singing segments of the opera.

The second theme is repeated two times in different registers. Between these two statements there is the double-stop interlude (mm.249-233) in which the tempo slows down. At the same time, the piano accompaniment part presents triplets in octaves, which make the melody broader and more intense (see Example 3.12).


In the second theme, the violin melody ends up in the lower register, while the piano part keeps the flowing triplet rhythmic pattern creating a deeper emotion than the first section. In the last two bars of this piece, the violin plays very slight pizzicato and the piano part presents a series of continuous sixteenth notes that create a sense of dreamy and hazy feeling.
Seeing Somebody Off is a typical Chinese traditional violin piece, which has a clear structure and distinct sense of story. The melody line is fluid and smooth, and it is obvious in the contrast of dynamics that the composition reflects the Chinese frame of mind.
CHAPTER FOUR

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY AND ANALYSIS OF BRIGHT SHENG’S A NIGHT AT THE CHINESE OPERA

Biographical Sketch of Bright Sheng

Bright Sheng (Chinese name Sheng Zongliang) (b.1955) is a Chinese-American contemporary composer who is active in both Chinese and Western classical music scenes. As Frederick Lau states, Sheng and his contemporaries such as Tan Dun (b.1957), Chen Yi (b.1953), Zhou Long (b.1953), and Qu Xiaosong (b.1952) can be regarded as the so-called new-wave composers who are characterized by their special biographical and educational backgrounds. The hallmark of their musical style is their intentional move away from the obvious use of Chinese melody and Western diatonic harmony. They focus on a variety of tunes, timbres, and textures commonly based on Chinese music. Meanwhile, these new-wave composers established their own aesthetics and diverse dimensions to research to create music from their own perspective during the era in which China underwent immense social and economic changes.\(^5^4\) To analyze and research these composers has a profound impact on the studies of synthesis of Chinese and Western musical elements because of the ways in which music develops as a result of different social contexts.

\(^{54}\) Frederick Lau, “Fusion or Fission,” 27.
Bright Sheng and his music are representative of this “new wave” period. Sheng was born in Shanghai and raised in an intellectual family. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Shanghai is the place where *Haipai* culture originated. Scholar Zhu Shaowei in his essay mentions that the term *Haipai* was originally the abbreviation of Shanghai Huapai (the Shanghai painting school). *Haipai* culture featured aggressive innovations against the traditional art; tight connections with folk arts; and attentions to suit both the refined and the popular tastes in style. Also, Shi Zhongwen in his book, *The Chinese Come Out from the Dead End*, defines culture in three ways: culture as the total of all the civilization; the Oriental culture as the total of all the Eastern civilization; the Chinese culture as the total of Chinese civilization. So, Zhu Shaohua states that *Haipai* culture is the total of Shanghaiese’s civilization. With the birth of the Republic of China in 1949, *Haipai* culture had significant influence on people’s spirit and life, particularly locally. Sheng began studying piano when he was four years old; however, him becoming a musician was the result of a special historical “coincidence.” As he said, “I came from a traditional intellectual family that normally opposed the idea of being in the music business and viewed music as part of ‘the show-biz.’” This prejudice about music originated from the feudal society’s strict attitudes in which all types of arts did not deserve respect but were regarded as the accessory of the high social classes. As the result of Western culture and the establishment of Western-style curriculum in primary and secondary schools, the

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55 Zhu Shaowei, “Haipai wenhua qianlun,” [Brief Discussion about Haipai Culture], in Li Lunxin, Chen Dong ed., *Haipai Wenhua jingxuanji* [The Collection of Haipai Culture], (Shanghai: Shanghai daxue chubanshe [Shanghai University Press], 2017), 22.

status of music and musicians improved greatly, but a few old traditional families still considered that pursuing music as a hobby was better than as a career.

Bright Sheng grew up during China’s Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) and the Down to the Countryside Movement (1955-1978). During the Cultural Revolution, music was limited, since many different types of music which did not match the political ideas of the leaders were prohibited to be performed and created; on the other hand, music which matched and advocated the political minds received great support and experienced rapid development. This revolution cultivated a political atmosphere in which cultural activities including those in the field of literature, theater, music, and visual art, were compelled to be linked to official ideology.\(^\text{57}\) Music become the revolutionary machine that was used to promote the ideas of the leaders. Themes of musical compositions were limited to the direction of the policy and praise of Chairman Mao. Also, Western music was prohibited from being performed and studied. All musical activities were carefully screened by Jiang Qing (Madam Mao) who promoted the edition and creation of five “model operas,” two “model ballets,” and one “model symphony,” which served as the references for other composers’ creation.\(^\text{58}\) On the other hand, it stirred up the building of art troupes and enthusiasm for music education. The Down to the Countryside Movement started almost at the same time as the Culture Revolution. The purpose of this movement was to respond to Mao Zedong’s idea that young intellectual people (who graduated from high school or college) should be reeducated in


the countryside. At that time, the purpose of this movement was to solve the shortage of talent in areas of agricultural production and to relieve the pressure of unemployment among young people.⁵⁹

During the early years of the People’s Republic of China, population expansion increased the tensions of unemployment. Chairman Mao insisted young people should integrate into the labor and peasant classes in order to accept the baptism of a proletarian world view. The young people became the body of this movement. Like other young people, Bright Sheng was sent to the countryside for rural education. Since Jiang Qing’s music reformation created additional musical demand, many instrument performers joined troupes and as a result were able to avoid hard labor associated with the Down to the Countryside Movement.

Fortunately, Sheng played piano in the troupe of Qinghai Province for seven years. He began at age fifteen and had to teach himself since he could not obtain enough musical education at the Qinghai Province. This circumstance shaped a good habit for him, as he was to grasp quickly whatever other people were doing that might help him as a musician. Also, he learned about the richness of folk song in Qinghai, which proved to be a great resource for inspiration.⁶⁰

Then China’s leaders realized a series of terrible problems which were brought on by the Down to the Countryside Movement during the Cultural Revolution. This movement relieved cities’ employment pressures and provided intellectual support for

⁵⁹ He Wanzhong, “Zhishi qingnian shangshan xiaxiang dongyin fenxi ji lishi fansi” [Analysis of the motivation for Youth Down to the Countryside and historic reflection], (Master’s thesis, Jiangxi shifa daxue [Jiangxi Normal University], 2010), 10.

⁶⁰ McCutchan, The Muse That Sings, 206.
rural areas, but it took away the youth’s opportunity for studying professional knowledge in universities. This resulted in the loss of professional technical talent in China. In 1977, the Chinese college entrance examination system, which had been suspended for ten years due to the impact of the Cultural Revolution, was restored.

Bright Sheng became one of the first students to reenter Shanghai Conservatory of Music. He studied at the composition department, and sometimes his compositions were played by the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra. Also, he earned some awards when he studied in Shanghai and published his compositions in the journal *Music Creation*. Near the time of his graduation (near 1982), Sheng decided to go to the United Stated and gave up the opportunity to be faculty in the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. He left China in 1982 and auditioned at the Juilliard School. Unfortunately, he did not get admitted since his compositions were regarded as too conservative for that time.61

During his time in the U.S., Sheng studied with Chou Wen-Chung (b.1923), George Perle (1915-2009), Hugo Weisgall (1912-1997), Mario Davidovsky (b.1934), and Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990). In New York, Chou Wen-Chung was known as one of the day’s most influential Asian-American composers whose compositions were characterized by the synthesis of contemporary Western music and Chinese classical literature. Chou Wen-Chung started teaching at Columbia University in 1964 and hosted many lectures to spread his philosophy and aesthetics. He encouraged Sheng to learn about Chinese traditional culture—the knowledge of which contributed to Sheng’s later

creations. Then Sheng obtained his master’s and doctoral degrees in composition at Columbia University. Later, Sheng studied with Leonard Bernstein privately and worked as his conducting assistant for five years in Tanglewood Music Center as his only composition student. Sheng said that Bernstein had a unique method of approaching things, which could make complicated problems easier to understand. Meanwhile, Bernstein let students confidently believe they had the ability to accomplish whatever he could do. Bernstein effected Sheng’s creation and style of teaching.\textsuperscript{62} He earned many awards such as “National Endowment for the Arts, American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, Guggenheim Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, Naumberg Foundation, Copland Foundation, Michigan Arts Award, and a Rackham fellowship and a fellowship from the Institute for the Humanities from the University of Michigan.”\textsuperscript{63} He kept an active career as a conductor, composer and pianist, which is similar to that of his mentor Bernstein.

As a composer, Sheng had served in different positions in his career throughout his life, such as the composer-in-residence to the Seattle Symphony Orchestra, the Mannes College of Music, and so on. Also, as a pianist, he played with different orchestras, including the Seattle Symphony Orchestra and the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra. He taught composition at the University of Michigan starting in 1995, and his conducting repertoire spans different period from classical to contemporary music including Mozart, Brahms, Debussy as well as his own compositions.\textsuperscript{64}

\textsuperscript{62} McCutchan, \textit{The Muse That Sings}, 207.
His compositions are famous for their dramatic style and historical significance. He also states that the direction of his writing takes him toward the fusion of Asian and Western cultures, which is impacted by his education and adolescent experiences. This is a very old but always very popular topic about cultural identity. For example, in his piece *H’un (Lacerations): in Memoriam 1966-1976 for Orchestra*, presents the musical portrayal describing the violence that resulted because of the Cultural Revolution. This piece is characterized by the eerie and uncertain mood that are shaped by the dynamics contrasts and tonal background which is always disturbed by glissandos and strong bass chord. There is no obvious melodic theme in this piece since Sheng thought that a newly composed Chinese style melodies would be too “beautiful” and could not express the cruelty that occurred in the Cultural Revolution. In this piece, Sheng combined the historic events and the mood appropriate to it expressed through unique sound effects (energetic brass chord disrupting the slight glissando, dramatic expansion of the dynamic contrasts, etc.), and avoided the fluent sound of traditional Chinese music. On the aspect of fusing the national folk elements with Western music, Sheng mentioned that Bartok and Janacek were his compositional model. Bartok, whose compositions had a high fusion level of East European folk music with Germanic music was an especially important model for him. Even though the practice of adding the folk or secular materials in compositions was started early in Western history, Bartok tactfully conquered the

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65 Ibid.,
balance of the primitiveness and savageness that were from the folk elements, with the delicate quality of the classical tradition. Bartok’s compositional style inspired Sheng’s quotation of Chinese resources resulting from the need for creativity and to focus on surpassing the limitation of the cultural boundaries. Sheng exposed the Chinese elements in his compositions through an original angle based on his own understanding of Chinese musical gestures and history. In other words, he expanded the expressive range of the Chinese musical resource.

Analysis of Bright Sheng’s Violin Piece A Night at the Chinese Opera

Bright Sheng’s works including opera, works for orchestra, band, chorus, chamber, vocal, and solo instruments are characterized by a sense of Chineseness and are often labeled “the East meets West.” His violin piece A Night at the Chinese Opera is based on the elements of Beijing opera Farewell My Concubine. The history of opera in China can be traced back to Tang dynasty (618-907), Kun Opera flourished fourteen century, and the late of eighteenth century, such as Beijing (Peking) Opera. In ancient China, opera played an important role in people’s life serving as the mass-communication medium, equivalent to the television and cinema in modern society. Also, Opera was accepted by people from different social statues. It was treated as the education and entertainment tool for both educated and illiterate people. The Chinese opera is also a complex synthesis which includes dance, pantomimes, recitation, and aria. American ethnomusicologist William P. Malm states that the setting of the aria depends on the

68 McCutchan, The Muse That Sings, 209.
moods of a given drama that could fit to the body of standard pieces; another way was to use stereotypical melodies. Beijing opera was regarded as the essence of Chinese traditional opera, which used instruments for accompaniment such as gongs, cymbals, drums, suona, huqin, and so on. This repertoire reflected the traditional aesthetic standards that were simple and emphasized joy.

The story *Farewell My Concubine* evolved from Sima Qian (around BC145-BC86)’s *Shi Ji* (Records for the Grand Historian) of Xiang Yu (Overlord of Western Chu area). In Sima Qian’s record, Overlord Xiang retreated to Haixia and was defeated by Liu Bang (the Emperor Gaozu of Han dynasty)’s army. Xiang sung with solemn fervor to express his sorrow. His Concubine Yu Ji accompanied him at that time. Then he wrote a poem to express his sadness of losing his territory and suffering a defeat in the war. Madam Yu recited Xiang’s poem then both of them committed suicide. Even though Overlord Xiang was a tragic figure, people remarked him as a talented strategist and politician with affection and a faithful personality. The opera added more dramatic details and plots through imagination based on historical details.

Bright Sheng’s piece *A Night at the Chinese Opera* selected the elements from the melody and the instrumentation of the opera, adding contemporary compositional

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71 Ibid.
72 William Nienhauser, Sima Qian and the Shiji,” in Andrew Feldherr and Grant Hardy, *The Oxford History of Historical Writing: Volume 1: Beginnings to AD 600* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 463–484: Sima Qian is he famous historiographer, essayist in the Western Han Dynasty (BC.202-AD.8). His *Shi Ji* was the first history of the Biography in Chinese history, which recorded the history from the Yellow emperor in to the reign of Emperor Wu of the Han dynasty, totally covering more than three thousand years history.
techniques to create the unique synthesis. At the beginning of this piece, Sheng requires the pianist to hold the pedal until measure 45. Then, the piano plays at an extremely high register with an accented C to imitate the sound of cymbal and *bangu* (clappers instruments in the opera). Sheng slows down the tempo immensely, which shapes how the mysterious tune arouses the audience’s curiosity. The violin starts from bar 3 and this phrase ends at measure 9. In this section, the violin part is in steady eighth notes and dotted quarter notes, with grace notes and glissandos. Every two notes (including the grace notes) are either half-step or whole step (example 4.1). Ornamenting the melody with glissandos makes this phase carry a flavor of Beijing opera even though it is in a very slow tempo. This imitates the interlude and the singing’s accompaniment played by *jingju* and *yueqin* (the common string instruments in opera performance) in the opera.


In the second phrase (mm.6-9), the piano keeps a steady pulse and the violin switches to the lower register. The second part (mm.10-51) (example 4.2) is the most lyrical part of this whole piece, which is inspired by the abstracted opera references. Sheng uses polytonality in this part, which promotes dissonant sonic effects. Generally speaking, the key of Chinese traditional opera is based on the pentatonic scale, and
especially the tone belongs to the Gong system. The music for voice usually includes some pianyin notes (including fa, si, fa#, sib) that adds colors but will never become tonic on their own. They also deepen the degree of movability of the tonic key. The melody of this part comes from the jinhu’s melody that starts before these two characters’ singing as the connection and accompanying in the opera. The violin part, the right hand of the piano and the left hand of the piano form three separate voices. If we study these three parts individually, we will find that every voice has a separate tonal center. The violin voice is largely in Bb Gong pentatonic mode, the right-hand part of piano in Gong, and the left-hand part is made up of four notes C, D, F, and G (do-re-fa-sol). Sheng arranged almost every measure to contain at least one minor or augment seconds that come from different voices (see the circled notes in Example 4.2) to create a dissonant sonic effect. This is a clever and unusual way of composition, which keeps the characteristics of Opera’s mode and adds an exotic, contemporary flavor. In measure 19, the right-hand piano part contains many flat accidentals that still maintains the characteristics of B Gong mode.

The third section of this piece starts from measure 52 and continues to 283. Starting with evenly accented eighth and sixteenth notes groups expose the characteristic gesture of Beijing opera Jin da man chang (hasty bowing with slow singing). (Example 4.3). In this part, violin plays fast notes that imitate string instruments such as Jinhu (the main instrument characterized by its soft, melodious, brilliant tone. It always plays the approximate melody of the singing). Meanwhile, the piano plays accented rhythmic pattern that imitate the clapper instruments such as bangu (its tone sounds short and the power of penetration is high) and naoba that promotes the direction of the stereotypical

melodies that come from the strings and singing part. Also, the *Jin da man chang* section exposes a flexible rhythmic pulse. This unique trait requires the singer to pursue freedom in rhythm approaching a fluent melodic line.
From measure 69, Sheng reduces the thickness of accented notes and adds more glissando to pull the music so that it comes back to the tone of banter. Sheng indicates more dynamics to expose the contrasts in moods. From measure 91-99, (Example 4.4) violin plays ascending glissando and accented descending glissando imitating the sound of *suona*. Generally, *suona* is used to shape the joyful and enthusiastic mode since it is characterized by its intense and exalted tone. Also, *suona*’s special sonic effect could imitate the sound of birds and animals. However, in this piece, *suona* does not shape the happy mood. Instead it shapes the mood of hesitation and doubt, which was created by the slowing tempo and the accompaniment of fragmentary rhythm played by the piano. Moreover, Sheng marked a *crescendo* to *ff* in order to exaggerate the intensity of this phrase.

Rhythm plays a very important role in Beijing opera, especially in determining the turns.  

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Example 4.4. Bright Sheng, *A Night at the Chinese Opera*, mm.92-94.

Measures 101-125 serve as recapitulation of the second part of this piece. The violin keeps the same melody and the piano plays a fluent tonal melody. Combining these two voices, it still reflects the effect of the bitonality. It sounds like an elucidation (the second steps of the composition of an essay, which also can be used in music creation) of the whole piece and functions as a preparation for the next part. Measures 125-146 is a piano solo transition part. Sheng tried several clapper instruments on piano and uses the piano to play the ensemble of Beijing opera instrumentation. From mm.125-139, piano plays a series of dotted sixteenth notes with a hidden melody. The very high register of the piano serves as the sound of clappers such as *bangu*, and the very low register sustained notes sound like the *gong*.

Starting in measure 140, piano plays fast accented sixteenth notes sometimes with mordents to imitate the harsh bowing effects (Example 4.5).
Example 4.5. Bright Sheng, *A Night at the Chinese Opera*, mm.140-143.

After the piano solo, Sheng added the violin in measure 149, starting with strong, accented double-stops. The expression mark here is “percussive” which means that every accented double-stop should be played heavier than usual. Also, he adds glissando between every two sixteenth double-stops, lending more intensity and tensions. From this part, Sheng indicates the use of extended techniques. The symbol “X”’s on note heads indicate approximate pitches (Example 4.6 and Example 4.7). In term of timbre effect, Sheng required the double-stops to be played not exactly in tune, so they could approach the effect of the microtone to some extent. This also could be closer to the tuning of Chinese traditional bowed-string and plucked-string instruments such as *jinhu* and *pipa*, which do not follow the just intonation system as in the violin. In terms of musical flavor, playing approximate pitch promotes the level of sonic similarity to Chinese opera instrumental ensemble. Moreover, from the angle of acoustics, the vibration of in-tune notes will reach a sonority and create a bright consonance effect. On the contrary, these intentionally out of tune double-stops will convey the emotion of hysteria that could
shape characterize the mood of the climax of the opera when the plot develops to the stage of sharp conflict.

Example 4.6. Bright Sheng, A Night at the Chinese Opera, mm.149-151.

Example 4.7. Bright Sheng, A Night at the Chinese Opera, mm166-168.

From measure 218 to 283, violin plays fast accented sixteenth notes while the piano beats strong, accented notes that match the direction of the fast detaché, creating an effect characteristic of the Jijifeng (see Example 4.8). Jijifeng is a performing method of

Example 4.8. Bright Sheng, A Night at the Chinese Opera. mm. 218-220.
opera percussion ensemble characterized by fast and exciting tempo, which is used for nervous and quick mood.

Measure 283 to the end is the coda of the whole piece, where the melody from the beginning comes back. The tempo slows down to create a calm and relaxed mood. The glissandos in this piece are the most commonly used technique in the opera performance, which should be played heavier than when played in normal violin pieces. Finally, this piece ends in a trill and a glissando, which signal the end of the opera.
CHAPTER FIVE

ANALYSIS OF BRIGHT SHENG’S THREE FANTASIES FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO

Bright Sheng’s Three Fantasies for violin and piano was composed in 2005 and consists of three short independently titled pieces. The first fantasy is named “Dream Song.” The theme of “Dream” appears in Sheng’s compositions several times, such as Dream of the Red Chamber (opera), China Dream (for orchestra), and Spring Dreams (for cello and Chinese traditional orchestra). He mentioned that sometimes dreaming about music was helpful for him, especially when he was struggling during the process of working. In a dream, he found that the most difficult part of his piece China Dream (composed in 1959) was completed nicely. When he woke up, he wrote it down from his memories of the dream in which he heard the melody he needed. He suggests that people should keep a balance between intuition and logic in music composition rather than relying on just one of them.74 In my opinion, his dream could be regarded as one of the resources for his intuition and inspiration.

The “Dream Song” is based on “a short memory from what Bright Sheng heard in a dream, in which a violin and piano played a very simple tune.”75 The melody starts with the violin solo, which is fluid in this piece. The tempo marking is at quarter note equals

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74 McCutchan, The Muse That Sings, 207.
63-69, a slow tempo, with pianissimo dynamics, and the expression marking “dolce” that continues until the end of this piece. From Measure 1-10, the violin solo plays the slow and flowing melody, which sounds like it is in G Zhi mode. The melody line is flowing even though there is a quarter rest between measure 4 and measure 5. Here Sheng marks a slur at the end of the note G (the last note of measure 4) towards to the note A (the first note of measure 5). The whole step (G to A) interval naturally smooths the gap created by the rest and enhances the flow of the melody (Example 5.1).

Example 5.1. Bright Sheng, *Three Fantasies* “Dream Song.” mm.4-5.

Generally, this violin solo part is tonal, with the flavor of Chinese traditional pentatonic melody, except for the measure 8, where the melodic major-ninth interval from G to A produces a slightly dissonance sonic effect (Example 5.2).


The piano comes in at measure 11 with soft dynamics and plays with the violin in octaves for two measures; then the piano is at an octave and fifth below the violin until measure 17, which thickens the harmony. This phrase sounds like it is in D major. The dissonant parts appear in the transition between the vertical octave to the perfect fifth and measure 16, that creates the harmonic interval of major second. In measures 18-29, there are many
accidentals, but the melody almost always keeps the consonance effect. In measures 18 and 19, there are only two voices involving the violin part and the left hand piano part to shape the harmonic intervals of the perfect fourth. From the second half of measure 20, the left-hand melody on the piano is added to play in octaves with the right-hand part. This left-hand piano part forms perfect fifths with the violin part. In this musical phrase, the register of right-hand piano melody is higher than violin’s. (see Example 5.3)


From measure 30, the melody is presented in two voices that play the harmonic interval of perfect fifths, and there are no accidental markings. The dissonant effects are created by some harmonic major seconds as in the former section. In measures 40-43, the melody forms a few dissonant harmonic major seconds and transfers to octave. Finally, the violin plays a long G note and piano part presents a single melody line that ends on A and that does not create a sense of an ending. This brings audience to believe that there is something more to musically expect about the dream.

The melody in this piece suggests ambiguous musical direction. Also, every phrase is coherent and flowing, ornamented by several dissonant intervals, which is reminiscent of the French impressionist style that makes music shimmery and obscure.
Another characteristic of this piece is that it has a “good tune.” As Sheng mentioned, a tune is made up of individual notes, and good tune should be the imagery of what we call “poetic feeling”; projected by these individual words, there should be an unbroken or intact essence of classical Chinese poetry. Also, it has the ability to go beyond the distinct musical notes. In this piece, he uses slur in consonant melodic intervals to weaken the gap between adjacent phrases. Also, the fluctuation of the melody line is limited in a certain range.

The second fantasy is “Tibetan Air” which “was inspired by a form of Tibetan folk song singing in which, vertically, the meter and rhythm seem to appear random, but horizontally the singing is presented in a very straightforward, long-breath motion. It might give the listener an unwieldy ‘wild’ feeling; yet it is utterly attractive.” During his student years, Sheng he stayed in Qinghai province (the remote area in the past), which was very close to Tibet, for seven years. “Tibet is bordered by Qinghai to the northeast. The Tibet autonomous region is called ‘the roof of the world’ since it occupies a vast area of plateaus and mountains in Central Asia. The western and southern border of the Plateau of the Tibet is formed by the great mass of the Himalayas. The climate in Tibet is very dry and has a long sunshine duration. The temperatures in the higher elevations are cold, but the low valleys and the southeast are mild and pleasant.”

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has a long traditional religion, Mahayana Buddhism, which has produced profound influence on Tibet and Tibetans. Tibetan people are interested in many religious subjects, so their arts, such as sculptures and paintings, could very well be the result of their unique religious aesthetic values.\textsuperscript{79} In fact, all of the “Tibetan arts were expressing the living reality of Buddhism as it was realized in the lives of the people.” For example, Tibetans often put natural objects and even the landscape into works of art that are religiously motivated to show how Buddhism weaves its way through their everyday lives.\textsuperscript{80} Probably influenced by Buddhism and their historical background, people who live in Tibet could not only be “regarded as ‘simple happy natives,’ but also as highly civilized, hospitable and amazingly open.”\textsuperscript{81} As we know, dance and song, accompanied with the development of social civilization, plays an important historical role, since these activities record the evolutionary process of culture. For Tibetans, the main religious vocal music is \textit{dbyangs} which is always exposed in very low voice register pitches. Also, in some chants the singer could produce a low fundamental with two octaves below middle C that would be accompanied by some intensified partials. This makes the single person sing a chord.\textsuperscript{82} Such “throat” tone appears in Mongolia songs and this double-voice singing is called “Khoomei” today.

The “Tibetan Air” consists of three parts that contain a deep Tibetan flavor. Before the introduction (mm.1-4) of the first part, there is a piano chord that Sheng

\textsuperscript{80} Rosemary Jones Tung, \textit{A Portrait of Lost Tibet} (Oakland, University of California Press, 1996), 25.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 63.
\textsuperscript{82} Malm, “Music Cultures,” 168.
The pattern in this introduction part also reemerges at a later part.


In measure 5-7 (Example 5.5.), Sheng instructs the pianist to play “Inside piano, use left hand palm to strike all string s from lowest A through and including the B a major ninth above” in order for the piano to create a dark musical background. The violin plays two voices at the same time in F# Gong. The upper melody should be played on the
G string with many strong accented triplet rhythm patterns. Sheng adds mordents, grace notes, and accented four-sixteenth notes to connect the triplet figures, making the music interesting and tense. The lower voice repeats on the note D matching the rhythmic pattern of the melody voice creating a counterpoint to it. It sounds as if two violins are playing together. In this phrase, Sheng seems to imitate the singing effect of “Khoomei” on the violin. Khoomei is a popular singing technique in Tibet and Inner Mongolia region. In fact, the technique of playing two or more voices on the violin appears in other virtuosic violin pieces, such as in Paganini’s 24 Caprices for solo violin (1817), and Heinrich Wilhelm Ernst’s arrangement of the famous song *The Last Rose of Summer* (1864). The mordents in this piece imitate the most common technique of Tibet singing. This mordent singing technique is always used in pastoral songs and folk songs in Tibet region, regarded as inherent talent of the herdsman singers. This technique enables a range of flexibility in virtuosity, providing the room for these singers who have good voice and singing ability to improvise, enhancing the mordents’ durations and difficulty.

Example 5.5. Bright Sheng, *Three Fantasies* “Tibetan Air,” mm.5-7.

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Starting from measure 9, there is a recapitulation of the first theme, but Sheng adds more notes in the piano part. These include the accented quarter-note triplets, which are in counterpoint to the eighth-note triplet, and sixteenth notes, which makes the harmonic texture thicker (Example 5.6 and Example 5.7). The mordents appear in different voices frequently. The accented quintuplet and septuplet appear first in the violin part and later in the piano part to reinforce the tension and fluency during this process. These dissonant chords played by the piano imitate the Tibetan percussions interspersed in the main melody. In general, each horizontal voice is tonal, but the discordant sonic effects come from the vertical alignment of notes producing the dissonant harmonic intervals.


Example 5.7. Bright Sheng, *Three Fantasies* “Tibetan Air,” mm.32-34.
The second part of this piece (measure 47-67) has a faster and more fluid melody. The series of slurred quintuplets occupies the most part of the melody. The violin plays slurred quintuplets with soft dynamic between measures 47 and 53. After that the violin part consists of accented quintuplets with a strong dynamic creating a dramatic effect. The right-hand of the piano also presents quintuplets that neatly match the violin part producing consonant harmonic intervals. The left-hand part plays quarter-note triplets to accompany the lyrical melody.

From measure 68 to the end of the movement Sheng synthesize the patterns of motives from the first and the second parts (see Example 5.8). The violin part presents the melody in octave doubling, the right-hand of piano part is the triplet pattern, and the left-hand part is the smooth and flowing sextuplets that come from the second part of this piece. Later Sheng presents the accented quintuples come from the second part in the piano part, to be played in octaves (see Example 5.9).


This piece ends with a series of energetic, accented quintuples accompanied by consonant chords and a strong dissonant chord. In this piece, Sheng selected some elements from the Tibetan folk song and used them in his own style to expose the characteristics of the Tibetan music, including its “wild” feeling.

The third fantasy is called “Kazakhstan Love Song.” Sheng states that, “this is based on a folk song he heard while traveling in the Chinese part of the Kazakhstan during the summer of 2000 when he was researching ethnic music along the ancient Silk Road Route.”

This piece consists of three parts that are full of exotic flavors. According to Encyclopædia Britannica, “the Kazakh is an Asiatic Turkic-speaking people inhabiting mainly Kazakhstan and the adjacent parts of the Uighur Autonomous Region of Sinkiang in China.” The music in Kazakhstan has distinct characteristics of diversification that combine the musical flavors of the East and the West. There is a Chinese saying that states that “the song and the horses are the two wings of Kazakh people,” demonstrating the importance of folk song for the Kazakh people. The themes of their folk songs reflect their social lives, cultural information, love, and others. Kazakh music is varied in terms of rhythm and meter, which has a close relationship with their poems. The accent of a word is always on its last syllable in the Kazakh language. For example, if there are three syllables in one word, the possible rhythm pattern should be 2/4, 2/8, 4/8, 5/8.

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84 Bright Sheng, Program Notes to A Night at the Chinese Opera (City: New York: G. Schirmer, 2005), No page number.
Sheng’s piece, the various time signatures the composer included reflect this feature of Kazak folk song.

The piece starts with soft dynamics with an expensive marking that states “distant emerging from noise.” The melody seems to be in Eb Jue mode (Bb as the Gong note) (example 5.10). Sheng uses grace notes, glissandos, and mordent to expose the national flavor. Another characteristic is that Sheng adds fermata on some notes that are connected with rests and/or sixteenth notes. The fermata notes provide the uncertainty of the musical duration. Additionally, the sixteenth-note rest promotes the importance of the sixteenth note that follows it. In measure 5, even though there is no rest, the grace notes also provide the tendency to lean on the up-beat note. The held notes in the piano part follows opens with a gesture in quintuplets that do not match the metric pattern in the violin melody, resulting in an unbalanced effect.

In the following part, Sheng has the tendency to emphasis the up-beat note since he added many rests on the down beats (see Example 5.11).


There are many accented quintuplets played in pizzicato in the second part. Later, quintuplets developed into accented-septuplets making the melody more intense and energetic. From measure 38, accented double-stop sextuplets and septuplets emerge, which increases the musical tension and make it more exciting (Example 5.12).

![Example 5.12. Bright Sheng, Three Fantasies, “Kazakhstan Love Song,” mm.31, 40.](image)

The third part (mm.50-61) of this piece is played using a mute, but the expression marking is “warm.” The strong dynamic combined with the unique sound produced by the use of the mute make the melody sound more intense. But it also sounds like it is coming from a faraway place. The accented notes sliding back and forth between minor seconds and major seconds reflect the flavor of the Western Regions (see Example 5.13.).

![Example 5.13. Bright Sheng, Three Fantasies, “Kazakhstan Love Song,” mm.51-53.](image)
From measure 54, Sheng adds mordent notes in triplets and combines them with accented notes. The music disappears in a gesture consisting of long harmonics, giving shape to a kind of ethereal experience or phenomena.
CHAPTER SIX

COMPARISON OF SELECTED WORKS FROM CHEN GANG, CHEN GUOQUAN AND BRIGHT SHENG

The earliest synthesis of Chinese and Western music appeared in China under the special political environment that was promoted by the May Fourth Movement (1911-1922). The intellectuals from this early stage in the history of Modern China established Chinese national music based on Western practice. These early Chinese musicians not only were introduced to Western culture passively (by way of wars and colonization) but also studied western theory and instruments actively. For example, one of the earliest musicians Liu Tianhua (1895-1932), who taught the course in Western and Chinese vocal and instrumental music in Beijing University, carefully studied theory of composition and violin with Russian violinist Tonoff. He devoted himself to developing traditional Chinese music and insisted that to develop the traditional music wisely musicians should adopt the essence of Chinese music and accept the new ideas from the Western wave. Such intellectuals like Liu Tianhua, who had progressive ideas, promoted the progress of Chinese and Western music performance and education further, after the birth of the Republic of China. In the Western world, some composers such as John Cage, (1912-1992), Henry Cowell (1897-1965), and Gustav Holst (1874-1934), who were influenced by non-Western music systems, attempted to use Eastern elements to make their music ineffable. But the first generation, Chinese-born American composer, Chou-Wenchung, critiques some of these composers’ attempts to ignore the essence of Eastern music’s
characteristics, arguing that there is no musical breakthrough in this kind of combination of Eastern and Western music. Based on Chou-Wenchung’s criticism, Eastern music was just a surface interpretation in the accentuated Western music.  However, the results from Chinese composers and Western composers combining Chinese music materials and western style are different, even though traditional Chinese music made a general impression, characterized by the pentatonic scale, the “ad libitum” rhythm, tuning system that was different from the equal temperament, and just intonation. The reason that caused the difference could relate to their different life background and the culture they experienced. As Everett’s diagram of the network of communication and signification explains, composition as an interactional text can be influenced by the encoder’s space, which is the cultural industries and composer’s poetics. In my opinion, the cultural industries are the external products that were influenced by the contained cultural background that contains them, and the composer’s poetics is the internal product. According to this idea, cultural background plays a significant role when comparing the different composers’ works. Also, Frederick Lau pointed out that many analyses ignored the social cultural context under which composers worked and had responded to. Social context influenced composers’ ideas and composition style largely, since social context relates to the creation environments, and connects with the appreciation and aesthetic of audiences and performers. Considering the social context as one of the analysis elements

89 Lau, “Fusion or Fission,” 23.
of music composition should make it easier to access the essences of these composers and their works.

Chen Gang’s *Morning in the Miao Village*, Chen Guoquan’s *Seeing Somebody Off* and Bright Sheng’s *Three Fantasies for Violin and Piano* can be regarded as Chinese violin music, which is based on the Chinese traditional music and imbued with Western compositional techniques. But the sonic effect of Bright Sheng’s piece is totally different from Chen Gang and Chen Guoquan’s. The different social context played a part and resulted in this discrepancy. Also, as we know, a full music composition is formed by tonality, key, tune, rhythm and structure. I will compare them in terms of these aspects.

It is easy to ascertain that Chen Gang and Chen Guoquan’s compositions are tonal, and Bright Sheng’s piece is atonal from simply listening to them. Chen Gang and Chen Guoquan’s pieces utilized the traditional pentatonic mode which is usually seen in traditional Chinese music. In fact, the pentatonic scale is not unique to China. But it made an impression for audiences that the Chinese music tuning system was equated with the pentatonic scales because traditional Chinese traditional music used a high frequency of the pentatonic scale. In the Western system of major and minor scales, modes can be created by using a different note in a scale as the pitch center. A similar procedure can be used in the system of pentatonic scale, in which each note of the scale could be used as the tonic note to create a mode and keep the basic five-tone framework. In this system, a single tonic note can have different key signatures. Notes outside of the pentatonic scale, for example in C Gong pentatonic mode (C-D-E-G-A), F# (bian zhi), Bb (run), B (binggong), F (qingjue), can exist in this system. But they tend to be used as passing
tones or occur at weak beats. The major third C-E (Gong-Jue) is the characteristic interval in the pentatonic mode system (see example 6.1.)

Example 6.1. The basic pentatonic mode in C Gong system with Bian zhi(F#) and Bian gong (B).

Since the establishment of People’s Republic of China, the Western-style courses were offered in school, accompanied with the expectation that composers combine the Western music theories with Chinese context. These composers, such as Chen Gang and Chen Guoquan, gained the opportunity to receive a systematic music education. The outside social environment provided the stage for their musical creations as well as the experience of the new synthesis of Western instruments with Chinese musical ideas, but also it has cognitive limitations due to the time. For instance, Chen Gang’s violin piece *Butterfly Lovers*, which has a highly Romantic harmonic language, is reminiscent of Rachmaninoff’s orchestral compositions. The style of this period was referred to as “pentatonic romanticism,” which was popularized by composers and embraced by the people.\(^9\) For example, one of the progressive composers and music educators of this time, Sang Tong (1923-2011), composed a violin piece in 1947, *Ye Jing [Night Scene]*, that used Schoenberg’s Western twelve-tone serialism. This composition may have been

\(^9\) Lau, “Fusion or Fission,” 27.
as a good sample for later composers, but it was limited by the social context and therefore did not spread among the masses during the twentieth century.

As we know, letting the masses accept and understand new music is the ultimate purpose of musical development. Using the violin to express Chinese traditional music had seen great progress at the early twentieth century. Violin has abundant musical expressivity of and the unique timbre differed from Chinese traditional instruments, which introduced some new ideas to create Chinese music incorporating violin techniques. So, adopting the theme from Chinese folk song and opera based on pentatonic mode framework and the unique tone of the violin could make the song novel and match the aesthetic appreciation of Chinese people at the same time.

However, with the development of society, contemporary composers like Bright Sheng, Tan Dun, and Chen Yi had space to add more “seasonings” into their compositions. For example, the motivic idea for Bright Sheng’s piece *A Night at the Chinese Opera* comes from the accompanied part of Beijing Opera, which could be regarded as the pentatonic mode-like and tonal. However, he tactfully made the dissonant harmonic intervals from different voices that result in polytonality. Also, people have no specific rules to estimate the key of Sheng’s piece since the key varies as the melody proceeds. *A Night at the Chinese Opera* is similar to other contemporary music that has a flexible tonal organization. As Bright Sheng argued, he sacrifices a bit of both Western and Eastern minds to reach “cultural license,”[91] which endowed a new sound for

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interpreting Beijing opera. Audiences could easily figure out this piece has certain inner-
connections to Beijing opera rather than simply rearranging the opera.

In the tone and timbre aspects, Chen Gang, Chen Guoquan and their contemporaries prefer to expose the violin’s beautiful and lyrical timbre in their works. In my opinion, this tendency of exposing the violin sound is related to the melody of Chinese traditional folk song and opera. Folk songs are not only the foundation of the development of music art, but also the description of national people’s lives and culture. Chinese scholar Wu Yongsheng argues that the birth of the Chinese folk song can be traced back to the period of Huangdi’s rule (B.C.2721-B.C.2599) (“third of ancient China’s mythological emperor, a culture hero and patron saint of Daoism”). During that time, the progress of folk music was spontaneous, regional condition. Until the collection “Shijing” (the book of songs with no verifiable original editor) came out, the Chinese folk song was first collected based on different regions.92 The folk songs in Shijing originated from people’s farm work before developing into the songs sung at festivals as well as parties, during sacrifices, and to express love.93 Then, with the development of culture and humanity, folk songs in different areas began to have different flavors as well as diverse pronunciation and intonation between different regions. For example, in the region south of the Yangtze river, folk music is characterized by minor keys and a gentle, charming style. On the other hand, in the area of the north Chinese plain, folk music was

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influenced by cold temperatures and the harsh living conditions, so songs are
categorized by a bold, rough, which is like the personalities of the people who lived in
this region. Moreover, in the area of the loess plateau, there are many mountains with
small populations and inconvenient transportation that resulted a depressing lifestyle,
which makes their folk song commonly contain yell-like singing. Finally, in the
southwest of Sichuan province mountain area, there are many mountains and rivers, so
the folk songs have different characteristics which were separated only by the mountains.
Their folk songs always have the padding syllable and the strong vital flavor. Also, the
folk song has vivid rhythm and the descending graceful melody. The Stream Flows is the
representative song in this area. In the Xinjiang area and Tibet, the folk songs are added
flavor of exoticism.94

No matter where the folk song comes from, the melodious sound is the common
characteristic. Even when folk songs express the mood of sadness and anger, they are
usually slowing the tempo and lowering the volume of the singing tone. In other aspects,
the violin sound is naturally similar with people’s singing. When Chen Gang and Chen
Guoquan created violin pieces, they naturally adopted the essence of folk songs to
combine the unique sound with violin. So, in the Morning in the Miao Village and Seeing
Somebody off, most tones are brilliant and keep the beautiful timbre of the violin. When
expressing the violent mood, the violin part will be more strong and accented. When
expressing a mood of sadness, the tempo of the violin part will slow down and stretch
long notes. For Chen Gang, exposing the synthesis of Chinese music elements and

94 Wu Yongsheng, Feng Jianlin, Zhang Xiaolin. “Zhongguo minge wenhua de
diyu tezheng jiqi dili jichu” [The Characteristics of the Chinese Folk Song and its
Western instruments is to make the orchestration heavier and denser. He also used violin techniques such as harmonics, double stops, détaché. Chen Guoquan keeps the beautiful timbre through the whole piece. The folk song come from the mass, which means the melody and the timbre that are familiar to them. So, it is easier to be accepted at that time. But for Bright Sheng, who is a new wave composer, is trying to make his own relationship with sounds. He would like to create new sounds from instrumental techniques that served his musical idea and, potentially, philosophy.⁹⁵ So, in his piece A Night at the Chinese Opera, he marks some notes to play the approximate pitches to make the noisy and struggling effect as well as the Three Fantasies. Sheng did not hesitate to use microtones and the extremely exaggerate glissando to shape the mood, which represents a great advance from his predecessors’ works. With the progress of the society, people from the East and the West also break the limitation of the appreciation to accept the new sound in violin music.

The “tune” is also an important component in music. As Sheng said in an interview, to write a good tune is the first step to write a good melody, which requires that composers have not only good experience and inspiration, but also good technique. And the most important thing for music is that it should touch the audience and arouse their sympathy.⁹⁶ Chen Gang’s piece Morning in the Miao Village, the theme almost repeats the main melody of Miao folk song Flying Song. Then, he utilized some composition technique to transform the theme based on the tonal condition. So, the whole

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⁹⁵ Lau, “Fusion or Fission,” 28.
piece preserves the essence of the “Flying Song” and contains interesting musical changes to shape the musical image and express the composer’s emotions. One reason why the audience accept this piece easily is that audiences are familiar with the song’s melody. Another reason is that this piece matches their aesthetic value at that time. As Clifford Taylor mentioned, “the meaningful definition of idea should be under a controlled, but sufficient amount of repetition before it is allowed to expand too freely and generate new ramifications.” Chen Gang successful selects the original idea of this piece and his sophisticated composing techniques touches the audience. Audiences can figure out some exciting parts are based on the lyrical melody but do not feel boring since the piece has an asymmetric aesthetic, which conform to the audiences’ appreciation for music aesthetic at that time. Chen Guoquan’s piece Seeing Somebody Off is the same model as the Morning in the Miao Village, in which the progression of the tune follows the pentatonic mode, and the way of expressing emotion also follow the model of other Chinese violin pieces.

On the other hand, Bright Sheng’s approach of using Chinese elements is in suggestiveness and evocation. He avoids referencing the Chinese element directly doing a translation superficially. For example, his Three Fantasies is scored for violin and adorned with Chinese musical gesture that demonstrates Sheng’s understanding of Chinese culture and history. But Sheng’s references to Chinese elements are not always obvious in this piece, which means that, compared to Chen Gang and Chen Guoquan’s

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98 Lau, “Fusion or Fission,” 28.
compositions, the reference of Chinese elements can range from explicit to abstract.\textsuperscript{99} He seems to keep the flavor of Chinese music, but this gesture disappears soon. The first movement \textit{Dream Song} was inspired by his real dream. As mentioned in former chapter, the “dream” topic is very important for Sheng’s creation. In the dream, he can get the inspiration and the power to promote his intuition. This piece recorded the memory from what he heard in a dream. The whole piece is full of the feeling uncertainty and non-direction. Every phrase has no obvious sense of pause and meaning of ending and the melody line flows back and forth, which arouses the audience’s curiosity about the dream’s next step. Also, this piece abstracts the musical elements that were inspired from the notes Sheng heard in his dream, which did not accord with the modes and the pattern of Chinese music. Breaking the limitation of the mode provide more space for contemporary composers’ creation. Actually, some of the Chinese traditional violin pieces also engaged with the “dream” topic, but they are still limited by the mode, folk tune and timbre. Dreams in actuality may not be organized in neat order. On this point, I think, to some degree, contemporary music is easier to access the reality and has more choices for expressing the dream musically.

Another difference between Chen Gang, Chen Guoquan, and Bright Sheng is the title of their compositions. The title in Chinese music is similar to Western program music. Almost every Chinese piece has a title. As Frederick Lau mentioned that, “titles are part of the signification packages that provide other clues about musical references to

China. Most of these titles are based on images or historical events familiar to Western as well as Chinese listeners.” ¹⁰⁰ But the clues are different between traditional violin music and contemporary violin pieces. In the traditional violin piece, the meaning of the title is specific and describes explicitly the action what would be doing next. For example, Chen Gang’s *Morning in the Miao Village* inspires people to imagine the scene in the village which should be peaceful and accompanying with birds’ chirp. Also, Miao people make the expressive singing and dancing, which hints audiences this piece may have an exciting dancing part. Chen Guoquan’s piece titled *Seeing Somebody Off* describes a specific activity. Then we can hear the accompaniment of gongs and drums that help to shape the happy seeing off atmosphere. In Sheng’s pieces, the titles are comparatively abstract and are fantastically conceived rather than depicting specific scenes and actions. In some degree, Sheng’s title provides more space for his creation as well as offering audiences greater range of imagination.

The influence of society on music could be reflected in the title of the piece of music. In the Chen Gang and Chen Guoquan’s age, people just emerged from the suffering of cruel wars. The culture, economic and politics are located in the rebuilding period. People had a practical style of work and mind which left no space for the development of illusory imagination. People’s aesthetic value was focused on practical issues. Also, in 1966, Staring with the Cultural Revolution, the free development of music was prohibited. Music as a tool that was used for the requirement of politics. Actually, this pattern can be observed already in ancient Chinese feudal society when the

politics began to influence music and people’s aesthetics. The diagram in Figure 6.1 by Li Jian-jing shows how morality and religion, in addition to politics, become one of the factors that effects aesthetics (See example 6.2). But during the time of Cultural Revolution, politics became the only factor that can influence music. So, Chen Gang’s violin pieces all have an active tendency to praise the people of China. Under that special social context, people’s aesthetic value preferred to bold expressions and reality and preferred brilliant music sounds.


Then, after the Economic Reform, the economics and politics made a tremendous progress, which also influenced people’s ideology. In terms of music, new and unfamiliar sounds conveying different kind of emotions seen in compositions by Bright Sheng became more acceptable by many people. A couple of contemporary composers such as

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Bright Sheng and Tan Dun now receive recognitions in China. Through the comparison of Chen Gang, Chen Guoquan and Bright Sheng’s violin pieces, we can see how the differing social circumstances influenced the development of compositional styles in modern Chinese music and aesthetic change under different social contexts.
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