

**The Emergence of the Chinese Zheng:  
Traditional Context, Contemporary Evolution, and  
Cultural Identity**

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

The Faculty of Graduate Studies

(Ethnomusicology)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Vancouver)

May 2013

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## ABSTRACT

The zheng is a Chinese long zither that was developed from a five-string folk instrument over two thousand years ago to become a concert instrument with approximately twenty million practitioners around the world today. The opposing forces of metamorphosis and continuation have dominated the evolution of the instrument with the most rapid and drastic changes to its conception and practice witnessed in the twentieth century.

This dissertation is a musical and cultural study of the zheng's living tradition from traditional practice to contemporary evolution, with an emphasis on the transformation of its musical and cultural identity. The studied areas include composition, dissemination, performance technique, and aesthetics. These discussions reveal an underlying ancient Chinese aesthetic principle drawn from both Confucian and Taoist philosophies that applies to all developmental periods of the zheng—the relationship between *sheng* (generated sound) and *yin* (cultivated sound).

In addition to being a researcher, the author combines her four-decade long experience of performing and studying the instrument with the voices of four generations of zheng performers and those of Chinese and non-Chinese zheng composers and scholars to reveal the core musical and aesthetic elements of traditional zheng practice. Crucially this includes analyzing contemporary changes in Mainland China and North America since the twentieth century in the context of political influences, Westernization, and globalization. The author argues that the fundamental values of traditional zheng practice are still pertinent to the contemporary development of the instrument.

## **PREFACE**

The study that formed the foundation of this dissertation required the approval of the RISE UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board. The Principal Investigator (PI) was Nathan Hesselink, the Department Approver in the music department was Richard B. Kurth, and the Primary Contact was myself, Mei Han. The study, numbered H09-03060, was deemed to be a behavioural study of minimal risk. The initial approval date for the study was December 1, 2009, and the study required ethics reviews with annual renewals. Study completion occurred September 29, 2012.

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## GLOSSARY

### A

an 按 (a left-hand technique for depressing a string on the zheng)

### B

baban 八板 (a traditional Chinese compositional form, often referred to as a “mother tune”)

*Baban Mingyuan* 八板名源 (an eighteenth-century text on *baban*)

babantou 八板頭 (literally “baban head,” the first few phrases of *baban*)

babanwei 八板尾 (literally “baban tail,” the last few phrases of *baban*)

Bafa 八法 (eight combinations of traditional zheng fingering techniques)

Bagua 八卦 (the eight trigrams of the *Yi Jing*)

*Bapu Mingyuan* 八譜名源 (an eighteenth-century text discussing eight pieces created from *baban*)

Bai Chengren 白誠仁 (twentieth-century composer)

Bai Juyi 白居易 (Tang dynasty poet)

Baihu qifang, Tuichen chuxin 百花齊放, 推陳出新 (“Let a hundred flowers bloom and create the new through the evolution of the old,” quotation from Mao Zedong, 1951)

Baihua Zhengyan 百花爭艷 (*Hundred Flowers Blooming*, a 1976 documentary film)

ban 板 (wooden clapper, emphasized beat, or section)

bantou qu 板頭曲 (Henan instrumental music genre)

bayin 八音 (an ancient Chinese instrumental categorization)

Beijing Dianyong Zhipian Chang 北京電影製片廠 (a Chinese film factory)

beipai 北派 (Northern zheng style)

beiqu 北曲 (Yuan dynasty vocal genre)

biangong 變宮 (a semitone lower than a tonic)

Bianliang 汴梁 (capital of the Northern Song dynasty)

bianzhi 變徵 (a semitone lower than the fifth)

bianzou 變奏 (variation)

biaoyan 表演 (performance, performing)

Bo Ya 伯牙 (a character in a famous musical story)

### C

Cai 采 (a *qin* aesthetic of brilliance)

caifeng 采風 (academic activity focusing on collecting folk tunes)

Cai Zhongde 蔡仲德 (musicologist)

Cao Dongfu 曹東扶 (traditional Henan zheng performer)

Cao Zhi 曹植 (Han dynasty poet)

Cao Zheng 曹正 (traditional zheng performer and scholar)

*Caoyuan Yingxiong Xiao Jiemei* 草原英雄小姐妹 (twentieth-century composition for film)  
Chang Jing 常靜 (zheng performer)  
*Chang Xiangsi* 長相思 (twentieth-century zheng composition)  
Chaomei Yinyue She 潮梅音樂社 (Hakka music club formed in 1930)  
Chaoju 潮劇 (Chaozhou opera)  
Chaozhou 潮州 (region in Guangdong province, a regional zheng style)  
Chen Anhua 陳安華 (traditional Chaozhou zheng performer)  
Chen Hong 陳洪 (early twentieth century Chinese scholar)  
Chen Kangshi 陳康士 (Tang dynasty author)  
Chen Leishi 陳雷士 (twentieth-century zheng performer and scholar)  
Chen Maojin 陳茂錦 (traditional Fujian zheng performer)  
Chen Xingyuan Hefan 陳杏元和番 (traditional zheng composition)  
Chen Xingyuan Luoyuan 陳杏元落院 (traditional zheng composition)  
Chen Yi 陳怡 (Chinese/American composer)  
Chen Youzhang 陳友章 (traditional Fujian zheng performer)  
cheng 承 (continuation)  
Cheng Gongliang 程公亮 (scholar and performer of the *qin* and zheng)  
Chu 楚 (a kingdom in ancient China)  
*Chushui Lian* 出水蓮 (traditional Hakka zheng composition)  
chuantong 傳統 (tradition, traditional)  
cipai 詞牌 (poetic form)  
cui 催 (tempo marking in Tang banquet music, a technique for variation in Chaozhou zheng)

## D

da 搭 (zheng fingering technique for plucking outward with the thumb)  
*Da baban* 大八板 (traditional zheng composition)  
dadiao 大調 (a collective term for all the Hakka compositions written on the *baban* form)  
dadiao quzi 大調曲子 (a collective term for all the Henan compositions written on the *baban* form)  
*Dahu Shangshan* 打虎上山 (twentieth-century composition within one of the eight Revolutionary model operas)  
da pipan 大批判 (mass criticism in the Cultural Revolution)  
Dapu 大埔 (region in Guangdong province)  
daqu 大曲 (Tang dynasty music genre)  
Datong Yuehui 大同樂會 (twentieth-century music organization)  
daxing xiaofu, zhongfa qingsui 大興小附, 重發輕隨 (a poetic description of zheng fingering)  
dayin xisheng 大音希聲 (the Taoist phrase of “Great music has no sound”)  
Dai Chuang 戴闖 (instrument maker from Shanghai)

dan baban 單八板 (a composition on the *baban* form)  
 dancui 單催 (a Chaozhou fingering variation)  
 danqu 單曲 (a Han dynasty instrumental genre)  
 Daode Jing 道德經 (Lao Zi's treatise on Taoism)  
 Daode Xueshe 道德學社 (school in Beijing)  
 di 笛 (Chinese transverse flute)  
 dian 點 (a zheng fingering technique that momentarily alters the pitch of a string)  
 dian tan 點彈 (a zheng fingering technique alternating between the index finger of both hands)  
 diao 調 (key, mode, tonic, scale)  
 dieshizheng 蝶式箏 (butterfly zheng)  
 Deng Haiqiong 鄧海瓊 (zheng performer)  
 Dengzhou 鄧州 (a city in Henan Province)  
 Dong Bei Luxun Yishu Xueyuan 東北魯迅藝術學院 (former art school in northeast China)  
 donglu yayue tuan 東魯雅樂團 (Shandong traditional ensemble)  
 Dongshan 東山 (a county in Fujian province)  
*Dongting Xinge* 洞庭新歌 (twentieth-century zheng composition)  
*Dongzu Wuqu* 侗族舞曲 (twentieth-century zheng composition)  
 dui 兌 (one of the eight trigrams of the *Yi Jing*)  
 duilian 對聯 (calligraphy on either side of a traditional Chinese doorway)  
 dunhuang 敦煌 (a stop on the silk road famous for cave murals; a commercial brand of zheng made in Shanghai)  
 duosheng zheng 多聲箏 (the multiple-tuning zheng)

## E

erban 二板 (the fourth section of the Shandong *First Great Suite*)  
 erbian 二變 (two additional pitches to a pentatonic scale)  
 erhu 二胡 (a Chinese two-string stick fiddle)  
 ersi pu 二四譜 (a traditional Chaozhou notational system)  
 erxian 二弦 (a Chaozhou two-string fiddle)

## F

Fan Shang'e 范上娥 (zheng performer)  
 fanxian 反線 (a Hakka mode)  
 Fan Zuyin 樊祖蔭 (musicologist)  
 fangmanjiahua 放慢加花 (a compositional method to slow down and add flowers)  
 fangtang yuewu 仿唐樂舞 (twentieth-century song and dance composition)  
 Fei Shi 匪石 (early twentieth-century scholar)  
 Fenhonglian Zhugongdiao 粉紅蓮 諸宮調 (traditional Chaozhou zheng composition)  
 Fengbai Cuizhu 風擺翠竹 (traditional Shandong zheng composition)

Fengsu Tongyi 風俗通譯 (Han dynasty book of records)  
*Fengxiang Ge Bianzou Qu* 鳳翔歌變奏曲 (traditional Shandong zheng composition)  
fengyun 風韻 (inner gracefulness)  
Fujian 福建 (province in southern China)  
Fu Xuan 傅玄 (Han dynasty poet)

## G

gaige 改革 (to reform, a reform)  
gaige kaifang 改革開放 (to open the door and reform)  
gailiang 改良 (to improve)  
Gaoshan Liushui 高山流水 (traditional zheng composition)  
Gaoyang 高陽 (region in Henan province)  
Gao Zherui 高哲睿 (traditional zheng performer)  
Gao Zicheng 高自成 (traditional zheng performer)  
geming hua 革命化 (Communist term for revolutionization)  
gen 艮 (one of the eight trigrams of the *Yi Jing*)  
gong 宮 (tonic or first pitch of a scale)  
gongche pu 工尺譜 (a traditional notation system)  
*Gongche Shangshu* 公車上書 (Qing dynasty petition for reform)  
Gongsun Nizi 公孫尼子 (Han dynasty author of the *Yue Ji* [Book of Music])  
gou 勾 (zheng fingering technique for middle finger plucking inward)  
gudai 古代 (ancient period)  
gudian 古典 (classical)  
gudiao 骨調 (bone tune)  
Guzheng Jiaocai Bianxuan Zuotan Hui 古箏教材編選座談會 (1961 Forum to standardize the zheng)  
*Guzheng Mihu Quxuan* 古箏迷胡曲選 (book of opera tunes)  
*Guzheng Pu* 古箏譜 (zheng score book)  
*Guzheng Yanzou Fa* 古箏演奏法 (zheng instruction book)  
guzi ci 鼓子詞 (Henan narrative genre)  
guwei jinyong, yangwei zhongyong 古為今用，洋為中用 (“Let the past serve the present, Let foreign things serve China,” quotation from Mao Zedong, 1956)  
*Guan* 管 (tubular double reed instrument)  
*Guanzi* 管子 (ancient Chinese philosopher)  
*Guangling San* 廣陵散 (traditional *qin* composition)  
Guangzhou 廣州 (one of the five national central cities of China, and capital of Guangdong province)  
Guixi 貴溪 (a county in Jiangxi province, Southern China)  
Guoli Yinzhuang 國立音專 (National Conservatory of Music)  
Guo Ying 郭鷹 (traditional Chaozhou zheng performer)  
*Guoyu Zhouyu* 國語周語 (earliest Chinese history book)

Guoyue 國樂 (national music)  
Guoyue Gaijin She 國樂改進社 (twentieth-century music organization in Beijing)

## H

*Haiqing Nahe* 海青拿鶴 (traditional composition)  
Han 漢 (the main ethnic group in China)  
handiao 漢調 (Hakka music)  
Hangao Jiupu 漢皋舊譜 (Hakka score book)  
*Hangong Qiuyue* 漢宮秋月 (traditional Shandong zheng composition)  
Han Kuo-huang 韓國潢 (ethnomusicologist)  
Han Tinggui 韓庭貴 (traditional Shandong zheng performer)  
*Hanya Xishui* 寒鴉戲水 (traditional Chaozhou zheng composition)  
Hanyue 漢樂 (traditional Hakka music)  
*Hanyue Zhengqu Sishi Shou* 漢樂箏曲四十首 (Hakka score book)  
Hangzhou 杭州 (capital city of Zhejiang province)  
haokan, haoting, haoxue 好看 好聽 好學 (popular saying about the zheng: “easy on the eyes, easy on the ears, easy to play”)  
he 合 (unity, unification)  
he 和 (harmony, harmonious)  
He Baoquan 何寶泉 (zheng performer and educator)  
He Beibei 何貝貝 (zheng performer)  
he dang 合當 (Hakka zheng fingering technique of plucking with middle finger and thumb)  
Henan 河南 (province in northern China)  
He Yuzhai 何育齋 (traditional Hakka zheng performer)  
heyue 和樂 (traditional Fujian ensemble music)  
He Zhanhao 何占豪 (composer)  
*Hezheren de Chuntian* 赫哲人的春天 (twentieth-century zheng composition)  
*Honghu Shui* 洪湖水 (twentieth-century zheng composition)  
hongmu 紅木 (a type of padauk wood)  
Hong Peichen 洪沛臣 (traditional Chaozhou zheng performer)  
*Hongshuihe Kuangxiang* 紅水河狂想 (zheng composition)  
Hubei 湖北 (province in southern China)  
huqin 胡琴 (family of bowed fiddles)  
hua 花 (flower)  
hua 滑 (zheng fingering technique of bending notes with the left hand)  
*Hua Liuban* 花六板 (traditional composition on the *baban* form)  
huazi gongche pu 花字工尺譜 (Shandong zheng notation)  
*Huanxiang Qu* 幻想曲 (zheng composition)  
huangzhong 黃鐘 (tonic of ancient Chinese equal tempered twelve tone scale)  
huo sanwu 活三五 (another term for *huowu*)



huowu 活五 (Chaozhou scale)

## J

Ji Kang 嵇康 (Jin dynasty *qin* performer and philosopher)

Ji Wei 吉燁 (zheng performer and educator)

Jiahua 加花 (compositional method to add flowers)

jian 堅 (a *qin* aesthetic of solidness)

jianwu 劍舞 (Tang dynasty dance)

jianzi 減字 (a compositional method to subtract)

*Jiangjun Ling* 將軍令 (traditional composition)

Jiang Qing 江青 (Mao Zedong's wife)

Jiang Yinchun 蔣蔭椿 (traditional musician)

*Jiaochuang Yeyü* 蕉窗夜雨 (traditional Hakka zheng composition)

jiaofang 教坊 (Song dynasty music bureau)

Jiao Jinhai 焦金海 (zheng performer and educator)

*Jiaolong Tuzhu* 蛟龍吐珠 (traditional Fujian zheng composition)

jie 節 (a phrase of *baban*)

Jin Cuntian 金村田 (Shanghai Conservatory Party Leader in the 1950s)

Jinzhong Jiang 金鐘獎 (Golden Bell Award—a national instrumental music competition)

jing 靜 (a *qin* aesthetic of quietness)

*Jinggang Shanshang Taiyang Hong* 井岡山上太陽紅 (zheng composition)

Jingmeng Caotang 京夢草堂 (Qing dynasty publishing house)

*Jiu Ge* 九歌 (Warring States poem)

*Jiu Tang Shu* 舊唐書 (Old Record of the Tang Dynasty)

jue 角 (the third pitch in the common Chinese pentatonic scale)

jueju 絕句 (poetry form)

## K

kaxi 卡戲 (a technique used in traditional music to mimic operatic melodies)

Kaifeng 開封 (a city in Henan province)

kan 坎 (one of the eight trigrams of the *Yi Jing*)

Kang Mianzong 康綿總 (zheng performer)

Kang Youwei 康有為 (Qing dynasty reformer)

kaoda 拷打 (a term denoting a section in Chaozhou music)

kaopai 拷拍 (a term denoting a section in Chaozhou music)

Kejia 客家 (a Chinese term for Hakka)

keju 科舉 (historic Imperial examination system)

kouchuan xinshou 口傳心授 (the process of oral teaching)

kong 空 (a *qin* aesthetic of emptiness)

*Konggu Liushui* 空谷流水 (twentieth-century composition)

*Kongque Dongnan Fei* 孔雀東南飛 (twentieth-century composition)

Kongzi 孔子 (Confucius)  
Kongzi Gaizhi Kao 孔子改制考 (Qing dynasty essay by Kang Youwei)  
kuyin 哭音 (neutral seventh, “crying tone”)  
kuyin 苦音 (neutral seventh, “bitter tone”)  
*Ku Zhouyu* 哭周瑜 (traditional Henan zheng composition)  
kuai sidian 快四點 (traditional Zhejiang fingering technique using thumb and two fingers)  
Kuaisu zhixu 快速指序 (fast fingering sequence)  
kun 坤 (one of the eight trigrams of the *Yi Jing*)  
kunqu 崑曲 (operatic genre)

## L

Lang Lang 朗朗 (pianist)  
lao baban 老八板 (traditional tune and compositional form)  
lao liuban 老六板 (traditional tune and compositional form)  
Laozi 老子 (Taoist philosopher)  
leiqin 搗琴 (two-string Shandong stick fiddle)  
li 離 (one of the eight trigrams of the *Yi Jing*)  
li 禮 (Confucian concept of societal hierarchy)  
Li Bai 李白 (Tang dynasty poet)  
Li Chen 李晨 (*xiao* performer)  
Li Han 李哈 (zheng performer and educator)  
Li Huanzhi 李喚之 (twentieth-century composer)  
Li Jiating 李嘉聽 (traditional Chaozhou zheng performer)  
Li Ling 李凌 (twentieth-century music critic)  
Li Mei 李枚 (ethnomusicologist and composer)  
Li Meng 李萌 (zheng performer and educator)  
Li Si 李斯 (Warring States official)  
*Li Si Liezhuan* 李斯列傳 (biography of Li Si written in Han dynasty)  
*Lisao* 離騷 (Warring States poem, *qin* composition)  
Li Tai'an 李泰安 (Yinkou zheng maker)  
Li Wei 李煒 (zheng performer)  
Li Xi'an 李西安 (ethnomusicologist)  
Li Zhi 李贄 (Ming dynasty philosopher and historian)  
*Lianhua Yao* 蓮花謠 (zheng composition)  
lian taoqu 聯套曲 (a set of compositions)  
liang 亮 (a *qin* aesthetic of brightness)  
Liang Ming-yüe 梁明越 (ethnomusicologist)  
Liang Tsai-ping 梁再平 (twentieth-century zheng performer and educator)  
*Lin'an Yihen* 臨安遺恨 (zheng composition)  
*Lin Chong Yeben* 林衝夜奔 (traditional zheng composition)

Lin Maogen 林毛根 (traditional Chaozhou zheng performer)  
Lin Yongzhi 林永之 (traditional Chaozhou zheng performer)  
liu 溜 (a *qin* aesthetic of fluidity)  
Liuban 六板 (six beats)  
Liu Dehai 劉德海 (contemporary pipa performer)  
liupai 流派 (style, branch, school)  
*Liuqing Niang* 柳青娘 (traditional Chaozhou zheng composition)  
Liu Shikun 劉詩昆 (pianist)  
Liu Weishan 劉維姍 (zheng performer and educator)  
*Liuyang He* 瀏陽河 (twentieth-century zheng composition)  
Liu Zhuang 劉庄 (twenty-century composer)  
Lou Shuhua 樓樹華 (twentieth-century zheng performer and composer)  
luyin luxiang xiaozu 錄音錄像小組 (audio and video recording unit for Mao Zedong, 1975)  
lun 輪 (*pipa* fingering technique of a roll)  
luohou 落後 (backward)  
Luo Huiwen 羅惠文 (Luo Jiuxiang's granddaughter)  
Luo Jiuxiang 羅九香 (traditional Hakka zheng performer)  
Lü Ji 呂驥 (twentieth-century musicologist and music critic)  
Lü Jin 呂金 (zheng and *kayakūm* performer)  
*Lülü Zhengyi* 律呂正義 (Ming dynasty text on music theory)  
lüshi 律詩 (poetry form)

## M

Mawang Dui 馬王堆 (an archaeological site in Hunan, Southern China)  
Mao Zedong 毛澤東 (Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party)  
Meizhou 梅州 (region in Guangdong province)  
mihu 迷胡 (Shaanxi operatic genre)  
*Miluo Jiang Huanxiang Qu* 汨羅江幻想曲 (twentieth-century zheng composition)  
min 閩 (historic term for Fujian province)  
Min Huifen 閔惠芬 (*erhu* performer and educator)  
minjian 民間 (folk)  
minyue 民樂 (national music)  
minzuhua 民族化 (Communist term for nationalization)  
Ming 明 (Chinese dynasty from 1368-1644)  
*Mukamu Sanxu yu Wuqu* 木卡姆散序與舞曲 (twentieth-century zheng composition)  
muqu 母曲 (mother tune)

## N

Nanjing 南京 (city in Jiangsu province)  
nanpai 南派 (southern style)

nanting 難聽 (unpleasant sound)  
*Nan Xiang Zi* 南鄉子 (classical poetry form, composition)  
Nanyang 南陽 (city in Henan province)  
nao 猱 (left-hand technique for the *qin* and *zheng* for momentary pitch bend)  
naotai 鬧台 (enliven a stage)  
*Ni Cheng Pu* 擬箏譜 (twentieth-century monograph on the *zheng*)  
Nie Er 聶耳 (twentieth-century composer)

## O

Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (Song dynasty poet)  
Ouyang Xun 歐陽旬 (Tang dynasty Confucian scholar and calligrapher)

## P

pai 派 (style, school, branch)  
Pan Haixin 潘海新 (*zheng* maker)  
Pan Haiwei 潘海偉 (*zheng* maker)  
peng baban 碰八板 (traditional Shandong music genre)  
pipa 琵琶 (four-string teardrop lute)  
po 破 (Tang dynasty dance)  
*Pu Shuigang* 蒲水缸 (Qing dynasty novel)  
*Putian Tongqing* 普天同慶 (traditional Shandong *zheng* composition)

## Q

Qi 棋 (go, a Chinese board game)  
qi 起 (initiation)  
Qi Baishi 齊白石 (twentieth-century fine artist)  
qiyue hua 器樂化 (instrumentalization)  
qian 乾 (one of the eight trigrams of the *Yi Jing*)  
*Qiangxian* 搶險 (original title for *Battling the Typhoon*)  
*Qianzhong Fu* 黔中賦 (twentieth-century *zheng* composition)  
qiang 腔 (vocal tune)  
qin 琴 (seven-string fretless Chinese zither)  
Qin 秦 (a state from the Warring States period)  
*Qinsang Qu* 秦桑曲 (twentieth-century *zheng* composition)  
qinshu 琴書 (Shandong narrative form)  
*Qinyun* 琴韻 (traditional Shandong *zheng* composition)  
qinzheng 秦箏 (another term for *zheng*)  
qing 輕 (a *qin* aesthetic of lightness)  
qing 清 (a *qin* aesthetic of clarity)  
*Qing Feng Nian* 慶豐年 (twentieth-century *zheng* composition)  
qing san 輕三 (Chaozhou scale of light three)

qing sanliu 輕三六 (Chaozhou scale of light three six)  
qingsan zhongliu 輕三重六 (Chaozhou scale of light three heavy six)  
qingshang 清商 (Tang dynasty banquet music scale)  
qingshang yue 清商樂 (a section of Tang banquet music)  
*Qingting Dianshui* 蜻蜓點水 (traditional Fujian zheng composition)  
Qingtong xia 青銅峽 (Bronze Gorge in northwest China, site of a hydroelectric dam)  
qingyue 清樂 (traditional Hakka instrumental genre)  
qingyun 情韻 (feeling or emotional tone)  
Qing Zhu 青主 (composer and music educator)  
Qiu Dacheng 邱大成 (twentieth-century zheng performer and scholar)  
Qiu Ji 邱薺 (zheng performer and educator)  
Qulü 曲律 (Ming dynasty vocal instruction book)  
qupai 曲牌 (named tunes)  
Qu Xiaosong 瞿小松 (composer)  
Qu Yuan 屈原 (Warring States poet)  
Qu Yun 曲雲 (zheng performer and educator)  
qunzhonghua 群眾化 (Communist term for massifying)

## R

Rao Ningxin 饒寧新 (traditional Hakka zheng performer)  
*Renmin Yinyue Chubanshe* 人民音樂出版社 (People's Music Publishing House)  
Rong Zhai 榮齋 (Qing dynasty court musician)  
rou 揉 (portamento)  
rujia yue 儒家樂 (Hakka concept of refined music)  
ruan 阮 (four string round bodied lute)  
ruan wu 軟舞 (Tang dynasty dance form)  
ruan xian 軟線 (Hakka scale)

## S

sanban 三板 (the third section of the Shandong *First Great Suite*)  
San Chuan 三川 (a zheng trio based in Beijing)  
sanfen sunyi fa 三分損益法 (a system for temperament calculation)  
sanqu 散曲 (Yuan dynasty vocal genre)  
*Sanshi Sanban* 三十三板 (traditional Zhejiang composition)  
sanxian 三弦 (three-string fretless rebab)  
sao 扫 (strum)  
shao 少 (small)  
se 瑟 (ancient long zither)  
Shaanxi 陝西 (province in central western China)  
*Shancun Laile Shouhuo Yun* 山村來了售貨員 (twenty-century composition for Chinese *sona*)

Shandong 山東 (province in northern China)

*Shandong Yuequ Chaoben Erce* 山東樂曲抄本二冊 (Two Copies of Shandong Zheng Music from the Qing dynasty)

*Shandong Zhengqu Zhenchao Ben* 山東箏曲真抄本 (Shandong zheng score book)

*Shan Gui* 山鬼 (Warring States poem)

shankou 山口 (large bridge on the right side of the zheng)

*Shan Mei* 山魅 (zheng composition)

shang 商 (second tone of a Chinese pentatonic scale)

Shanghai 上海 (one of the five national central cities of China)

Shangqiu 商丘 (region in Henan province)

Shao Guangchen 邵光琛 (twentieth-century composer)

*Shenqi Mipu* 神奇秘譜 (Ming dynasty *qin* score book)

Shenyang 瀋陽 (capital city of Liaoning province)

Shen Yue 沈約 (fifth-century poet)

Shenzong 神宗 (Ming dynasty Emperor)

sheng 笙 (bamboo mouth organ)

sheng 聲 (sound)

shengduo yunshao 聲多韻少 (more sound, less *yun*)

shengqianghua 聲腔化 (vocalization)

shengshao yunduo 聲少韻多 (less sound, more *yun*)

shengyin 聲音 (sound)

shi datao 十大套 (ten *baban* suites)

shidai jingshen 時代精神 (Communist concept of the “spirit of the time”)

*Shiji* 史記 (Han dynasty history book)

*Shiliu Ban* 十六板 (traditional zheng composition on a *baban* form)

*Shimian Maifu* 十面埋伏 (traditional *pipa* composition)

*Shi Shu* 史書 (historical records written for every dynasty throughout the Chinese imperial period)

Shi Yinmei 史陰美 (traditional Henan zheng performer)

Shi Zhaoyuan 史兆元 (zheng performer and educator)

*Shuyun* 書韻 (Shandong zheng composition)

*Shuangban* 雙板 (traditional Shandong composition)

shuangcui 雙催 (Chaozhou technique to rearticulate a given note three times)

shuangdie cui 雙疊催 (Chaozhou technique to rearticulate a given note seven times)

shuangqing 雙清 (four-string Fujian long neck lute)

Shuowen Jiezi 說文解字 (Han dynasty Chinese dictionary)

sijiu 四舊 (Communist concept of the “four olds”: old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits)

*Shuo Lue* 說略 (Ming dynasty encyclopedia)

siban 四板 (the fourth section of the Shandong *First Great Suite*)

sidian 四點 (“four points,” a fingering technique alternating the thumb and first two fingers)  
*Sihe Ruyi* 四合如意 (traditional Zhejiang composition)  
*Siku Quanshu* 四庫全書 (Complete Library of the Four Treasuries, 1782)  
siping bawen 四平八穩 (Chinese idiom for stability “four being even and eight being stable”)  
sixian 絲弦 (Hakka zheng genre)  
sixiang luohou 思想落後 (politically backward)  
Song 宋 (Chinese dynasty from 960-1279)  
su 俗 (euphonic quality)  
Su Wenxian 蘇文賢 (Chaozhou zheng performer)  
suzi 俗字 (folk music notation)  
Sui 隋 (Chinese dynasty from 581-618)  
Suiping 遂平 (a county in Henan province)  
*Sui Shu* 隋書 (Record of the Sui dynasty)  
Sun Wenyan 孫文妍 (zheng performer and educator)

## T

tai 太 (low or large, often referring to drum sounds)  
tanchang 彈唱 (narrative song genre)  
Tan Dun 譚盾 (composer)  
*Tan Gu Luan* 嘆孤鸞 (traditional Fujian zheng composition)  
tanhuang 灘簧 (Zhejiang narrative form)  
tanlun 彈輪 (contemporary zheng counterpoint technique of a synchronized pluck and roll)  
tanyao 彈搖 (contemporary zheng counterpoint technique of a synchronized pluck and tremolo)  
Tang 唐 (Chinese dynasty from 618-906)  
Tang Biguang 唐壁光 (twentieth-century composer)  
Tang Guocheng 湯國誠 (traditional Fujian zheng performer)  
Tianjin 天津 (one of the five national central cities of China)  
tianyuan 添眼 (traditional compositional method of adding a weak beat)  
*Tianxia Datong* 天下大同 (Universal Harmony, an album of zheng music, the title of a zheng composition in *baban* form)  
*Tianxia Tong* 天下同 (the title of a zheng composition in *baban* form)  
tianzi 添字 (Hakka term meaning “to add”)  
*Tongdian* 通典 (Encyclopedic History of Institutions, 801)  
touban 頭板 (the first section of the Shandong *First Great Suite*)

## W

waijiang xian 外江弦 (a term for Hakka music)

wanke 玩客 (a Zhejiang and Jiangsu term for a casual meeting of musicians to play together)

wanyou 玩友 (a Shandong and Henan term for a casual meeting of musicians to play together)

wanwan qiang 碗碗腔 (a regional operatic genre in central Shaanxi province)

Wang Changyuan 王昌元 (zheng composer and performer)

Wang Dianyu 王殿玉 (traditional Shandong zheng performer)

Wang Guangqi 王光歧 (musicologist)

Wang Jide 王驥德 (Ming dynasty music scholar)

Wang Jianmin 王建民 (composer)

Wang Leyong 王樂永 (traditional Shandong zheng performer)

Wang Li 王莉 (zheng performer)

Wang Shengwu 王省吾 (traditional Henan zheng performer)

Wang Shu 王樹 (twentieth-century composer)

Wang Xunzhi 王巽之 (traditional Zhejiang zheng performer)

Wang Yingrui 王英睿 (ethnomusicologist)

Wang Yun 王運 (zheng performer and educator)

Wang Zhongshan 王中山 (zheng composer and performer)

Wei Hongning 魏洪寧 (zheng maker)

Wei Zhongle 魏仲樂 (twentieth-century *pipa* performer)

Wei Ziyu 魏子猷 (traditional Henan zheng performer)

Wenhua Jiang 文華獎 (a notional instrumental music competition)

*Wenji Guihan* 文姬歸漢 (Beijing Opera piece)

*Wenxian Tongkao* 文獻通考 (A Comprehensive Investigation of Documents and Traditions, 1307)

*Wenyi Jiemu* 文藝節目 (Art Program, a special score collection compiled during the Cultural Revolution)

Wu Fei 吳非 (zheng performer)

Wulin 武林 (another term for Zhejiang)

wuqu 武曲 (“martial” section of traditional *pipa* repertoire)

wuqu 舞曲 (dance music)

wutong 梧桐 (type of wood for making instruments)

*Wuyi Pinglan* 無意憑欄 (Fujian traditional zheng composition)

Wu Yingju 吳應炬 (composer)

Wu Xi 無錫 (city in Jiangsu province)

Wu Zuqiang 吳祖強 (composer)

## X

Xi'an 西安 (capital of Shaanxi province)

Xi'an guyue 西安鼓樂 (Xi'an drum music)

*Xibu Suixiang* 西部隨想 (twentieth-century zheng composition)



xiqin 奚琴 (Shandong two-string stick fiddle)  
*Xishan Qinkuang* 溪山琴況 (Aesthetics of the Qin at Xishan Mountain, 1673)  
 xixue 西学 (Western knowledge)  
*Xi Yun* 戏韵 (twentieth-century zheng composition)  
 xiyue 细乐 (Chaozhou ensemble music genre)  
 xiandai 現代 (contemporary)  
 xianshi yue 弦诗乐 (Chaozhou ensemble music genre)  
 xiansuo 弦索 (string ensemble)  
*Xiansuo Beikao* 弦索備考 (nineteenth-century score book)  
 xiansuo diao 弦索調 (northern narrative singing genre)  
 xiansuo qiang 弦索腔 (northern narrative singing genre)  
*Xiansuo Shisantai* 弦索十三套 (nineteenth-century score book)  
 xianghe daqu 相和大曲 (Han dynasty song and dance genre)  
 xianghe ge 相和歌 (Han dynasty vocal genre)  
*Xiangshan Shegu* 香山射鼓 (twentieth-century zheng composition)  
 Xiang Sihua 項斯華 (zheng performer)  
 xiao 簫 (end-blown bamboo notch flute)  
 xiao 小 (small, tiny)  
 xiaolun 小輪 (*pipa* fingering technique of a roll that excludes the thumb)  
 xiao qu 小曲 (Henan folk music)  
*Xiaotao Hong* 小桃紅 (traditional Hakka zheng composition)  
 Xiao Youmei 蕭友梅 (twentieth-century musicologist)  
 Xiaozhao Yuetuan 霄霏樂團 (twentieth-century music society)  
 Xinchao Sizhu Hui 新潮絲竹會 (Chaozhou music society in Shanghai)  
 Xinjiang 新疆 (Uyghur autonomous region in western China)  
*Xin Tang Shu* 新唐書 (The New Record of the Tang Dynasty, 1060)  
 Xinye 新業 (county in Henan province)  
 xing 刑 (punishment)  
 Xinghai 星海 (Guangzhou music conservatory)  
 Xu Xiaolin 徐曉林 (composer)  
 Xu Zhengao 徐振高 (zheng maker)  
 xuanji 炫技 (to display skill)  
 Xue Qionqiong 薛瓊瓊 (Tang dynasty zheng performer)  
*Xueshan Chunxiao* 雪山春曉 (twentieth-century zheng composition)  
 xuetang yuege 學堂樂歌 (school song)  
 xun 巽 (one of the eight trigrams of the *Yi Jing*)  
*Xunfeng Qu* 薰風曲 (traditional Hakka zheng composition)

## Y

ya 雅 (refined, elegant)

*Yashan Ai* 涯山哀 (traditional Hakka zheng composition)  
 yayue 雅樂 (refined music)  
 yayun 押韻 (to rhyme)  
 yan 眼 (weak beat)  
 Yan'an 延安 (the base camp of the Communist Party of China during the anti-Japanese War)  
 Yan Fu 嚴復 (Qing dynasty scientist)  
 yanshi 演釋 (to interpret)  
 yanyue 筵樂 (Tang Imperial court banquet music)  
 yanzou 演奏 (to perform)  
 yang 陽 (masculine, solid, opposite of *yin* in the duality of *yin-yang*)  
*Yangbian Cuima Yunliang Mang* 揚鞭催馬送糧忙 (twenty-century composition for Chinese *dizi*)  
 Yang Guangquan 楊廣泉 (traditional Chaozhou musician)  
 yang qin 揚琴 (hammered dulcimer)  
 Yang Xiuming 楊秀明 (traditional Chaozhou zheng performer)  
 Yang Yinliu 楊蔭瀏 (musicologist)  
 yao 搖 (zheng fingering technique for tremolo)  
 yaosheng 搖聲 (moving tone)  
 yaoyou 搖游 (zheng fingering technique for tremolo that moves along the string)  
*Yeijing Luanling* 夜靜鑾鈴 (traditional Shandong zheng composition)  
 Ye Xiaogang 葉小剛 (composer)  
 yi 意 (intention)  
 yiban sanyan 一板三眼 (one strong beat, three weak beats)  
 yiban yiyen 一板一眼 (one strong beat, one weak beat)  
*Yi Dian Jin* 一點金 (traditional Hakka zheng composition)  
*Yi Jing* 易經 ([Chinese] Book of Changes)  
 yijing 意境 (an idealized place or philosophical state suggested by a poetic title and the programmatic contents of a piece)  
*Yili Hewan* 伊犁河畔 (twentieth-century zheng composition)  
 Yi Suzi 一素子 (eighteenth-century writer)  
*Yiwen Leiju* 藝文類聚 (Collection of Literature Arranged by Categories, 624)  
 Yixiang She 逸響社 (Hakka music society in Shanghai)  
 yiyun busheng 以韻補聲 (zheng aesthetic of using *yun* to enrich sound)  
 yizhaoxian 一招鮮 (Shandong technical commentary of “one smart move”)  
 yin 音 (music)  
 yin 陰 (feminine, fluid, opposite of *yang* in the duality of *yin-yang*)  
 yin 吟 (zheng fingering technique of light vibrato)  
 Yingkou 營口 (city in Liaoning province)  
 yingxian 硬線 (traditional Hakka scale)

youyun 幽韻 (the delight of elegant reclusion)  
 yu 竽 (an ancient bamboo mouth organ)  
 yu 羽 (the pitch *la* in the common Chinese pentatonic scale)  
 Yu Huiyong 于會泳 (composer, former Minister of Culture)  
 yuji 娛己 (self-entertainment)  
 yuren 娛人 (entertaining others)  
*Yuzhou Changwan* 漁舟唱晚 (twentieth-century zheng composition)  
 yuan 圓 (*qin* aesthetic of smoothness)  
 Yuan 元 (Chinese dynasty from 1271-1368)  
 yuanban jiahua 原板加花 (compositional method of adding flowers to the original beats)  
 yue 樂 (music)  
*Yue'er Gao* 月兒高 (traditional composition)  
*Yuefu Shiji* 樂府詩集 (Collection of Lyrics from the Music Bureau, c. 1254)  
 Yuehe minsheng 樂合民生 (Confucian saying of “if music is harmonious, people are harmonious”)  
*Yue Ji* 樂記 (Record of Music)  
*Yueju Yuekan* 樂劇樂刊 (Journal of Musical Theater and Music)  
 yueqin 月琴 (small round-bodied lute)  
 yueshan 岳山 (fixed bridge on the right side of the zheng)  
*Yueshu* 樂書 (Treatise on Music, c. 1100)  
 yuetong 樂同 (Confucian saying of “music unites”)  
 yun 韻 (zheng aesthetic of sophistication, refinement, and beauty)  
 yunduo shengshao 韻多聲少 (zheng aesthetic of more *yun*, less sound)  
*Yun Qing* 雲慶 (traditional composition)  
 Yunxiao 雲霄 (region in Fujian province)

## Z

zaju 雜劇 (Yuan dynasty operatic genre)  
 zaoju 造句 (Chaozhou term for variation)  
 Zenghou Yi 曾侯乙 (Marquis from fifth century BCE)  
 Zeng Zhimin 曾志忞 (twentieth-century scholar)  
 zhan 顫 (zheng fingering technique for heavy vibrato)  
*Zhan Taifeng* 戰台風 (twentieth-century zheng composition)  
 zhantou quwei 斬頭去尾 (compositional method for variation)  
 Zhanyou 戰友 (comrade, name for a Chinese art troupe)  
 Zhang Guisheng 張貴聲 (composer)  
 Zhang Kun 張昆 (zheng maker)  
 Zhang Xiaofeng 張曉峰 (composer)  
 Zhang Yan 張燕 (twentieth-century zheng performer)  
 Zhang Zelun 張澤倫 (scholar)

Zhang Zhitong 张之恫 (Qing dynasty scholar)  
 Zhang Zirui 张子锐 (zheng maker)  
 Zhao'an 詔安 (region in Fujian province)  
*Zhaojun Yuan* 昭君怨 (traditional Hakka zheng composition)  
 Zhao Chun 趙純 (zheng student)  
 Zhao Manqin 趙曼琴 (zheng educator)  
 Zhao Yuzhai 赵玉斋 (traditional Shandong zheng performer)  
 Zhejiang 浙江 (province in eastern China)  
 zhen 震 (one of the eight trigrams of the *Yi Jing*)  
 zheng 箏 (Chinese long zither)  
 zheng 政 (governance, administration)  
*Zhengfu* 箏賦 (Odes to the Zheng)  
*Zhengfu Xu* 箏賦序 (preface of Odes to the Zheng)  
 Zhenggai Xiaozu 箏改小組 (Zheng Reform Unit)  
 zhi 指 (finger)  
 zhi 徵 (a pitch on the common Chinese pentatonic scale)  
*Zhiqu Weihushan* 智取威虎山 (Taking the Tiger Mountain by Strategy, one of the eight model operas)  
 Zhong 中 (Confucian aesthetic of equilibrium)  
 zhong 重 (a *qin* aesthetic of heaviness)  
*Zhongguo Wenlian Chuban She* 中國文聯出版社 (Chinese Literary Association Publishing House)  
 Zhongguo Yangzhou Guzheng Xueshu Jiaoliu Hui 中國揚州古箏學術交流會 (1986 National Guzheng Conference)  
 Zhongguo Yishu Tuan 中國藝術團 (Chinese National Art Troupe)  
*Zhongguo Yinyue Gailiang Shuo* 中國音樂改良說 (Discourse on Chinese Music Reform)  
 zhongliu 重六 (Chaozhou scale of heavy six)  
 Zhongyang Gewu Tuan 中央歌舞團 (Central Song and Dance Troupe)  
 zhongxue weiti, xixue weiyong 中學為體, 西學為用 (Qing dynasty initiative of Chinese learning as substance, Western learning for application)  
*Zhongzhou Gudiao* 中州古調 (Hakka score book)  
 Zhou Enlai 周恩來 (Chinese Prime Minister)  
 Zhou Ji 周吉 (twentieth-century ethnomusicologist, composer)  
 Zhou Jiu 州鳩 (ancient Chinese music official)  
 Zhou Long 周龍 (composer)  
 Zhou Wang 周望 (zheng performer and educator)  
 Zhou Yanjia 周延甲 (zheng composer and educator)  
 zhu 筑 (ancient five-string bamboo zither)  
 zhuche 佇尺 (Hakka and Chaozhou compositional method to insert *re* in between two melodic notes)

zhufuo 佇拂 (Hakka and Chaozhou compositional method to insert a short glissando between two melodic notes)

Zhu Lei 朱蕾 (zheng performer)

zhuliu 佇六 (Hakka and Chaozhou compositional method to insert *sol* between two melodic notes)

zhuan 轉 (deviation)

Zi Qi 子期 (a character in a famous musical story)

zitan 紫檀 (a type of red sandalwood used for making instruments)

*Zuo Zhuan* 左傳 (Chronicles of Zuo, a Confucian classical text)

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The writing of this dissertation was a three-year process, but it took me a lifetime to prepare for it, including forty years learning about the instrument and thirty years learning English as my second language. Throughout this long journey I received support and guidance from many teachers, friends, and family members, and I am grateful to all of them.

First I would like to express the deepest appreciation for my committee members Dr. Nathan Hesselink, Dr. Michael Tenzer, and Dr. Catherine Swatek. I am deeply indebted to my adviser and committee chair Dr. Nathan Hesselink who has guided me throughout my Ph.D. program with encouragement, insightful knowledge, and thoughtful advice. I also would like to thank him for his constructive feedback and editing. I am grateful to Dr. Michael Tenzer who has always inspired and challenged me with his critical thinking and high standards of scholarship, and to Dr. Catherine Swatek for her support and for being willing to be a member of the committee. I would also like to thank Dr. Jan Walls who selflessly lent his expertise in translating Chinese language into English; Dr. Janette Tilley for her editing, comments, and perspectives; as well as Dr. Fredric Lieberman and Dr. Alan Thrasher, two distinguished scholars of Chinese music, for giving me invaluable advice. I would also like to thank The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada who generously supported my Ph.D. studies.

A number of leaders of zheng communities in both Mainland China and in North America provided tremendous support, specifically Shi Zhaoyuan, Zhou Yanjia, Chen Tianhua, Rao Ningxin, Xiang Sihua, Fan Shang'e, Wang Changyuan, Liu Weishan, Liu

Qichao, Li Meng, Wang Zhongshan, Li Wei, Lü Jin, Qiu Ji, Ji Wei, Deng Haiqiong, Wu Fei, He Beibei, and Xiang Mei. Dr. Li Mei and Xu Xiaolin offered candid discussions on many issues addressed in the dissertation that greatly improved the text. And I would like to thank the composers and musicians I have collaborated with, specifically Dr. John Sharpley, Dr. John Oliver, Professor Barry Truax, Jon Jang, and John Reischman.

I am forever grateful to my zheng teachers Gao Zicheng, Zhao Yuzhai, and Zhang Yan.

Last, but certainly not least, I am deeply indebted to Randy Raine-Reusch who is my mentor and the catalyst who sparked my continuous search for new artistic voices on the zheng and a deeper philosophical connection between my heart and my music. I am also thankful for his intelligence and creativity, his encouragement to share ideas with him, and his tireless support in numerous ways throughout the entire process. I would also like to thank my daughter D'arcy Han for her support and love.

# DEDICATION

*To artistic hearts and inquiring minds*



# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Prelude

[People in the *Qin* State] beat clay drums [and] earthen jars, play the zheng, [and] slap their thighs to accompany songs. This is the true music of the *Qin*.<sup>1</sup> (Li Si, 237 BCE)

The zheng is a plucked half-tube wooden zither native to Han Chinese.

Throughout the two thousand years of its history, the zheng has gone through several transformations in construction, yet the instrument has maintained its fundamental form. Its body is nearly rectangular in shape, with a flat bottom, flat sides, and a convex top soundboard. The strings are stretched over movable bridges across the soundboard and fastened to tuning pegs. Over time the zheng has varied in its size, numbers of strings, shapes of bridges, and materials for making strings and bridges. Today the size of the zheng ranges from 140 to 170 cm long and 25 to 35 cm wide. The soundboard is made of *wutong* wood (*firmiana platanifolia*), while the frame of the body uses *hongmu* (*padauks*), *zitan* rosewood, or other types of hardwood. The standard modern zheng employs from 21 to 26 strings, whereas historically 5, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 or 18 strings were used. Strings were made of silk for the majority of the zheng's history, with copper and steel strings becoming common in the late nineteenth century; modern zheng strings are now commonly made of metal wound with nylon. Zheng bridges are currently constructed of wood or occasionally bone or synthetic material, while historically ivory or jade were also used.

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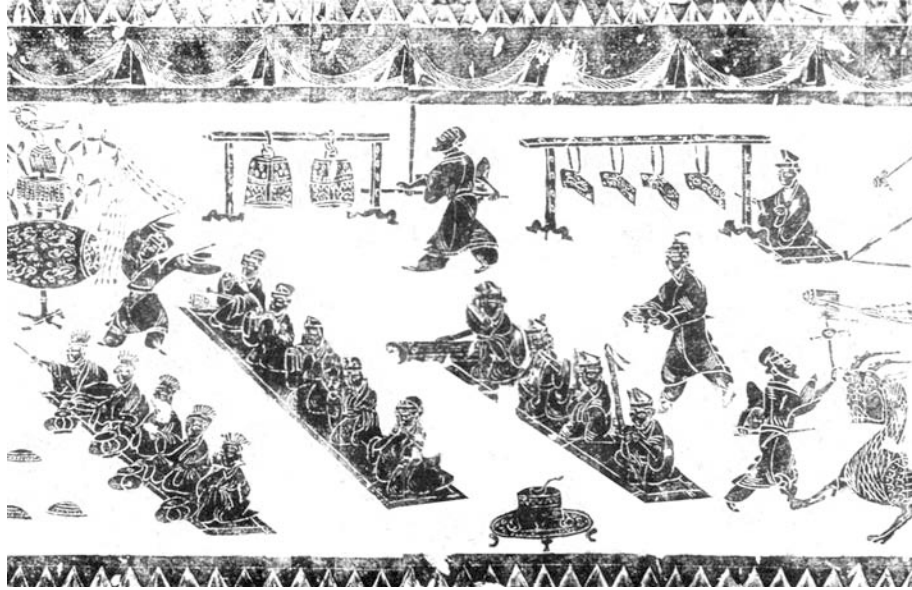
<sup>1</sup> This statement is the earliest known description of the zheng, cited from the “Li Si Liezhuan” (Biography of Li Si) in *Shiji* (Records of the Grand Historian, Sima c. 91 BCE). The state of *Qin*, located in modern day Shannxi province in central western China, was one of the Warring States (475-221 BCE).

The rich history of the zheng encompasses both solo and ensemble genres. With its roots planted in folk music, as illustrated by Li Si's description, the zheng has extended to a multitude of performance contexts with manifold musical styles while continuously retaining its appeal to diverse social strata. Based upon primary performance function, dissemination, and literature, I divide the zheng's history into two primary developmental stages: ancient tradition (*gudai*, the second to fourteenth century), and living tradition, which can be further divided into traditional (*chuantong*, the eighteenth to mid-twentieth century) and contemporary (*xiandai*, mid-twentieth century to current day). These stages reflect each period's social-cultural context and the zheng's shifting position in styles, genres, and popularity within the various social classes.

The zheng became popular during the Han dynasty (206 BCE-221), with the instrument used in various folk and court music activities (see Figure 1.1). It featured most prominently in a small string and wind ensemble to accompany *xianghe ge* (harmonious song), also known as *xianghe daqu* (great tunes of harmony), a genre that features singing and dancing. An instrumental repertoire known as *danqu*, performed by either a solo zheng<sup>2</sup> or an ensemble featuring the zheng, was developed from the *xianghe daqu* (Guo c. 1264). By the second century the solo zheng had become a popular form of entertainment as well as a tool for self-cultivation for the literati; as the great poet Cao Zhi (192-232) writes: "Playing the zheng, strive for tranquil tones; fresh sounds, marvelous as the divine."

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<sup>2</sup> The *Yuefu Shiji* (Collection of Lyrics from the Music Bureau, Guo c.1264) listed seven *danqu* pieces as both ensemble works as well as solo works for the zheng, the *qin* (seven-string zither), the *zhu* (five-string struck zither), and the *sheng* (bamboo mouth organ).



**Figure 1-1 A third-century stone relief of a music ensemble from northeastern China (modern day Shandong province) with a half-tube zither at the centre of the picture (Liu 1988:31, photo by permission of the Chinese Music Research Institute).**

In the following Sui, Tang, and Song (581-1279) dynasties—the height of the Chinese imperial era—solo zheng performance flourished and the performance techniques and compositions of the zheng became very sophisticated (Duan c. 890). There were two types of zheng popular at the time found in professional court ensembles performing *yanyue*: banquet music and other non-ritual court activities<sup>3</sup> (see Figure 1.2). A twelve-string zheng was utilized in performing the *qingshang yue* (pure music) section of *yanyue* that featured older Han Chinese music. The more popular thirteen-string zheng was used in the non-Han sections of *yanyue* and other musical genres (Chen c. 1100).

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<sup>3</sup> *Yanyue* refers to the banquet music performed at the imperial court established as early as the Zhou dynasty (1046-256 BCE). During the Tang dynasty, *yanyue* became a general term to include banquet music and all non-ritual music performed at the imperial court. The most prominent *yanque* of the time was banquet music divided into nine (later ten) sections. While the *qingshang yue* section of *yanque* was Han Chinese music inherited from previous dynasties, the other sections were comprised of foreign musics, including those from Persia, Central Asia, and Korea.

During this period, women—whether court musicians, courtesans, or members of noble families—often played the zheng, establishing it as a symbol of beauty and romantic sentiments.



**Figure 1-2 A Tang dynasty mural painting of a court ensemble including the zheng (Liu 1998:83, photo by permission of the Chinese Music Research Institute).**

Court music, and especially banquet music, gradually lost its position as the main source for entertainment over the next two hundred years as China went through a series of major political and cultural shifts with the change of dynasties. The Ming dynasty (1368-1644) then saw the total demise of banquet music, and only sporadic performances of court music continued with the zheng taking a minor role, if included at all.

Although largely unacknowledged in the literature, the zheng was combined with other string instruments in the *xiansuo* (string) ensemble<sup>4</sup> to accompany various *beiqu* (northern tune) vocal genres, including *zaju* (operatic plays on various subjects) and *sanqu* (literary songs), both developed during the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368) (Zhongguo 1985:22).<sup>5</sup> Over the next several hundred years, a new type of narrative singing genre, named *xiansuo diao* or *xiansuo qiang* (string tune), was developed in Henan and Shandong provinces of northern China (Zhang 1993:28) where two northern traditional zheng styles were later established.<sup>6</sup>

These developments marked a significant transition of the zheng, which saw its function shift from its previous role as a prestigious and elegant instrument primarily serving the imperial court to an accompaniment to popular art forms for common people. This change in identity and social status of its practitioners led the instrument to its second stage of development, which I refer to as its traditional period. The musical elements of these opera and narrative singing genres later became the fundamentals for traditional zheng music, delineating its general concepts of composition and creation, as well as the development of styles and techniques.

In the traditional period the zheng was most prominent in rural areas of northern and southern China as a lead instrument in small ensembles performing instrumental

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<sup>4</sup> The term *xiansuo* first appeared in the Song dynasty, referring to plucked string instruments. Later it became the general term for string ensembles accompanying dramatic genres developed in Northern China. These ensembles commonly included the *zheng*, *pipa* (four-string pear shaped lute), *sanxian* (three-string fretless *rebab*), and *huqin* (two-string fiddle) (Yang 1981:629).

<sup>5</sup> Lyrics mentioning the zheng are found in *sanqu* repertoire, such as “There is a fine *xiao* (end-blown bamboo flute), but don’t know how to blow it; there is a lovely zheng, but don’t know how to play it”; and a woman is “...good at playing the zheng to accompany vocal. Very few can compete with her” (Zhang 1993:16, translated from the Chinese).

<sup>6</sup> A number of earlier sources cited by Zhang Zelun stated that *xiaosuo qiang* was also known as “woman’s tune,” because it was often sung by female entertainers who accompanied themselves on *xiansou* instruments (Zhang 1993:29, translated from the Chinese). These sources suggest that *xiansuo diao* has a possible link to the earlier practice of solo female performances of the zheng in earlier dynasties.

music, and as accompaniment to narrative singing genres. This period saw a wealth of repertoire formed through a collective compositional process based on the *baban* mother tune, to be discussed later. This repertoire became the foundation for the zheng's next developmental period.

The contemporary period commenced with the demise of the imperial era in China in the early twentieth century, while a subsequent series of dynamic political and cultural revolutions once again transformed the zheng. Specifically, in the latter half of the twentieth century the zheng underwent its most condensed period of modification and development, affecting its physical construction, repertoire, performance practice, social function, and dissemination. Socio-cultural upheavals such as absorption of Western influences, the Cultural Revolution, and rapid economic growth not only greatly challenged zheng tradition, but also propelled the instrument well into the twenty-first century as a prominent national instrument with a unified pedagogy. Today the zheng has become one of the most—if not *the* most—popular Chinese instruments with an estimated twenty million practitioners in China and around the globe.

With this considerable history and significant transformation occurring in the twentieth century, I ask a number of important questions about the zheng and its contemporary modernization: 1) In its change and transformation over the centuries, is there a core identity and a governing aesthetic remaining?; 2) If so, what aspect of the zheng's identity has changed?; and 3) What are the influences or stresses that impel the changes? These questions will form the substance of this dissertation.

## **1.2 Studied Subjects, Personal Background and Perspective, and Research Process**

This dissertation is a musical and cultural study of the living tradition of the zheng, its traditional practice, contemporary evolution, and musical and cultural identity, with an emphasis on its contemporary transformation since the twentieth century.

I use the term “traditional zheng” to refer to the music developed in several rural regions in China before the twentieth century. In zheng literature this developmental stage is often referred to as folk (*minjian*) music, primarily due to its practices of aural-oral transmission and collective composition. However, research has shown many inner-connections between “folk” and “court” practice. Therefore, labeling traditional practice as “folk” would be incorrect and overwrite important continuities. In addition, these regional genres are living traditions, which are still vibrant in certain areas outside the metropolitan centres in which the “contemporary” zheng has been established. For these reasons, I identify zheng music prevalent in the rural regions as *traditional* instead of *folk*. I use the term “contemporary” to define music developed since the twentieth century, composed by individual composers and performed by professionally trained musicians and zheng students.

### **1.2.1 Organization of the Chapters**

The issue of identity change is at the heart of the contemporization of the zheng. While metamorphosis and continuation have been two conflicting yet coinciding features dominating its evolution, the twentieth century has witnessed the most rapid and drastic

transformations of all. Composition, performance techniques, dissemination, and performance aesthetics comprise four aspects in which the most significant changes have occurred, affecting the music and cultural identity of the instrument. These subjects are examined in the context of social and cultural changes that demonstrate the continuum and transformations of the zheng from its traditional era to contemporary practice.

Each of these subjects could support its own dissertation or in-depth study but I attempt a more synthetic and comprehensive approach. It is my observation that even with the rapid growth of an indigenous body of zheng literature in recent years providing a wealth of new information, Chinese studies primarily recount *what* happened. A lack of critical perspective leaves many questions remaining as to *how* and *why*.

Rapid modernization and Westernization in the last hundred years has brought the zheng to a new milestone as a versatile concert instrument; now it is facing new challenges such as globalization and the influence of popular cultures. Thus it is paramount to examine the zheng's music and cultural identity at this time through: 1) reevaluating traditional music and music practice; 2) scrutinizing the impact of communist ideology on the modern transformation of the instrument openly and honestly; 3) assessing the influence of Western music (both classical and twentieth-century); and 4) understanding its relationship with other East Asian zither traditions. I also believe that a combination of a Chinese (insider) and global (outsider) perspective is needed for such an examination. My objective here is to step beyond descriptive studies and focus on a multifaceted examination of the zheng's changing identity through discussing the musical issues and forces behind these changes, challenging a number of well-accepted conventions.



Chapters Two through Five are laid out chronologically from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century. Chapter Two discusses the era of the traditional zheng—elements that signify the cultural provenance of the living tradition: its composition, performance techniques, music styles, transmission, and aesthetics.

Chapter Three examines the zheng’s initial modernization through the early twentieth century to 1976 (the end of China’s Cultural Revolution) as it transformed from a community based traditional instrument to a concert instrument. The discussion of the modernization of the instrument juxtaposes the two primary forces affecting the development of Chinese music of the time: the domestic social and political revolutions in China, and the influence of Western music.

Chapter Four discusses the zheng’s development in Mainland China from the 1980s to the present day. This chapter includes many diverse “insider” voices on issues of performance technique, composition, and performance aesthetics.

Chapter Five presents a new perspective on the zheng by examining the experiences and challenges that Chinese zheng performers have experienced in North America. The materials presented in this chapter have not previously been included in the study of the zheng, and they directly reflect my personal viewpoint. This chapter also serves as the conclusion of the dissertation, integrating all the previous discussions in my synthetic portrayal of the zheng’s musical and cultural identity.

### **1.2.2 Personal Background and Perspective**

As a professional zheng performer and a scholar of Chinese music studies I have a special involvement in the world of the zheng. I studied privately with both traditional

and contemporary zheng master performers in China, and was a professional musician performing both traditional and contemporary zheng music in China for over twenty years. Moving to the West I spent another sixteen years performing a multitude of contemporary and non-Chinese music genres on concert stages around the world. Throughout my subsequent years in academia I directly participated in the zheng's modernization. Each phase of my career has deepened my knowledge. These experiences provided me with a new perspective and insight—the synergy between a performer and observer, as well as that between a native Chinese and an expatriate to the West.

I started learning the zheng in 1971 with Gao Zicheng (1918-2012), a traditional zheng musician from the Shandong style who taught at the Xi'an Conservatory of Music at the time. Gao is best known for his gentle tone and exquisite subtle embellishments, and studying with him was especially beneficial in developing my traditional left hand techniques. In 1975 I was recruited by a professional orchestra in Shenyang, northeastern China and began my career as a professional musician. However, I continued to take lessons with Zhao Yuzhai (1923-1999), another Shandong zheng musician, who followed the same teacher as Gao Zicheng. My studies with these two masters granted me rare opportunities to experience traditional teaching—learning by rote and playing by ear. The traditional subtlety of the instrument and the essence of its music that was implanted in my heart and ears through these learning experiences benefited me for the rest of my artistic career and equipped me with an informed perspective on the key issues of the musical identity of the traditional zheng discussed in this dissertation.

In 1977, as contemporary compositions became prevalent in zheng performance, it became necessary for me to expand my palette of techniques. I began to study

contemporary techniques with Zhang Yan (1945-1996), one of the most accomplished contemporary zheng performers credited with creating and performing numerous modern techniques, as well as composing a number of landmark scores for solo zheng. Some of her techniques evolved from the traditional *Zhejiang* style, while others were adaptations of piano and harp technique.

In 1980 I joined the *Zhanyou Ensemble*, an instrumental ensemble affiliated with the People's Liberation Army in Beijing. I performed as a soloist, in ensemble works, and as a vocal accompanist. Heralded as the top Chinese ensemble of its type in the country at the time, the *Zhanyou Ensemble's* main goal was to entertain soldiers, therefore its repertoire consisted of compositions containing strong political messages. In the early 1980s a series of cultural transformations occurred in the new era of post-Mao China that affected both the Ensemble and my career. After decades of being isolated from the Western world, the new sounds of pop music—primarily from Hong Kong and Taiwan—began to permeate China. Western instruments such as the guitar, synthesizer, and drum set became a “must-have” for music groups nationwide. The *Zhanyou Ensemble* was no exception, incorporating these instruments to create a “modern” sound, with the roles for traditional Chinese instruments tremendously diminished. This prompted me to leave the ensemble and pursue academic studies in Chinese music.

Moving to the West in the late 1990s, my performance career rekindled, quickly expanding to the international stage. My approach to zheng composition and performance gradually shifted away from mainstream Chinese zheng music to embrace a multitude of non-Chinese music genres, including experimental music, New Music, Jazz, free improvisation, electro-acoustic, and various genres of world music. These activities have

gradually changed my position in the zheng community in China to that of an outsider, while becoming an insider to the diaspora.

My academic history includes studying ethnomusicology at the Chinese Music Research Institute of the Chinese National Academy of Arts (1992-1995) in Beijing before studying at the University of British Columbia (1996-1999); I received a Master's degree from both programs. I also studied two descendants of the zheng overseas—the *koto* in Japan and the *dan tranh* in Vietnam—in 2001 and 2005 respectively.

At the Chinese Music Research Institute I absorbed the method of traditional Chinese scholarship and Chinese music history and theory. This training provided me with knowledge of the zheng that a performer would not have—the ability to examine its performance practice within historical and theoretical perspectives, and understanding of the zheng in relationship to Chinese music theories and aesthetics.

My studies at UBC introduced me to Western scholarship and research methods. These approaches provided me with the tools to question and challenge cultural conventions with a depth of analysis and attention to issues not provided in China. This alone opened a new world to me, so that combined with the introduction to a wide scope of world music traditions and performing music in various idioms I now regard Chinese music and its cultural contexts from a radically new perspective. To put it succinctly, my view of the world, its cultures, and art is constantly evolving.

My study of other Asian long zithers has not only been beneficial to my understanding of these instruments, but has also helped me to gain new appreciation of the commonalities among East Asian long zithers. Through exploring this larger cultural sphere I have gained a broader perspective of my own culture, and developed a more

comprehensive understanding of the zheng. In this dissertation I utilize a cross-cultural viewpoint that combines ancient Chinese ideas, approaches drawn from Western ethnomusicology, and my expertise on the instrument to challenge many assumptions about the zheng and its contemporary development.

### **1.2.3 Research Process and Interviews**

My research process began with a comprehensive review of the literature on the zheng, including sources written in Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and English. The Chinese zheng literature includes historical documents, contemporary journal articles, theses, and monographs. I also draw from English sources that examine historical and sociological issues related to the zheng and its development not discussed in Chinese.

One of the key strategies of this dissertation is to present the studied subjects with a combination of many voices—those of active practitioners, academic critiques, and my own. Extensive fieldwork was therefore central, and included interviews, attending concerts, and taking and observing zheng lessons. As I have considerable access to prominent zheng musicians and composers, I conducted extensive interviews both in China and in North America. My interviewees in China included zheng performers, instructors, students, composers, and ethnomusicologists. I gave high priority to seeking the involvement and opinions of performers who are among the most highly engaged and experienced participants in the zheng's development. Interviews in China included the most senior living zheng performer/scholars Shi Zhaoyuan and Zhou Yanjia, traditional performers Rao Ningxin (Hakka style) and Chen Tianhua (Chaozhou style), first-generation conservatory trained professional performers Xiang Sihua, Fan Shang'e,

Wang Changyuan, and Liu Weishan, the leading zheng educators Li Meng and Wang Zhongshan, and the most prominent young performers such as Qiu Ji and Ji Wei. While these personal communications presented a wide range of individual perspectives from inside the tradition, they also revealed clear generational differences of perspective on critical issues concerning the evaluation and conservation of the tradition, Westernization, and globalization. My discussions with the Chinese ethnomusicologist Li Mei and composer Xu Xiaolin were especially valuable, as they conveyed unique views on the development of the zheng outside the performance community.

Outside Mainland China I interviewed diasporic zheng performers who are pioneering new styles, such as Deng Haiqiong, Wu Fei, and He Bei Bei; and I approached Western composers that I have worked closely with on innovative projects such as John Sharpley, John Oliver, Barry Truax, Randy Raine-Reusch, and Robert Zollitsch. I believe that the new perspectives brought by these performers and composers will make an impact on the mainstream zheng community in China in the near future.

There are, admittedly, some lacunae. The first is that the research area does not include the development of zheng music in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Europe, all three regions having a vibrant scene. As Taiwan and Hong Kong have been modeling the zheng in Mainland China, their developments have not been distinctive enough for this discussion. I am equally cognizant of zheng developments in Europe and felt that they would not substantially affect my arguments. Secondly, different styles of zheng music have rapidly expanded in Mainland China since I began my dissertation research. One significant change is the use of the zheng in pop music, a style established by the *12-girl*

*band* in China. The use of the zheng in pop music and other fringe genres in China (i.e., rock & roll and new age) requires a separate study. These are for future research.

Objectivity sometimes presented a challenge to me. Being an active artist I have developed a set of artistic values and opinions. Integrating my own artistic choices and viewpoints and those held by others (performers and academics), I strive for balance.

All Chinese texts, if not otherwise credited, are translated by the author.

### 1.3 Literature Review

In this section I will review a select number of important historical texts that comprise the main resources for historical studies of zheng organology, aesthetics, early performance history, and music theory. I will also review the contemporary literature, in both Chinese and non-Chinese languages, that presents essential contributions to the study of the zheng.

Chinese scholarship historically was guided by Confucian ideology, which viewed music as an integral part of governance and education and which closely reflected the cultural hierarchy of the imperial society. Musical issues documented in historical texts largely pertain to theory, methods for pitch calculation, chronicles of the court music bureau, organology, and Confucian and Taoist aesthetics. As the zheng was primarily considered an entertainment instrument, it did not become the subject of critical scholarly studies commonly reserved for what were perceived as higher art forms by conventional Chinese scholarship (e.g. the *qin*, the seven-string long zither). Contemporary Chinese music studies in the People's Republic of China embraced Chinese folk music (*minzu minjian yinyue*), and its research method was modeled after *caifeng*—gathering folk tunes—an academic activity initiated in the 1920s and instigated in the 1940s at Yan'an, the base camp of the Communist Party of China during the anti-



Japanese War.<sup>7</sup>

Both older and Communist approaches to scholarship are evident in the Chinese zheng literature. As Bell Yung points out: “Chinese music is considered within its own historical and cultural contexts. For example, some types are considered ‘fine’ or ‘art’ and thus deserving of study, while others are considered less so. China’s study of its own music has much to do with national pride in artistic accomplishments and with a broader context of national development. The goal is to promote, improve, and disseminate as much as to do research and to understand” (2001:25).

### 1.3.1 Historical References

References to the zheng have been found in a variety of historical texts since its initial citation in the second century BCE. These sources range from ancient dictionaries and treatises on customs to dynastic records and poetic essays.

The primary early references for zheng studies are found in the *Shuowen Jiezi* (Explanation of Graphs and Analysis of Characters, Xu c. 121) and *Shiming* (Explanation of Characters, Liu c. 200), two prominent etymological reference books, as well as the *Fengsu Tongyi* (Treatise on Customs, Ying c. 175) and the poetic essay *Zhengfu Xue* (The Preface of the Odes to the Zheng, Fu c. 265). These sources discuss the zheng’s denomination, invention, origin, and instrument construction in the context of

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<sup>7</sup> The contemporary study of Chinese folk music began in the early twentieth century. Known as *caifeng* (gathering styles), academic activities mainly focused on collecting folk tunes, both vocal and instrumental. The *caifeng* was later adapted by the Communist Party in the 1940s to serve its political policy of “serving the people.” In order to mobilize the masses, as Isabel Wong explains, “...the Party, must organize a program... by using musical or literary forms familiar to the targeted group as a means of persuasion... In order to make the mass-line strategy function effectively, the Party needed a ‘cultural army’ to collect suitable popular cultural products, which were then to be remolded as means for winning over the hearts of the people. On the musical front, the collection of folk songs was a logical choice ...” (Wong 1991:46).

etymology and morphology.<sup>8</sup>

These early accounts were compiled together with ancient myths<sup>9</sup> and commentary in later musical treatises, notably the *Yiwen Leiju* (Collection of Literature Arranged by Categories, Ouyang 624), the *Tongdian* (Encyclopedic History of Institutions, Du 801), the *Yueshu* (Treatise on Music, Chen c. 1100), and the *Wenxian Tongkao* (A Comprehensive Investigation of Documents and Traditions, Ma 1307). In addition to discussion of morphological issues, these books include descriptions of the various forms of ancient zheng, lists of repertoire performed in the imperial court, and accounts of popular zheng musicians.

Other important sources for zheng studies, especially its use in imperial court ensembles, were the music sections of the *Shi Shu*—historical records written for every dynasty throughout the Chinese imperial period. The *Sui Shu* (The Record of the Sui Dynasty, Wei c. 629), the *Jiu Tang Shu* (The Old Record of the Tang Dynasty, c. 946), and the *Xin Tang Shu* (The New Record of the Tang Dynasty, 1060), in particular, list a variety of types of zheng in a number of styles of music in their catalog of the instrumentation of various court ensembles and musical styles. All the above sources are also found in the *Siku Quanshu* (Complete Library of the Four Treasuries, 1782), the largest historical anthology in Chinese history.

Chinese poetry serves as an indispensable resource for contextualizing classical zheng music. Eight *Zhengfu* (Odes to the Zheng) written between the third and the sixth

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<sup>8</sup> The full citations for these ancient texts are included in my “Zheng” entry in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (2001:802).

<sup>9</sup> Mythology attributes the invention of the zheng to two historical figures: Kui (c. 2200 BCE), a mythical being and talented musician who served as the musical official for the legendary Emperor Huangdi; and General Meng Tian (d. 210 BCE) of the Qin State (seventh cent.-221 BCE). As a result, the zheng is also known as *Qinzheng*.

centuries (Ouyang 624)<sup>10</sup> bear valuable information on the zheng's performance technique and style, while exemplifying the way of a gentleman cultivated by Confucianism and Daoism.

The popularity of courtesans and female musicians performing solo zheng in the imperial court is reflected in the hundred or more classical poems romanticizing the sound of the zheng and its performance. Examples can be seen in poems written by renowned poets such as Shen Yue (441-513)<sup>11</sup> and Ouyang Xiu (1007-1072).<sup>12</sup> Most importantly, these poems portray an idyllic aesthetic associating female beauty with the zheng. This aesthetic is especially critical and relevant to the cultural phenomenon of female dominance in contemporary zheng performance practice.

### 1.3.2 Twentieth-Century Zheng Literature

Contemporary zheng studies in Chinese, English, and French encompass texts on its history, tradition, and contemporary development. The earliest known source on the zheng written in English is A. C. Moule's brief (two paragraphs) description of the

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<sup>10</sup> Six of the eight *Zhengfu* (Odes to the Zheng) written between the late Han and Nanbei (The Southern and Northern, 420-589) dynasties are compiled in Ouyang Xun's *Yiwen Leiju*.

<sup>11</sup> Shen Yue writes in "The cither [zheng]" :

The cither of Chi'in [Qin] give forth unsurpassed melodies,  
The frets of jade make the strings produce high-pitched tunes.  
The strings are strung so tight as to be nearly breaking,  
The melody follows her agile fingers roaming over the strings.  
But how can one by merely hearing the lingering echo afar-off,  
Divine the perfect beauty of the player? (translated by Gulik 1951:17)

<sup>12</sup> Ouyang Xiu's "Li Liuhou Jia Wen Zheng Shi" (Impromptu - Written While Hearing the Cither Played) writes:

For twenty years I had not heard the sad notes of the cither,  
Then suddenly her slender fingers made the strings resound.  
Now the tones came lightly like birds twittering among the flowers,  
Then there was a low murmuring sound, like streams covered with ice.  
It is usually said that this music is now forgotten,  
So I ask her who taught her the cither when she was still a child.  
The melody finished, the guests laugh at me over their wine cups,  
For I, white-haired old man, have started silently to weep. (translated by Gulik 1951:19)

zheng's morphology in *A List of the Musical and Other Sound-Producing Instruments of the Chinese* (Moule 1908:111). Van Gulik's article "Brief Note on the Cheng, the Chinese small Cither" (1951) was a rare non-Chinese source on the zheng at the time, which provided a substantial review of historical texts, a list of traditional zheng repertoire, and its development in China in the early twentieth century.

In China a small number of texts were written in the 1930s. Little else was added until the 1980s, when zheng literature began to grow. In the last decade writings on the zheng expanded exponentially due to an increasing number of national and regional universities offering graduate programs in ethnomusicology, as well as Chinese conservatories' establishment of master's degrees in zheng performance requiring a thesis as partial fulfillment for the degree. As a result, zheng studies have grown from the limited number of historical reviews to a substantial body of literature containing monographs, ethnographies, articles, and theses spanning numerous research fields.

#### 1.3.2.1 Historical Studies

In the twentieth century Liang Tsai-Ping (1910-2000) and Cao Zheng (1920-1998) were prolific pioneering writers on zheng history. Liang's 1938 instruction book, *Ni Cheng Pu* (A Sketch of the Zheng), contains "Introductory Essays on the Zheng," which references many of the historical sources mentioned above, as does Cao's historical study *Guzheng Pu* (Guzheng Score, 1946, unpublished).<sup>13</sup> Liang's monograph *Music of Cheng* (1971), published in Taiwan, includes a detailed overview of the historical development of the zheng. Cao's "A Discussion of the History of the Gu

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<sup>13</sup> Both Liang and Cao's original manuscripts are preserved in the Library of the Chinese National Academy of Arts.

Zheng,” published in *Asian Music* (1983),<sup>14</sup> is a summary of most of Cao and Liang’s previous works, yet more importantly provides the first account of developments after the 1949 founding of the People’s Republic of China. French sinologist/ethnomusicologist Rault-Leyrat also did substantial historical work (1987).

Ancient instruments and musical iconography unearthed in archeological sites found in China between the 1970s and 1980s greatly stimulated and expanded historical studies, especially pertaining to morphology and organology.<sup>15</sup> This led to renewed discussions of the zheng’s origin, its early construction, and its relationship to both the *se*, a twenty five-string plucked wood zither used in ceremonial court music, and the *zhu*, a five-string bamboo zither (Huang 1987; Wei 1990; Xiang 1993). Based on his study of the 598 BCE zithers excavated in Guixi County, Jiangxi, Southern China in 1979 (1987: 40), Huang argues that the zheng and the *se* were separate instruments.<sup>16</sup> Wei posits that the zheng and *se* were the same instrument named differently in various regions (1990:19). Xiang relates the early forms of the zheng to the bamboo zithers of the non-Han ethnic groups in Southern China, and includes studies of the Southeast Asian bamboo zither by the Japanese scholar Hayashi (1962); and, by way of Hayashi’s writing,

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<sup>14</sup> The Chinese version of this article was originally published in the journal *Chinese Music* in 1981, volume 1.

<sup>15</sup> Eight musical instruments, including wood zithers, were found in the Han Dynasty Mawang Dui Tomb (168 BCE) in Hunan, Southern China in 1972. Two thirteen-string wood zithers dated 598 BCE were excavated in Guixi County, Jiangxi, Southern China in 1979. Two pieces of bronze sculpture portraying a zither performance from the sixth century BCE were found in No. 306 tomb in Zhejiang, Southern China in 1982.

<sup>16</sup> One ancient theory suggests that the zheng was created when two people, often two relatives, fought over a *se* and broke it in half, thus creating both a twelve-string and thirteen-string zheng. One version is as follows: “[State of] Qin was ill-mannered. A father fought with his son over a *se*. [The result was that] each took half [of the *se*] and named [the new instrument] zheng” (The *Shuolue*: vol. 11, in *Siku* 1782). Modern scholars agree that the zheng originated in the State of Qin (now Shaanxi province in central western China) around the fifth century BCE, yet disagree as to whether the zheng came from splitting the *se*. Two long zithers that descended from the zheng, the Korean *kayagŭm* and Japanese *koto*, however, have twelve and thirteen strings respectively.

that of Sachs.<sup>17</sup> Xiang's work reflects the initial impact of the introduction of Western ethnomusicology in the mid-1980s, which brought with it valuable new avenues of research, comparative methodologies, and new approaches to Chinese scholarship.

In 1986, as the study of the zheng expanded, the Xi'an Music Conservatory began publishing *Qinzheng*, a journal for zheng studies. Featured was "Qingzheng Shihua" (The History of the Qingzheng, Jiao 1992-1997),<sup>18</sup> a series of articles that ostensibly function as a bibliographical study of historical texts. Jiao's comprehensive inclusion of historical accounts from a wide variety of literature forms provides an essential tool for identifying original literary sources.

One of the most important periods of the zheng's history was within the imperial court tradition of the Tang dynasty when classical zheng music flourished. Descriptive discourses on both the use of the zheng in the imperial court ensembles and as a solo instrument for entertainment are found in a variety of Tang official documents and music treatises. However, the only surviving instruments and scorebooks from the Tang period are preserved in Japan.<sup>19</sup> The Japanese music manuscripts the *Jinchi Yoroku* (Essentials of Being Benevolent and Wise, Fujiwara c. 1171) and the *Ruisōchiyo* (Essentials of the

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<sup>17</sup> Sachs writes: "Both the cheng [zheng] and the she [se] are composed of three parts, a main section that supports the strings, and two end pieces which are bent back. This triple arrangement recalls the *tube-zither* and the *half-tube-zither* of the Malayan Archipelago and a few African countries including Madagascar, all of which have a piece of bamboo as a body, either an entire tube or half of a bamboo split lengthways; the strings run parallel to each other the length of one internode in the bamboo and are formed by strips cut off the bamboo itself ... That these bamboo zithers were the prototypes of the Far Eastern unfretted zithers is confirmed by a Chinese tradition, according to which the cheng was originally made of bamboo" (Sachs 1940:186). The "Chinese tradition" here most probably refers to the existence of the "bamboo" radical in the Chinese character for zheng.

<sup>18</sup> This series of articles was later published under the same title by *Zhongguo Wenlian Chuban She* (Chinese Literary Association Publishing House) in 2002.

<sup>19</sup> Four zheng from the Tang court have been preserved in the *Shōsōin* Repository in Nara, Japan.

*Koto* for *Gakuso*, c. thirteenth cent.),<sup>20</sup> which contain essential musical information such as tuning and modal systems, as well as performance techniques—have been a key source for the studies of Tang zheng music by non-Chinese scholars (Hayashi 1962; Picken 1969; Tanabe 1936). The integration of the information from these historical scores with previous research generated new opportunities for analyzing, interpreting, and reconstructing zheng music from the Tang dynasty (Jin 1992; Ye 1986), and stimulated comparison between zheng and *koto* melodic structure (Thrasher 1995) and performance techniques (Yan 1996). The most recent synopsis of the Tang Dynasty zheng is provided in a thesis by Xie Ming (2007).

#### 1.3.2.2 Studies of the Traditional Zheng

As stated in the Prelude, the traditional zheng was predominantly found in rural China. Its repertoire and performing techniques were passed on by the combination of notation and oral transmission for centuries. Literary descriptions of music activities involving the traditional zheng as a folk instrument exist,<sup>21</sup> yet few substantial writings in historical texts are found, a situation similar to many other folk music traditions in China. Subsequently, only a handful of zheng scores written in traditional *gongche* notation have survived to the beginning of the twentieth century, including some in the *Xiansuo Beikao* (References for Strings; Rong 1814, in Cao and Jian 1955), a collection of thirteen works

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<sup>20</sup> *Jinchi Yoroku* and *Ruisōchiyo* are collections of tablature scorebooks for the *koto/gakuso*, the Japanese thirteen-string zither, a descendant of the zheng. Among the over two hundred pieces collected in the books, many were classical zheng pieces brought to Japan from China during the Tang dynasty. The books also contain tuning systems and the modal theories used for zheng music in the Tang court.

<sup>21</sup> The two famous classical novels, the fourteenth century *Shuihu Zhuan* (Outlaws of the Marsh) and the seventeenth century *Liaozhai Zhiyi* (Strange Tales of a Lonely Studio), contain many brief descriptions of zheng performances.

for small string ensembles that contains the zheng, and four hand-copied score collections from the early twentieth century.<sup>22</sup>

The Chinese study of the traditional zheng was initiated in the early 1980s, with several of the journal articles published during this period written by traditional musicians who initiated zheng instruction in conservatories. Their perspectives as performing musicians trained in a very different context from later generations of contemporary zheng performers have helped to lay the groundwork for scholarly analysis on the subject.

The articles written on the Shandong zheng by Cheng Gongliang (1982 and 1993), on Henan by Zhou Qingqing (1983), on Chaozhou by Lin Maogen and Chen Anhua (1981), and on Fujian or Min by Chen Maojin (1986) inform the history of these traditional styles, their repertoire, performance techniques, cultural contexts, and connections—both historical and musical—to vocal and other instrumental music genres in their respective regions. Wu Yujun’s substantive MA thesis (2009), a cultural study of Hakka zheng, is one of the latest contributions to the study of traditional zheng.

Articles that focus on individual musicians and genealogies of musicians (Cao 1993; Guo 1993; Guo and Guo 1996; Zhao 1984) offer interesting insights into the daily lives of musicians and the teaching methods of the traditional zheng.

A series of monographs on individual traditional styles was produced during the 1980s and 1990s by the *Renmin Yinyue Chubanshe* (People’s Music Publishing House), a state-owned publishing company in Beijing. Each monograph included an introductory

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<sup>22</sup> These four scorebooks include *Shandong Zhengqu Zhenchao Ben* (An Original Copy of Shandong Zheng Music) and *Shandong Yuequ Chaoben Erce* (Two Copies of Shandong Zheng Music), both anonymous from the Qing dynasty and hand copied by Cao Zheng; and also *Dapu He Yuzhai Xiansheng Zhengpu* (Zheng scores by Mr. He Yuzhai of Dapu) preserved by Sun Yude and *Zhengshi Pu* (Scores of Zheng Poetry) from the *Jingmeng Caotang* publishing house in the Qing dynasty (Zhongguo 1994).



article on regional styles and master musicians, a chart of idiosyncratic fingering techniques, and scores of popular works in their repertoire (Shi 1985; Fan 1987; Cao and Li 1981; Chen 1991). Later many of these texts were compiled, with minor changes, in the *Zhongguo Guzheng Mingqu Huicui* (Collections of Famous Chinese Guzheng Pieces, Yan 1993)<sup>23</sup> and again in the *Chuantong Zhengqu Ji* (Traditional Zheng Music, Xiao 2009), a collection of ten volumes of traditional zheng repertoire containing repertoire for the *yatga* (Mongolian long zither) and *kayagŭm* (Korean long zither) from Inner Mongolian and Chinese Korean ethnic groups respectively. Each of the ten volumes also includes previously published articles on the style and an audio CD.

The *Zhongguo Minzu Minjian Qiyuequ Jicheng* (Anthology of Chinese Ethnic and Folk Instrumental Music, Li et al. 1991-2007), the largest collection of transcriptions of traditional instrumental music in Chinese history, serves as a database for studies of the traditional zheng; these sources also include brief discussions on social contexts and musical features. Volumes covering provinces where traditional zheng styles were established contain transcriptions of both solo repertoire and ensemble pieces. For instance, the Shandong volume contains eighty-five solos, some rarely known outside the province, as well as three suites for *peng baban* ensemble, a genre performed on zheng and other string instruments.

These scorebooks were originally intended to preserve traditional zheng music and to promulgate performance scores, yet they are of value for academic studies by providing descriptions of styles, historical background, and idiosyncratic approaches to

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<sup>23</sup> The *Zhongguo Guzheng Mingqu Huicui* contains three volumes in total. The second and third volumes are compilations of contemporary compositions from the 1950s to the 1990s (Yan 1993).

music making. However, the transcription method became subject of debate.<sup>24</sup> These codifications of traditional zheng repertoire, which were essentially transcriptions of individual musician's extemporizations upon a core score, have changed the function of the score from "descriptive" to "prescriptive" (Seeger 1958). I will address this issue in detail in the following chapters.

The *Zhengxue Sanlun* (Essay on Studies of the Zheng, Jiang 1995) is the first ethnography on the zheng, commemorating the author's teacher Jin Zhuonan (1882-1976), a scholar-musician from Shandong province, and documenting his achievements as a composer and teacher. The author also discusses his own experience as a zheng practitioner. One of the latest contributions to the studies of traditional zheng is He Song's (1922-2007) ethnography *He Yuzhai Zhengpu Yigao* (He Yuzhai's Manuscript of Zheng Score, 2008).<sup>25</sup> The author's research is based on sixty Hakka pieces handed down by He Yuzhai (1886-1943), his grandfather and a representative Hakka musician. The book records the author's experience of learning the zheng with his grandfather, his observations of the activities of the Hakka zheng in the early twentieth century, and encapsulations of important technical idiosyncrasies of the style.<sup>26</sup>

One of the first published studies of zheng notation is Chen Leishi's (1918-2010) *Chaoyue Juepu "Ersi Pu" Yuanliu Kao* (Examination of the Origins and Development of

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<sup>24</sup> In his review of the *Anthology*, British scholar Stephen Jones pointed out that "Without access to recordings, it remains to be seen how reliable such transcriptions are... indeed, different versions of many pieces from the same province are given, though not different versions of the same piece performed by the same musicians on different occasions... it is unlikely that one will be able to construct reliable or detailed analyses from such transcriptions" (2003:298).

<sup>25</sup> Previously published by *Zhongguo Xiju Chubanshe* (The Drama Publishing House) in 2006 without a CD.

<sup>26</sup> The chapter titled "The Eight Patterns of Playing the Zheng" reports that to differentiate the varying degrees and directions of bending tones on a single string, the older generation of musicians would replace specific *gongche* notes with a variety of words whose spoken tones match the pitch direction (He 2008:181).

the Lost Chaozhou Ersi Notation), in which he explores the origin of *ersi* notation, a Chaozhou system, suggesting a direct connection to Tang court music (Chen 1978:54). Cao Zheng further discusses the relationship between the *ersi* and *gongche* notation in Chaozhou music and their interchangeability in performance practice (Cao 1980). Zhao Yi's notation study, using a comparative methodology, draws similarities between the historical tuning systems amongst the *zheng*, *qin*, and *koto*, arguing that *zheng*'s notation systems were developed from indications of string number and scale degrees (Zhao 1999).

Compositional theory and score structure form the framework that performance and repertoire are built upon. Traditional musicians' accounts of the compositional mother tune *baban* (Lin and Chen 1981; Zhao 1983) provide reliable firsthand descriptions of extemporaneity in the course of performing traditional repertoire. Discussions of the musical scales and modes of the southern styles review the relationship between the basic score and their realization (Zheng and Cai 1983; Shi 1985). Studies of *baban* and other theoretical subjects relevant to the traditional *zheng* are included in many monographs and articles by Chinese theorists (Ye 1983; Yuan 1987; Xue 1999; Du 2004). However, in-depth considerations of *baban* structure and its relationship to realizing individual works are still lacking in Chinese sources.

Alan Thrasher's studies on *zheng* solo and ensemble music in Southern China (1988, 1995, and 2002) and his recent monograph *Sizhu Instrumental Music of South China: Ethos, Theory and Practice* (2008) examine the theoretical underpinnings of the Chaozhou and Hakka instrumental music traditions. My own study (2010) on the application of *baban* structure in Shandong *zheng* music explores the integration of

theory and practice in its compositional process. Lawrence Witzleben's study of silk and bamboo music (1995), a traditional ensemble genre from the Shanghai area, investigates *baban* and the six-beat structure of *liuban* sheds light on traditional zheng in Han instrumental music.

Other English sources on the study of traditional zheng music include Mercedes Dujunco's study of the Chaozhou *xianshi* string ensemble (1994) and Deng Haiqiong's study of the manifestation of traditional aesthetics within the zheng's portamento (2006).

### 1.3.2.3 Studies of Contemporary Development

Subsequent to Cao Zheng's 1983 article, two English dissertations discussed the modernization and Westernization of the zheng (Chen 1991; Cheng 1991). Cheng's writing presents an overview of development prior to the late 1980s, highlighting the creation of new compositions and the construction of the modern zheng. Chen provides a brief timeline of the twentieth century zheng, though it contains numerous erroneous and unsubstantiated statements which seem to display a cultural bias, calling into question her understanding of the tradition.

Wang Yingrui's dissertation *Ershi Shiji de Zhengyue* (Twentieth Century Zheng Music, 2007) is supported by extensive research and reveals many important political and cultural influences. Her first chapter is particularly informative, providing detailed information on the music activities of over a dozen zheng musicians (some lesser known) who moved into metropolitan centres such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou during the 1920s, 30s, and 40s. Wang presents a balanced view of each musician's involvement

in performing in this new environment while constructing new repertoire for this rural-to-urban transition of the zheng in China.

Two theses document the period between 1949 and 1966 immediately preceding the Cultural Revolution (Yang 2007 and Zhao 2009). These works briefly address political and cultural influences on modernization and institutionalization of pedagogy. They also analyze new performance techniques and compositional vocabularies resulting from the influence of Western music under the guise of “nationalization” (*minzuhua*).

Composition for the zheng underwent a significant transformation in the second half of the twentieth century. Zhang Tong’s “Cong Xinshiqi Guzheng Chuangzuo Kan Zhengyue Fazhan” (An Examination of the Development of the Zheng in the New Era through its Composition, 1994) explores this transformation through a comparative study of three generations of zheng composers and their compositional styles post-1949. The author also explores the interrelationship between the expansion of the compositional language with the development of the zheng’s performance techniques, the modification of the instrument, and experimentation with new tunings.

As compositional and stylistic practice expanded in the last three decades, the study of zheng composition has become more specified, branching into sub-disciplines such as examinations of solo zheng works from 1949 to 1966 (Li 2009) or studies of individual composers, such as Xu Xiaolin (Hu 2009) and Wang Jianmin (Sun 2009). They consider the use of Western compositional methods to develop a national voice in contemporary zheng composition, socio-economic impact on musical development, and the composer’s role.

Discussions of contemporary fingering techniques, elucidate diverse perspectives on the balance between new and old. Wang Xiao Ping contends that traditionally the right and left hand fulfill differing functions: the right hand initiates a note, whereas the left hand embellishes that note, a process that distinguishes the zheng from other instruments (2001). Li Han, conversely, argues that techniques developed in the last fifty years, such as both hands rapidly plucking, have increased the artistic value of the zheng (2000). Qiu Ji (2004) points out that a balanced approach should be taken in the development of new techniques. A recent thesis by Yang Fan traces the evolution of zheng techniques from those inherited to the recently innovated, explaining their progression as an inevitable result of China's social and cultural evolution (2007).

In recent Chinese texts ethnomusicological concepts and methods (e.g., comparative, anthropological, and/or cultural studies approaches) are increasingly applied. However, there is often an implication that the zheng developed from being a previously unsophisticated folk instrument into an improved modern instrument capable of expressing the national voice, and that credit is due to government efforts to modernize. They comprise an establishment view of rapid development and increased technical complexity in zheng performance composition.

## 2 THE MUSIC AND CULTURE OF THE TRADITIONAL ZHENG

All music (*yin*) rises from the human heart. Emotion stirs, taking shape as sound (*sheng*). Sound refined in patterns is music (*yin*). (Confucius, in Gongsun c. first cent. BCE)

In this chapter I will present an overview of the traditional zheng. This will include an introduction to the major regional styles, their representative compositions, idiosyncratic techniques, and genealogy. I will also discuss briefly the historical, geographical, and cultural issues that contributed to the development of the traditional zheng. I will then examine traditional approaches to composition, exploring the principles underpinning the repertoire that entail correlations between: 1) compositional structure and development of melodic material development through variation and embellishment; 2) performance techniques and compositional method; 3) notation— “the blueprint”— and the method of oral teaching; and 4) traditional philosophy and aesthetics.

### 2.1 Introduction to the Traditional Zheng

Traditional zheng refers to zheng practice developed in several rural regions of China before the twentieth century. These major regional practices, now known as *liupai*,<sup>27</sup> include Shandong, Henan, Chaozhou, Hakka, Fujian, and Zhejiang established in

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<sup>27</sup> The application of *liupai* to traditional zheng commenced in the 1930s as part of the modernization of the zheng, which will be addressed in the next chapter.

Shandong and Henan provinces in the North; and Guangdong, Fujian, and Zhejiang provinces in the South (see Figure 2.1).<sup>28</sup> Chinese terminology for a zheng style may either denote a province, such as Shandong, which contains a number of regional centres for the zheng; or a specific region, such as Hakka or Chaozhou, both located in Guangdong province.



**Figure 2-1 Centres for traditional zheng.**

In the early twentieth century only men practiced the zheng as part of small community ensembles for entertainment, to accompany opera or narrative singing, and for self-cultivation. Coming from an oral tradition, they believed this use of the zheng

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<sup>28</sup> Listed here are traditional instrumental zheng practices by Han Chinese, which therefore do not include the Mongolian *yakta* or Korean *kayagŭm* popular in Inner-Mongolia or the Korean region of northeast China respectively, nor the minor practice of utilizing the zheng to accompany narrative song traditions located in northern Shaanxi province in the north of China, and in Guangdong and Hong Kong in the south.



had a long history; however, the unbroken lineage of these regional practices can only be traced back to the nineteenth century.

### 2.1.1 Shandong Style

Shandong was one of the oldest cultural hubs of the Han Chinese and the birthplace of *Kongzi* (Confucius). The music scene in ancient Shandong has been described as follows: “Everybody could blow the *yu* (a mouth organ), play the *se* (25-string long zither), strike the *zhu* (struck zither), or pluck the *qin*” (Anonymous, c. 210 BCE, in *Siku* 1782, translated from the Chinese).<sup>29</sup> From the twelfth century onward, a wide variety of popular forms of entertainment such as opera, narrative singing, dancing, and acrobatics flourished in Shandong (Li 1994:10). The root of Shandong zheng music—the *xiansuo* string ensemble—and other ensemble instrumental genres became increasingly popular in the Ming and Qing dynasties in the west and southwest of the province.<sup>30</sup> Local musicians believed *xiansuo* was *yayue*, or refined music from the imperial court (Zhao 1983:34), which had been introduced to the region in the early Qing dynasty by a Taoist monk who used to be a court musician (Yang 1988:21). A typical Shandong *xiansuo* ensemble contains four stringed instruments: the zheng, *pipa*, *xiqin* (the local two-string fiddle), and *yangqin* (hammered dulcimer).<sup>31</sup> Since the main repertoire of *xiansuo* is created from *baban*, the genre is commonly known as *peng baban* (meeting the *baban*). *Peng baban* could be performed independently and, more often, to

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<sup>29</sup> In addition to referring to the seven-string zither, the term “*qin*” was also used as a general term for string music in Shandong. The string ensemble repertoire of Shandong was labeled as “*qin* music” (Cheng 1982:47).

<sup>30</sup> The regional centers of Shandong zheng are located in Juancheng, Yuncheng, and Heze counties in the Heze District of southwestern Shandong, as well as Linqing in the Liucheng District of western Shandong.

<sup>31</sup> *Xiansuo* ensembles were recognized as a Chinese national intangible heritage in 2006, and still actively perform in Western Shandong province, especially in the Heze region.

accompany *qinshu*, the local narrative singing genre, as mentioned by my teacher Gao Zicheng.<sup>32</sup> The ensemble normally played a long instrumental section as a “prelude” for the main act. Due to this close connection with *qinshu*, the Shandong zheng repertoire includes a large number of *qupai*, or named tunes, drawn from *qinshu*, in addition to its *baban* repertoire.

The most important part of the Shandong zheng repertoire are its *baban* pieces, most with poetic titles such as *Gaoshan Liushui* (Lofty Mountain and Flowing Water), *Fengbai Cuizhu* (Bamboo Swaying in the Wind), and *Yeijing Luanling* (Tinkling Bells in the Still of the Night). These pieces can be played individually or combined as suites. Originally there were ten *baban* suites known as *shi datao* (great ten suites), but by the beginning of the twentieth century only the first suite of the *shi datao* had remained (Zhao 1983:34). The older generation of Shandong zheng musicians disclosed that there was no separate repertoire for the solo zheng, as the musicians played the same pieces for both solo and ensemble performances (Cheng 1993:266).

The Shandong style used both a thirteen- and a fifteen-string zheng, with the latter being more common. The fifteen string zheng had steel or copper strings—seven thicker and eight thinner strings—known as “seven elderly and eight youth” to musicians. The right-hand technique is centred around the thumb, with the two most recognized techniques including: 1) the thumb playing inward and outward rapidly on the same string, creating a short tremolo with a clear individual sound; and 2) playing *hua* (flower)

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<sup>32</sup> My teacher Gao Zicheng recollected that the *qinshu* used to be accompanied by the *yangqin*, consequently the genre was also called *chang yangqin* (singing the *yangqin*). It should be noted that the instrumentation in the *Xiansuo Beikao* (References for Strings, Rong 1814), a collection of works for small string ensembles compiled by the Beijing court musician Rong Zhai, includes the zheng, *pipa*, *sanxian*, and *huqin*. The replacement of the *sanxian* with the *yangqin* in Shandong *peng baban* suggests the influence of the *qingshu* tradition instrumentation.

descending glissandi as either an anacrusis at the beginning of phrases or around the main melodic notes. The musical style of Shandong zheng is strongly influenced by *qinshu*, therefore the sole purpose of the left hand is nearly always to bend the string in imitation of its vocal style.

The Shandong zheng has a lineage spanning over six generations, commencing with Wang Leyong (1830-1905) and ceasing with Han Tinggui (b. 1929) (Li 1994:1516). Prominent artists include Wang Dianyu (1899-1964) and his students Zhao Yuzhai (1923-1999) and Gao Zicheng (1918-2010), both considered the most accomplished of the traditional Shandong zheng musicians, and this author studied privately with both of the latter (see Figure 2.2).



Figure 2-2 *Donglu Yayue Tuan* (Refined Music Ensemble of East Shandong) photo taken in 1944. Wang Dianyu (middle), Gao Zicheng (second from the right), and Zhao Yuzhai (second from the left, playing the *yangqin*) (photo in Public Domain).

### 2.1.2 Henan Style

Henan, located in the central plain of China, was a centre of the ancient Han Chinese civilization. The zheng was performed as part of an ensemble in the regions of

Kaifeng city—formerly known as Bianliang, the capital of the Northern Song dynasty (960-1127)—in east Henan, and also in southwest Henan. The popularity of the zheng in the southwest was due to frequent flooding in the east, forcing those from the Kaifeng area to migrate and eventually settle in Nanyang and its neighbouring counties in southwestern Henan (Li 2006:118).<sup>33</sup>

Eastern Henan is adjacent to southwest Shandong province where the Shandong zheng is prevalent. Subsequently, traditional zheng practice from these two regions is jointly identified as the “northern style” (*beipai*).<sup>34</sup> Traditionally the zheng was part of a *xiansuo* ensemble, which had different instrumentation from that of Shandong. A Henan *xiansuo* ensemble featured three plucked-string instruments: the zheng, *pipa*, and *sanxian*. In addition, it occasionally included wind instruments, such as the *xiao*, an end-blown bamboo flute, and the *guan*, an end-blown tubular double reed. Chinese scholars and local musicians believe that as an instrumental music genre *xiansuo* was popular in the Kaifeng region as early as the fifteenth or sixteenth century (Ding 1993:271).

The most important development to later influence the Henan zheng was the use of *xiansuo* to accompany local folk songs, known as *xiaoqu* (small tunes). This combination of vocal and instrumental music eventually was developed into the new narrative genre of *guzi qu* (drum tune) around the eighteenth century, which later became known as *dadiao quzi* (major tune). The original instrumental form of *xiansuo*, built on the *baban* form, became *bantou qu*, the instrumental prelude section of the *dadiao quzi*

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<sup>33</sup> Traditional zheng practices are found in Kaifeng and Shangqiu in eastern Henan, as well as Nanyang, Miyang, and Dengzhou in the southwest of the province.

<sup>34</sup> The term “*beipai*,” or northern style, first appeared on the cover of *Tianxia Datong*, a record of zheng performance by Lou Shuhua from Hebei province in 1936, while “*nanpai*,” southern style, was written on the cover of *Hanya Xishui*, a record by Liang Tsai-ping released in Taiwan after 1949 (Wang 2007:12).

played before the singer enters the stage. This practice of livening up the stage is known as *naotai* (Ding 1993:271).

The Henan solo zheng tradition was drawn substantially from *bantou qu*, with the addition of *paizi qu* (the local term for *qupai*), named tunes used in the *dadiao quzi* narrative form.<sup>35</sup> Vestiges of the *dadiao quzi* narrative form in the Henan solo zheng tradition are evident in the underlying programmatic storylines in such well-known pieces as *Su Wu Sixiang* (Su Wu Longing for Home),<sup>36</sup> *Ku Zhou Yu* (Weeping for Zhou Yu),<sup>37</sup> *Chen Xingyuan Hefan* (Chen Xingyuan's Matrimonial Alliance with Barbarians), and *Chen Xingyuan Luoyuan* (Chen Xingyuan Landing in the General's Yard).<sup>38</sup> These tales are most probably borrowed directly from narrative forms and opera plots.

The foremost idiosyncratic technique of the Henan solo instrumental zheng is also a vestige of narrative singing (Zhou 1983:23-27). This is a rapid descending portamento accomplished by the right thumb playing a rapid roll while moving along the length of a single string creating variations in timbre and dynamics, while the left hand simultaneously releases the pressed string with a rapid vibrato.

Wei Ziyou (1875-1936) was celebrated for being a pioneer Henan zheng artist performing and teaching in Beijing in the 1920s (Ding 1993:272). He taught Liang Tzai-ping, Lou Shuhua (1907-1952), and Shi Yinmei (1889-?) who, in turn, made important

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<sup>35</sup> The *bantou qu* prelude and *dadiao quzi* narrative form are still performed in Henan.

<sup>36</sup> Su Wu (140-60 BCE) was a general from the West Han dynasty who led a military campaign against the Huns in the west of China. Having lost in battle, Su was captured and exiled to Siberia. After nineteen years of herding sheep, he finally returned to China. This is a popular plot for Chinese opera and narrative genres.

<sup>37</sup> Zhou Yu (175-210) was one of the most famous military strategists in Chinese history who lived in the late Han dynasty. This piece expresses his wife's heartbreak upon receiving news of Zhou's death. This story was another popular plot.

<sup>38</sup> Chen Xingyuan, an opera character, was the daughter of a Tang court official who was forced to marry into a northern tribe in exchange for peace for the country. On her journey to the North, she tried to commit suicide by jumping off a cliff, but accidentally landed in another general's yard. Again, a story utilized in Chinese opera and narrative genres.

contributions to popularizing the zheng in China, Taiwan, and abroad. Wang Shengwu (1904-1968) was known for having a unique repertoire, but unfortunately few of his arrangements have become standard.<sup>39</sup> Cao Dongfu (1898-1970) was the most prominent musician responsible for bringing the Henan zheng to the national music scene by transferring and arranging a large number of ensemble *bantou qu* works for solo zheng. It was during his time in the early twentieth century that the number of strings was increased from the original thirteen to sixteen (Li 1997:729).

### 2.1.3 Chaozhou Style

Chaozhou is located in eastern Guangdong, a province at the southern tip of the country and the ancient territory of the indigenous Yue people. The Chaozhou dialect is a branch of the Southern Min (Fujian)—a Sinitic linguistic group, which contains eight tones that subsequently influenced the unique tonal complexity of Chaozhou music (Tang 2005:103). Since the fourth century, Han Chinese moving from the North to evade wars and strife settled along the east coast of Guangdong, including the Chaozhou region, bringing their music and other cultural practices with them. The zheng is referred to as *qinzheng* in Chaozhou, as it came from the north where “*Qin*,” the ancient capital region of the Han Chinese, was located (Cao 1993:274).

The Chaozhou zheng was traditionally utilized in two ensemble genres: *xiyue* (elegant music) and *xianshi yue* (string-poem music). *Xiyue* is performed by three plucked-string instruments: the zheng, *pipa*, and *sanxian*. As an instrumental music form, *xiyue* was common as early as the Song dynasty, and the inclusion of the zheng in a *xiyue*

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<sup>39</sup> According to Ding Chengyun, Wang’s performance repertoire was compiled in *Guzheng Duzou Quji* (Music for Solo Zheng) and published in 1958 (Ding 1993:273).

ensemble occurred during the Southern Song period (Zhou c. 1150). The *xianshi yue* was originally used to accompany chanted poetry (Zhongguo 1985:422), and the ensemble included *zheng*, *pipa*, *erxian* (two-string fiddle), *yangqin*, and *xiao* (see Figure 2.3).<sup>40</sup>



**Figure 2-3 A Chaozhou *xianshi yue* ensemble (photo by permission of A. Thrasher, 2006).**

The Chaozhou *zheng* repertoire is composed of *baban* pieces and various *qupai* pieces, following a similar path of development as the traditional *zheng* in the North. The most recognized ten *baban* pieces are known collectively as *shi datao* (great ten suites), and include the well-known pieces *Hanya Xishui* (Lonely Crows Playing Over a Winter Stream), *Zhaojun Yuan* (Lament of Lady Zhaojun), *Jinshang Tianhua* (Adding Flowers to Colourfulness), and *Da Baban* (Great Eight Beats). The *qupai* pieces, represented by *Liuqing Niang* (Madam Liuqing), often contain fewer beats than sixty-eight. Differing from the regional *zheng* in the North, each Chaozhou *zheng* piece often contains multiple

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<sup>40</sup> Thrasher's research has shown that the two ensemble forms share great similarities, although a higher skill level is required to perform *xiyue* (Thrasher 2008:8).

sections. In addition, individual pieces can be tied together to become a larger suite, known as *lian taoqu* (joined suites) (Li 1992:8).

Chaozhou zheng traditionally use a shorter zheng, often with a more convex top and sixteen metal strings. Chaozhou zheng music utilizes both *ersi* and *gongche* notation, which will be further discussed in this chapter.<sup>41</sup> Unique to *ersi* notation are four *diao* (scales or modes),<sup>42</sup> each denoting a selection of five or six tones arranged within one octave and sharing the same tonal centre: *qing sanliu* (light three-six), *qingsan zhongliu* (light three and heavy six), *zhong sanliu* (heavy three-six), and *huowu* (lively five) or *huo sanwu* (lively three-five).<sup>43</sup> A fifth *diao*, *fanxian* (reverse string), a term most likely derived from reversing the tuning of a two-string fiddle, has a different tonal centre. I will discuss the *diao* in relation to the left-hand technique later in this chapter.

The Chaozhou zheng has developed a wealth of left-hand techniques to enable the strings to be bent to the specific pitches in each different scale, and also to perform subtle nuances that mirror tonal changes in its spoken language. The right-hand technique is not as complex, with the most idiosyncratic technique being *cui*, plucking with combinations of the right thumb and the first and middle fingers. Different types of *cui* are utilized in a range of tempi to create density and rhythmic variations with the main melodic notes, which will be discussed later.

The lineage of traditional Chaozhou zheng musicians can only be traced back three or four generations to the early twentieth century. Nevertheless, the number of well-

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<sup>41</sup> Local zheng musicians stated that *ersi* notation was vocalized with Chaozhou dialect, which made it difficult to propagate; therefore, it was partially replaced by *gongche* notation (Lin and Chen 1981:41). However, Chinese theorists believe that the adoption of *gongche* notation was a result of playing *qupai*, which was written in *gongche* notation (Zheng and Cai 1983:105).

<sup>42</sup> The term *diao* is used for both scales and modes, and does not differentiate between them. I differentiate scales from modes where appropriate.

<sup>43</sup> “Light” refers to an open string, and “heavy” refers to a string pressed to raise the pitch to changes scales from the open tuning.



known Chaozhou musicians exceeds that of any other region for traditional zheng. The first generation includes Hong Peichen (1866-1916) and Li Jiating, as well as Lin Yongzhi (1892-1928) who introduced the Chaozhou zheng to northern China in 1924. Notable second generation musicians are Su Wenxian (1907-1971) and Guo Ying (1914-2002), both who contributed greatly in teaching the Chaozhou style in conservatories. The representative musicians of the third generation include Lin Maogen (1929-2007) and Yang Xiuming (b.1935), both still performing and teaching today.

#### 2.1.4 Hakka Style

The term Hakka, meaning “guest” (*kejia*) in Mandarin Chinese, refers to one of the oldest groups of Han Chinese that previously resided in central China. Between the eighth and twelfth centuries they migrated to escape two major wars in the North<sup>44</sup> to settle in Meizhou and Dapu of eastern Guangdong, and the region has since been known as the Hakka district. Hakka music is officially known as *Guangdong Hanyue* (Cantonese Han Music), a name assigned by the government after the founding of the P.R.C. (Zhongguo 1985:129). Yet it is more commonly known as *handiao* (tunes of the Han), *zhongzhou gudiao* (ancient tunes of the Central Plain), and *waijiang xian* (strings of foreign rivers), titles that tie the music tradition to its origin in central-northern China.

Traditional Hakka zheng are utilized in two instrumental genres: *sixian* (silk string) or *he xiansuo* (to join in playing *xiansuo*), and *qingyue* (pure music). While *sixian*

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<sup>44</sup> A military revolt led by An Lushan, an ex-Tang general, turned into a civil war between 755 and 763. The severe damage cost by this war marked the beginning of the end of the Tang dynasty. In 1125 Jurchen (*Jin*), a northern kingdom, declared war on the Chinese, which forced the Song imperial court to move its capital from Kaifeng, Henan, to the southern city of Hangzhou, Zhejiang.

is performed by a larger ensemble,<sup>45</sup> the zheng plays a more prominent role in *qingyue*, which also includes the *yehu* (two-string coconut fiddle) and *pipa*. *Qingyue* is also known as *rujiayue* (Confucian's music), as it is believed to contain ancient Han music that is refined and elegant. Hakka musician Luo Jiuxiang (1902-1978) declared: “*Qingyue* is first-rate, like those who are commonly called Confucian scholars. The so-called Confucian scholars are not necessarily erudite cognoscenti, but rather people who value elegance and refinement over mere technique” (Luo cited in Ju 1995:194, translated from the Chinese).

The Hakka zheng repertoire is divided into two types: 1) *dadiao* (great tunes), all in *baban* form; and 2) *chuandiao* (minor tunes), a collection of *qupai* tunes from *Hanju* opera and other local opera genres (Shi 1985:2). The best-known *dadiao* melodies include *Chushui Lian* (Lotus Emerging From Water), *Yashan Ai* (Anguish At The Cliff), *Xunfeng Qu* (Tune of Warm Breeze), and *Zhaojun Yuan* (Sorrow Of Madam Zhaojun). The *chuandiao* repertoire includes famous pieces, such as *Jiaochuang Yeyu* (The Night Rain Tapping on the Window), *Xiaotao Hong* (Red Little Peach), and *Yi Dian Jin* (A Piece of Gold). Most pieces in both repertoires were arranged and notated in *gongche pu* by He Yuzhai (He 1993:281), the oldest known Hakka zheng musician, compiled in two score manuscripts: *Zhongzhou Gudiao* (Ancient Tunes from the Central Plain) and *Hangao Jiupu* (Old Tune from the Hanjiang River) (He 2008).

Structurally the Hakka zheng shares certain similarities with the Chaozhou, in that each piece can contain multiple sections, and each section can be repeated (Shi 1985:1). In addition, a combination of individual pieces can also be played together as a larger

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<sup>45</sup> A *sixian* ensemble usually contains the *erxian* (two-string fiddle), *yehu*, *zheng*, *yueqin* (lute), *pipa*, *sanxian* and *dizi*.

suite. The two common scales, *yingxian* (hard string) and *ruanxian* (soft string), are the equivalent to Chaozhou's "light" and "heavy" *sanliu*.<sup>46</sup>

The traditional Hakka zheng has sixteen strings. The right hand middle finger is highlighted, as phrases are often led by the middle finger playing either the downbeat or accents on syncopated phrases. Like the Chaozhou zheng, left-hand technique involves bending strings to obtain alternate pitches and ornaments. However, Hakka melodies are less embellished compared with the Chaozhou style.

There is little record of the older generation of Hakka zheng musicians before the twentieth century. The most influential musicians of the twentieth century are He Yuzhai (1886-1943) and Luo Jiuxiang (1902-1978). He Yuzhai brought the zheng to the most important urban cultural centre at the time by founding *Yixiang She* (Tranquil Sound Association), a music club in Shanghai in 1932. Luo was active in teaching and propagating the Hakka zheng from the 1950s to the 1970s. Together these two men handed down the Hakka repertoire and performance techniques. The younger generation of prominent traditional Hakka performers include Chen Anhua (b. 1940) and Rao Ningxin (b.1941), both of whom taught at the Xinghai Music Conservatory in Guangzhou, capital of Guangdong province.

### 2.1.5 Fujian (Min) Style

Fujian province, also known as Min, is on China's southeast coast. The traditional Fujian zheng shares a cultural background with Hakka and Chaozhou zheng, as it is

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<sup>46</sup> Modal systems in Chaozhou and Hakka music are complex and prominent in defining the traditions and have, therefore, been an important subject for scholarly study. Alan Thrasher's research on the subject is thus far the most comprehensive among non-Chinese language sources (Thrasher 1988, 2002 and 2008).

found in the southwest of the province,<sup>47</sup> close to the border with east Guangdong. This region is a hub for old Chinese Han culture where many local families chronicle ancestors originating in Central China.

Fujian zheng originally had twelve or thirteen silk strings, as did those used in Tang and Song imperial court music. By the middle of the twentieth century, however, most musicians had changed to the sixteen-string Chaozhou zheng instead (Chen 1986:29). The zheng plays a leading role in the regional ensemble genre known as *heyue* (unified or harmonious music), which includes the *xian* (two-string fiddle), *xiao*, small *sanxian*, and *shuangqing*, a four string long-neck lute rarely seen in other traditional genres across the country. Like other traditional zheng styles, the Fujian solo zheng repertoire derives from ensemble music, in this case *heyue*.

Fujian zheng performance is closer to that of Hakka than Chaozhou, with an emphasis on simplicity and fewer embellishments, yet the repertoire more closely resembles Chaozhou melodically and in piece titles. Musically the locals “did not play Chaozhou music, only revered the ancient music” (Chen 1993:285, translated from the Chinese). Unlike other regional zheng forms, *baban* is not found within the style nor mentioned by local musicians, which may suggest that the origin of this style predates *baban*. The representative pieces include *Wuyi Pinglan* (Casually Leaning on the Rail), *Qingting Dianshui* (A Dragonfly Touching Lightly on the Water), *Tan Gu Luan* (Sighing Over Widowhood), and *Jiaolong Tuzhu* (Water Dragon Spewing Pearls). Idiosyncratic performance techniques include the right middle finger plucking inward consecutively on

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<sup>47</sup> Fujian zheng is predominantly located in Yunxiao, Zhao’an, Zhangpu and Dongshan counties.

two adjacent strings,<sup>48</sup> and rapidly muting a string with the edge of the right hand after plucking to create staccato.

Zheng performance in southwest Fujian was documented as early as the seventeenth century according to Chen Maojin, the most prominent traditional zheng musician of this style.<sup>49</sup> From 1875 to the 1950s several generations of the local Zhang family from Zhao'an were famous for playing the zheng, with techniques handed down through a female family member (Chen 1986:25), the only such case of female dissemination in the traditional zheng practice. Tang Guocheng (1864-1937) was the first known zheng player from Yunxiao county, whose student Chen Youzhang (1909-1963) was credited with collecting the scores and propagating the style nationally (Chen 1986:25-26).

### 2.1.6 Zhejiang (Wulin) Style

The Zhejiang zheng is found in Hangzhou (the capital of Zhejiang province) and its vicinity in southeastern China. Although Hangzhou was the capital of the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279) where classical zheng music was popular,<sup>50</sup> traditional zheng in this region do not suggest any direct relationship with Court zheng performance. The Zhejiang zheng was used as a non-essential instrument in ensembles to accompany

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<sup>48</sup> A similar finger gesture is used with the Japanese *koto*.

<sup>49</sup> A 1644 text stated: "There is an accomplished zheng player named Pu Shuigang, who knows over a hundred pieces. He has studied the zheng for over forty years and perfected ten different fingerings. His technique is above others' and [he] has many students" (Chen 1986:25).

<sup>50</sup> *Wulin Jiushi* (Old Story of Wulin, Zhou c. 1150) mentioned that several dozens of zheng performers once served at the Court music bureau (*jiaofang*). It also documented the titles of solo zheng pieces as well as duet works performed by zheng and *pipa*.

*tanhuang*, a narrative singing tradition that came into fashion on the southeast coast around the 1700s (Zhongguo 1985:384).<sup>51</sup>

The Zhejiang zheng has fifteen strings and its repertoire and performance techniques differ a great deal from other regional zheng. The repertoire is drawn from several instrumental genres, including: 1) *Sihe Ruyi* (Quadra Harmony and Gratification) and *Yun Qing* (Cloud Celebration) from silk-bamboo music, an instrumental ensemble genre popular in regions of China's southeast coast; 2) *Yue'er Gao* (The High Moon), *Jiangjun Ling* (General's Command), and other works from the *Xiansuo Shisantaoyao* (Thirteen Suites of String Music), an 1814 score collection for string ensemble; and 3) *Haiqing Nahe* (Falcon Catches Swan) and other solo *pipa* works. The influence of *pipa* techniques can be clearly seen in Zhejiang zheng. Typical techniques include *yao* (using the right thumb to play long tremolo) and *sidian* (four points), also known as *kuai sidian* (fast four points), a group of four sixteenth notes played by different combinations of the right thumb and the first and second fingers in fast tempi, as well two hands plucking.

In my opinion these idiosyncratic Zhejiang zheng techniques create a more powerful sound and greater versatility than other zheng styles, which made the instrument an ideal choice for creating new compositions following the artistic criteria under communist political agenda in the 1950s. In addition, techniques of plucking with two hands opened the door to adopting western influenced techniques, such as playing chords and arpeggios, and compositional methods, such as the use of counterpoint. Consequently the Zhejiang zheng was uniquely positioned as a bridge between the traditional and contemporary zheng.

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<sup>51</sup> A *Tanhuang* performance can include from five to eleven performers, with the main instruments being the *erhu*, *pipa*, *sanxian*, clapper and drum. The zheng, together with the *sheng*, is added when performed as a seven-piece ensemble (Sheng 2007:192).

Wang Xunzhi (1899-1972), a zheng performer and educator, studied with the historically little-known Jiang Yinchun but went on to become the primary artist in the establishment of Zhejiang zheng. In the 1920s Wang performed the zheng in Shanghai, and returned again to start teaching at the Shanghai Music Conservatory in 1956 where he and his students arranged and notated all the pieces he had collected.<sup>52</sup> Most of his students became prominent contemporary zheng musicians.

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<sup>52</sup> Xiang Sihua, one of Wang's top students, said: "*Falcon Catches Swan* and *The High Moon* were arranged after 1960. Fan Shang'e, Sun Wenyan (two other zheng students at the Conservatory), and myself all helped" (Xiang 2009, personal communication).

## 2.2 Compositional Structure of Traditional Zheng Music

Traditional zheng music was largely created upon an inherited compositional form called *baban*<sup>53</sup>—a *qupai*<sup>54</sup> (named tune) which contains a sixty-eight beat long melody. The use of inherited compositional forms is a practice shared by many Asian musical traditions, in which the most valued form of composition often faithfully follows a pre-existing framework such as a fixed rhythmic cycle, a melodic form, or a modal structure. As such, these frameworks are defined by tradition and contain the fundamental elements essential for artistic creation. The *qupai* tunes were used as compositional forms that were referred to as “mother tunes” (*muqu*) (Cheng 1983:262), or “bone tunes” (*gudiao*, a term known to the Hakka musicians) by traditional musicians, as Chinese zheng performer and educator Shi Zhaoyuan (b.1932) states: “[Old tunes] are simple, as only the basic principles are notated. Musicians in the past called these “bone tunes”...[through musician’s transformation], the melody of the “bone tune” is enriched with changes in pitch, time, rhythm, and tempo” (1985:6, translated from the Chinese).

As a compositional framework, *baban* not only allows, but in fact calls, for further development and embellishment; it is regimented with numerous rules and

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<sup>53</sup> *Baban* is the framework for many traditional Chinese instrumental genres. Although referred to as *baban* (eight beats) or *lao baban* (old eight beats) in all the traditional zheng styles, it is also known as *liuban* (six beats) or *lao liuban* (old six beats) in other genres, such as *Sizhu* (Silk Bamboo), an ensemble genre popular in Shanghai and other regions along the Southeast coast of China.

<sup>54</sup> The term *qupai* refers to melodies over which poetry was sung from as early as the Tang and Song dynasties. As each *qupai* has a title (usually drawn from the original lyrics of a poem), they are commonly referred to as “named tunes”, “labeled tunes” or “fixed tunes.” *Qupai* were a source for later works of dramatic and narrative singing, as well as compositional structures for instrumental music in the later imperial dynasties. In Laurence Picken’s studies of early Chinese music, he states: “One of the most fascinating musical features of these early operas is the use of a label, the *cheupair* (*qu pai*), or song-label, for each verse-form. The *cheupair* is a fragment of a *cheu* poem, usually consisting of three characters, and its function is to recall to the reader the structure of that particular verse-form. Its function may be compared with that of the metrical formulas in hymnals in the West which indicate to what type of melody hymn text can be sung or for what texts a given tune is suitable” (1960:115).



restrictions, yet at the same time these rules have almost all been stretched or broken at some point. It nurtured freedom for creativity, such that each individual artist who performed it chose to engage as a composer to various degrees, from only slight variations to adding a substantial amount of new material to the existing framework. As a result, a wide variety of new pieces were developed over time that embraced different regional styles as well as personal interpretations, and some have become standardized variants. Through *baban*, zheng music embodied a cultural continuity and a collective identity, and as such could be deemed “people’s music.”

Two prominent Chinese music theorists, Ye Dong and Yuan Jingfang, discuss the use of the *baban* form in Shandong *pengbaban*, Henan *bantou qu*, Chaozhou *Xianshi*, and Hakka zheng music (Ye 1983:139-59, Yuan 1987:162-69). Even though summary descriptions of the form are provided in their studies, detailed analyses of how *baban* is practically used to create compositions is lacking. Further, cursory discussions undertaken with musicians and their performance practice as an integral part of its composition are unusual, as the relationship is assumed. With this in mind, below I will examine the basic structures of *baban* as it pertains to the zheng and then follow with a discussion of the techniques, philosophy, and consequences of the musician as composer in *baban*.

### **2.2.1 *Baban* Beat-Form and its Variations**

*Ba* means “eight” in Mandarin, while *ban* holds multiple meanings. *Ban* is the name for clappers that function as the timekeeper to mark the accented beat in many operatic and narrative singing traditions; therefore, the term *ban* came to refer to accented

beats. As a vestige of the operatic tradition in instrumental music, the notion of “*ban*” in *baban* defines three rhythmic and structural elements underlying the form: “accented beat,” “phrase,” and “section.” The essential structural parameter for *baban* is documented in Yi Suzi’s 1762 text “*Baban Mingyuan*” (Explanation of the Name *Baban*):

When the ancients first began composing, they had a score, which had to have beats, called “*ban*.” Each piece had a total of 68 *ban*, divided into eight phrases called “*jie*.” Each phrase begins with a *ban*, therefore the total of eight *ban*. “Eight *ban*” is the foundation of all scores, and the gateway to learning. Too many scores eventually lead to chaos, and too much clever fingering leads to a lack of standards. (cited in Yuan 1987:162, translated from the Chinese)

The earliest notation of the *baban* “mother tune” is found in the scorebook *Xiansuo Beikao* (Rong 1814, in Cao and Li 1955).<sup>55</sup> In the original *baban*, each of the sixty-eight beats is a “*ban*,” or accented beat (see Figure 2.4).<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Originally notated in the *gongche* system, the *baban* melody was transcribed in staff notation, and was included in *Shiliu Ban* (Sixteen Beats), the first piece in the book, as a second reference system to demonstrate the root and the relationship between the melodies of *baban* and *Shiliu Ban* as well as that of the four instrumental systems of the *zheng*, *pipa*, *sanxian*, and *huqin*. A time signature of 2/4 is given to the transcription of *baban* melody in *Xiansuo Beikao*. In western music theory this would then suggest that each measure only has one *ban* (strong beat), which is incorrect and misleading. I use ¼ for the transcription of the *baban* melody, which indicates each single beat being a strong beat and reflects the true sense of *ban*, accented beat.

<sup>56</sup> Although the 68-beat *baban* is known as the earliest notated *baban* melody, over time many *baban* variants have been created which contain from 42, 44, 48, 50, 52, 56, 60, and 64 to 76 beats. Chinese scholars identify and categorize modified *baban* variants as pieces that only have *babantou* (*baban* head) or *babanwei* (*baban* tail), or describe cutting the beginning or ending of *baban* as *zhantou quwei* (decapitating head and docking tail; Ye 1983:140). Subsequently, the number of beats in each piece can vary greatly. The *baban* form and its variants can also be seen in the titles of numerous pieces, such as *Lao Baban* (Old Eight Beats), *Dan Baban* (Single Eight Beats), *Liu Baban* (Six Beats), *Lao Liuban* (Old Six Beats), and *Hua Liuban* (Flower Six Beats). Furthermore, since this mother tune was considered universal, *baban* pieces also include titles such as *Tianxia Tong* or *Tianxia Datong* (Universal Unison).

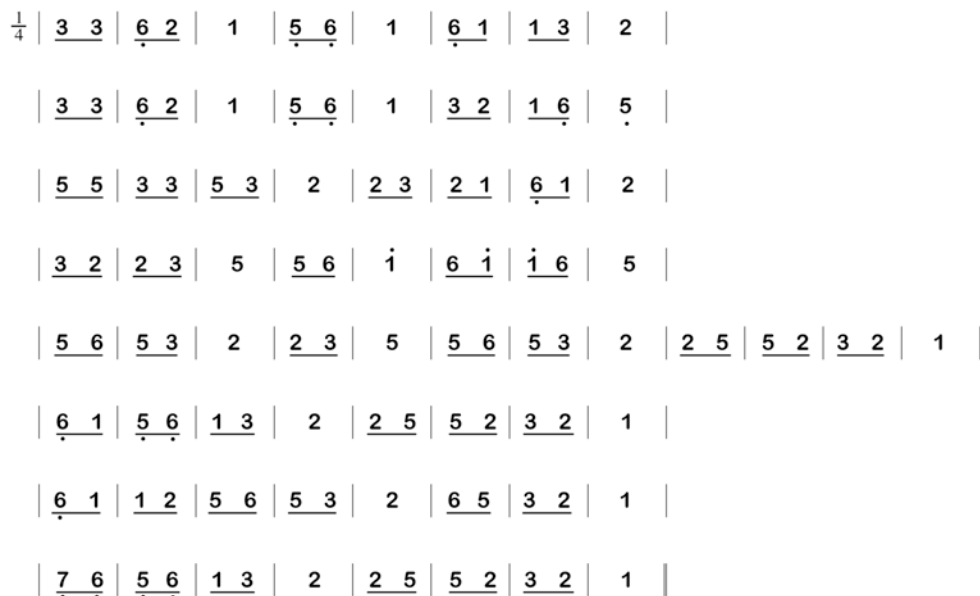


Figure 2-4 Baban mother tune.<sup>57</sup>

In the process of creating new pieces, the original *baban* is varied by either increasing the density of the original beats, or/and inserting extra beats to augment the original beat-form as well as contracting back to the original. The compositional method used to create variations is *bianzou*—“to play with change” or “to vary”—a term commonly used by Chinese musicologists in the study of traditional instrumental genres. Although traditional zheng musicians, including my teachers, used the term *bianzou* later in their career, the traditional terms for variation differed from region to region, including: 1) the Shandong and Henan term *jiahua* (to add flowers); 2) the Chaozhou

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<sup>57</sup> The music examples presented in this chapter are written in cipher notation, the most common system utilized for traditional zheng music today. The cipher notation includes: 1 (*do*), 2 (*re*), 3 (*mi*), 4 (*fa*), 5 (*sol*), 6 (*la*), 7 (*ti*). A dot below a note indicates a lower octave, and a dot above a note indicates a higher octave.

term *zaoju* (to make phrases); and 3) the Hakka terms *tianzi*<sup>58</sup> (to add) and *jianzi* (to subtract).

One of the primary methods of *jiahua* (adding flowers) is *yuanban jiahua* (adding flowers to the original beats), which is to vary the mother tune through interpolating new tones in between those of the original, and either displacing their original metric positions or dropping them. The following example is a comparison between the first sixteen beats of the original *baban* melody and *Putian Tongqing* (Universal Celebration), a Shandong piece (see Figure 2.5).

| <b>Putian Tongqing</b> |  | Shandong    |
|------------------------|--|-------------|
| Universal Celebration  |  |             |
| $\frac{1}{4}$          | $\overset{3}{\underline{\underline{\underline{3 \quad 5 \quad 3 \quad 2 \quad 1}}}} \mid \underline{\underline{6 \quad 6}} \mid \underline{1 \quad 1} \mid \underline{\underline{6 \quad 6 \quad 5 \quad 6}} \mid \underline{1 \quad 1} \mid \underline{\underline{6 \quad 6 \quad 5 \quad 1}} \mid \underline{5 \quad 6} \mid \underline{1 \quad 1} \mid$ |             |
| baban                  | $\underline{3 \quad 3} \mid \underline{\underline{6 \quad 2}} \mid 1 \mid \underline{\underline{5 \quad 6}} \mid 1 \mid \underline{\underline{6 \quad 1}} \mid \underline{1 \quad 3} \mid 2 \mid$  |             |
|                        |  |             |
| $\frac{3}{4}$          | $\overset{3}{\underline{\underline{\underline{3 \quad 5 \quad 3 \quad 2 \quad 1}}}} \mid \underline{\underline{6 \quad 6}} \mid \underline{1 \quad 1} \mid \underline{\underline{6 \quad 6 \quad 5 \quad 6}} \mid \underline{1 \quad 1} \mid \underline{\underline{6 \quad 6 \quad 5 \quad 6}} \mid \underline{6 \quad 3} \mid \underline{5 \quad 5} \mid$ |             |
|                        | $\underline{3 \quad 3} \mid \underline{\underline{6 \quad 2}} \mid 1 \mid \underline{\underline{5 \quad 6}} \mid 1 \mid \underline{3 \quad 2} \mid \underline{1 \quad 6} \mid 5 \mid$  | (continued) |

**Figure 2-5 Excerpt from *Putian Tongqing* (Universal Celebration).**

This example illustrates that the original beat-form remains unchanged. With minor variations the original *baban* notes are doubled, either in unison or octaves, and a number of *hua* (flower) glissandi are inserted after the main notes on the down beat of the first and ninth measures (indicated by a slur). The resulting new piece is much livelier, with every beat emphasized providing a strident support for the melody.

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<sup>58</sup> The term “zi” refers to the Chinese characters used in traditional notations; reducing or adding “characters” connotes adding or reducing notes.

Another variation technique is *tianyan* (adding *yan*) *jiahua*. *Yan* refers to weak beat and by adding *yan* after each *ban*, the original beat-form is lengthened. Commonly one or three *yan* are added after each *ban*, known as *yiban yiyang* (one *ban* and one *yan*, commonly notated in 2/4) or *yiban sanyang* (one *ban* and three *yan*, commonly notated in 4/4). Furthermore, adding *yan* can also be simultaneously combined with halving the meter of the mother tune (e.g., an eight-note value in the original *baban* is augmented to two beats, each with a quarter note value), thus quadrupling the length of the piece. This is known as *fangmanjiahua* (slowing down [the beat] and adding flowers). Thrasher summarises: “With the tempo decrease, weak beats (*yan*) are added—a single weak beat for moderate-tempo decrease (2/4), three weak beats for a still slower tempo (4/4), or seven weak beats for the slowest (8/4). With the slowing of tempo, the basic structure of the melodic model is maintained, the stable parameters being the fixed beat pattern (in augmented forms), the melodic length (e.g., 68 beats), and the pitches coinciding with strong beat (*ban*) and at cadences” (2008:130).

An example of this beat-form change can be seen in *Hangong Qiuyue* (Moon Shining on the Han Palace; see Figure 2.6).

**Hangong Qiuyue**  
Han Palace in the Autumn Moon

Shandong

1 = D

$\frac{4}{4}$   $\text{♩} = 30$   $\text{532165}$   $\underline{3}$   $3'$   $\underline{5}$   $\underline{6}$   $\underline{3}$   $\underline{2}$  |  $\underline{1}$   $\underline{1}$   $\underline{5}$   $\underline{66}$  |  $\underline{1}$   $\underline{1}$   $\underline{5}$   $\underline{5}$   $\underline{6}$   $\underline{5}$   $\underline{4}$  |  $\underline{5}$   $\underline{5}$   $\underline{1}$   $\underline{1}$   $\underline{2}$  |

$\frac{1}{4}$   $\text{Baban}$   $\text{♩} = 30$   $\underline{3}$   $\underline{3}$  |  $\underline{6}$   $\underline{2}$  |  $\underline{1}$  |  $\underline{5}$   $\underline{6}$  |  $\underline{1}$  |  $\underline{6}$   $\underline{1}$  |  $\underline{1}$   $\underline{3}$  |  $\underline{2}$  |

$\underline{3}$   $\underline{3}$   $\underline{5}$   $\underline{2}$   $\underline{2}$   $\underline{3}$  |  $\underline{1}$   $\underline{1}$   $\underline{2}$   $\underline{1}$   $\underline{5}$  |  $\underline{3}$   $\underline{3}$   $\underline{5}$   $\underline{5}$   $\underline{2}$  |  $\underline{1}$   $\underline{1}$  |  $\textcircled{1}$   $\underline{7}$   $\underline{6}$   $\underline{5}$   $\underline{5}$  |

$\underline{3}$   $\underline{3}$  |  $\underline{6}$   $\underline{2}$  |  $\underline{1}$  |  $\underline{5}$   $\underline{6}$  |  $\underline{1}$  |  $\underline{3}$   $\underline{2}$  |  $\underline{1}$   $\underline{6}$  |  $\underline{5}$  |

(continued)

Figure 2-6 Excerpt from *Hangong Qiuyue* (Han Palace in the Autumn Moon).

*Jianzi* (reducing notes) subtracts beats after the original beat-form is expanded in the slower section. Often *jianzi* is used to create fast sections of a piece, the opposite to the outcome of *fangman jiahua* (slowing down and adding flowers). It should be noted that traditional *gongche* notation does not have tempo indications. Instead, the tempo is implied in the compositional method used in creating the piece or a section, thus it is typical to begin with *fangman* (slowing down) and/or *tianyan* (adding weak beats) *jiahua* (section A), then move to *yuanban jiahua* (adding density on the original beats; section B) and finish with *jianzi* (contracting beats and/or density; section C, see Figure 2.7).

**Xunfeng Qu**  
Tune of Warm Breeze

Hakka

Section A 【一】 ♩ = 56

$\frac{4}{4}$   $\frac{2}{2}$   $\underline{3 \cdot 5}$   $\underline{2 \ 3}$   $\underline{2 \ 1}$  |  $\overset{b7}{\underline{6 \ 1}}$   $\overset{5}{\underline{2 \ 5}}$   $\overset{4}{\underline{3 \ 2}}$  |  $\overset{1}{\underline{1 -}}$   $\underline{1 \ 2}$   $\overset{b7}{\underline{1 \ 6}}$  |  $\overset{5}{\underline{4 \cdot 5}}$   $\overset{5}{\underline{5 \ 5}}$   $\underline{7 \ 1}$  |

Section B 【二】 ♩ = 80

$\frac{2}{4}$   $\underline{2 \ 2}$   $\underline{2 \ 3 \ 2 \ 1}$  |  $\underline{6 \ 1}$   $\overset{5}{\underline{2}}$  |  $\underline{1 \ 1 \ 2}$   $\overset{12}{\underline{1 \ 6}}$  |  $\overset{5}{\underline{5 \ 4 \ 5}}$   $\overset{5}{\underline{5 \ 5 \ 7}}$  |

Section C 【三】 ♩ = 112

$\frac{1}{4}$   $\underline{2 \ 3 \ 2 \ 1}$  |  $\underline{7 \ 1 \ 2}$  |  $\underline{1 \ 1}$  |  $\underline{7 \ 1 \ 2}$  |

Section A (cont.)  $\underline{1 \ 1}$   $\overset{5}{\underline{5 \ 7}}$   $\overset{1}{\underline{1 -}}$  |  $\overset{*}{\underline{7 \ 1}}$   $\overset{5}{\underline{5 \ 7}}$   $\overset{1}{\underline{1 -}}$  |  $\underline{2 \ 2}$   $\underline{6 \ 5}$   $\underline{4 \ 5 \ 5}$   $\overset{4}{\underline{3 \ 2}}$  |  $\overset{1}{\underline{1 -}}$   $\underline{1 \ 2}$   $\overset{4}{\underline{3 \ 5}}$  |

Section B (cont.)  $\underline{1 \ 1 \ 5 \ 7}$   $\underline{1 \ 2 \ 1}$  |  $\underline{7 \ 1 \ 7 \ 1}$   $\underline{1 \ 1}$  |  $\underline{2 \ 5}$   $\underline{2}$  |  $\underline{1 \ 1}$   $\overset{5}{\underline{5}}$  |

Section C (cont.)  $\underline{1 \ 1}$  |  $\underline{7 \ 1}$  |  $\underline{2 \ 7}$  |  $\underline{1 \ 1}$  |

**Figure 2-7 Comparison of the first two phrases of the three sections of *Xunfeng Qu* (Tune of Warm Breeze), also known as *Da Baban* (The Great *Baban*).**

### 2.2.2 Symmetry and Endnotes

The second meaning of *ban* defines phrase. The *baban* melody is divided into eight phrases in total, each containing eight beats, with an exception found in the fifth phrase, which has 12 beats (8+4). Some believe that the *baban* structure and the significance of the number “eight” is a reflection of *bagua*, the Eight Trigrams, a philosophical template to track changes in the book of *Yi Jing/I Ching*.<sup>59</sup> The extra four beats in the fifth phrase correlates to the four seasons of spring, summer, autumn, and winter. Both “four” and “eight” are important numbers in Chinese culture, which

<sup>59</sup> The total sixty-four beats come from the sixty-four combinations of hexagrams of the Eight Trigrams of *qian*, *kun*, *zhen*, *gen*, *li*, *kan*, *dui*, and *xun*.

symbolize stability and symmetry (Du 2004:148).<sup>60</sup> Others believe the symmetrical structures in *baban* are clearly vestiges of earlier vocal traditions:

In history, instrumental music was greatly influenced by vocal music; the structure of vocal music was determined by the form of poems. Therefore, it should not be accidental that the basic Chinese poetic forms, i.e., antithetical couplet (*duilian*), quatrain (*jueju*), and eight-line regulated verse (*lüshi*), also have the proportions of 2:4:8 lines. The matching of musical form with poetic forms provides us with a strong reason to consider that all the artistic forms chosen by Chinese are based on the same historical cultural and aesthetic root. (Xue 1999:91)

The principle of stability of an even number (2, 4, and 8) is also evident in the pitch arrangement of the phrase endnotes of *baban*.<sup>61</sup> The five tones of the Chinese pentatonic scale are *gong* (do), *shang* (re), *jue* (mi), *zhi* (sol), and *yu* (la), and among them *gong* is considered the most prominent. A famous statement “*Gong* is the master of all tones” by *Zhou Jiu* (c. 540 BCE) was documented in the *Guoyu Zhouyu* (States Discourse—Discourse of Zhou), one of the earliest Chinese classics. In the original *baban* melody, the pitches of the endnote for the eight phrases are (in order): *shang* (re), *zhi* (sol), *shang* (re), *zhi* (sol), *gong* (do), *gong* (do), *gong* (do), and *gong* (do). *Gong* is by far the most important and stable note, therefore it appears as the endnote in all four phrases in the second half of the piece (even). *Zhi* (sol) is less stable compared with *gong*, but more stable than *shang* (re), therefore it is employed as the endnote in the first two even-numbered phrases: two and four. My study of Shandong zheng repertoire indicates that in the course of creating new compositions the endnotes of the original *baban*

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<sup>60</sup> Four and eight are reflected in the layout of many of the classical architectures in Beijing. The ancient Chinese instruments were categorized as *bayin*, eight sounds. The Forbidden City features a total eight gates, four being the main gates. The phrase *siping bawen* (four being even and eight being stable) is used as a Chinese idiom. Philippine ethnomusicologist José Maceda discusses the interrelationship of the number four in music and ancient architecture in his article “The Structure of Principal Court Musics of East and Southeast Asia” (Maceda 2001:143-78).

<sup>61</sup> The term “endnote” indicates the final note of each phrase of *baban*, which is analogous to “final” and “cofinal” in Western modal theory.



function as “anchors,” therefore pitch alternation seldom appears in even numbered phrases. Since the last four phrases are in the second half of the piece, which is even compared with the first half, a greater restriction of symmetry and stability are hence exercised with no phrase endnotes being altered in the *baban* variants. This reinforces the underlying structure of the mother tune, while allowing slight pitch changes in the first and third phrase only.<sup>62</sup>

Furthermore, symmetry is present in the progression of the eight phrases of *baban*, which form four stages, each containing two phrases. Evident in Chinese poetry, opera, and music composition, this well established organizational concept is known as *qi*, *cheng*, *zhuan*, and *he*, translated as “initiation,” “continuation,” “deviation,” and “reunification.” Ye Dong, the late Chinese musicologist, summarizes the corresponding relationship among the four stages of *baban*:

The melodic line and endnotes between *qi* (initiation) and *cheng* (continuation) correspond. *Zhuan* (deviation) converges expansion of the phrase structure and changes endnote, while *he* (reunification) reinforces this new endnote and recapitulates the melody introduced in the stage of *zhuan*. It resolves the melody and brings stability and settlement [of the piece]. (1983:144, translated from the Chinese)

*Baban zheng* repertoire suitably demonstrates this theory, as both the endnotes in the second and fourth phrase are *zhi* (sol), which reveals the corresponding relationship between the stage of “initiation” and “continuation.” Then the endnote is switched to *gong* (do) at the fifth phrase, the stage of “deviation,” and *gong* (do) reappears in the last phrase as “reunification.” An additional four beats inserted in the fifth phrase, the

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<sup>62</sup> The entire repertoire of the First Great Suite of the Shandong, as well as a large number of pieces from the southern styles, follow this rule strictly. I found that the endnotes in even-numbered phrases in those pieces is identical to that of the original *baban* melody, while occasionally *shang*, the endnote for the first and third phrases, are replaced by *gong*.

beginning of the stage of “deviation,” break the normal length of an eight-beat phrase creating a temporary imbalance that seeks stability. This stability is achieved by introducing a new endnote—*gong* (do)—and the return of the eight-beat phrases (see Figure 2.8).

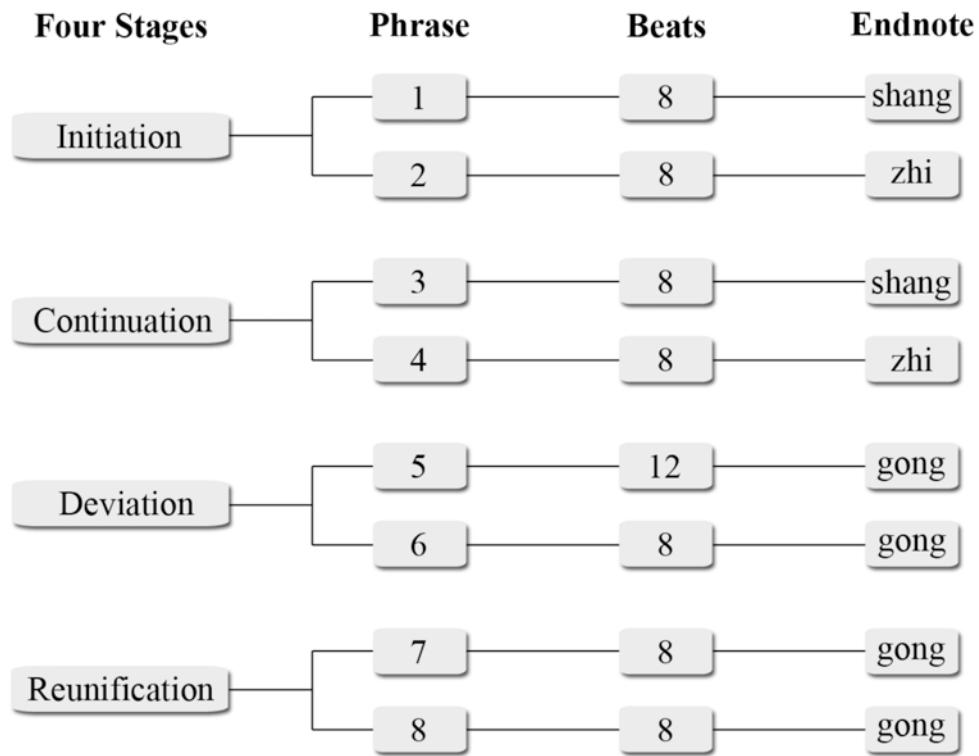


Figure 2-8 Phrase structure and endnotes of *baban*.

### 2.2.3 Section

The third meaning of *ban* is “section.” In southern styles, especially Chaozhou *baban* repertoire, each piece often contains multiple *ban* or sections: *touban* (the first and slow section), *erban* (the second and moderate section), *sanban* (the third and fast section), and *kaopai* or *kaoda* (whipped beat, a section featuring syncopated beats). While each section individually contains the *baban* form of sixty-eight beats, three or more sections are often performed concurrently as one complete composition.

In Shandong zheng “section” refers to one division of a suite of pieces; each of these pieces can be played individually as a composition. Each section contains from one to four individual pieces of a *baban* variant, dependant on the tempo. For instance, the “First Great Suite,” the main repertoire of the Shandong zheng, is comprised of four *ban* or sections—*touban* (the first section), *erban* (the second section), *sanban* (the third section), and *siban* (the fourth section), encompassing a total of eight pieces. The first section contains the longest and slowest piece, the second a shorter and slightly faster piece, the third two faster and shorter pieces still, and the fourth four short fast pieces. As pieces progressively become shorter and faster, more pieces are added to a section so that a relative balance and symmetry is maintained between sections (see Figure 2.9).

First Section - 4/4, ♩ = 54-60

Autumn Moon Shining on the Han Palace 汉宫秋月

Second Section - 4/4, ♩ = 80-90

Beautiful Lady Longing for Home 美女思乡

Third Section - 2/4, ♩ = 100-120

Letter Via Wild 鸿雁捎书

Goose Warbling Oriole 莺啭黄鹂

Fourth Section - 1/4, ♩ = 120 -160

The Charm of the Qin 琴韵

Bamboo Swaying in the Breeze 风摆翠竹

Tinkling Bells in the Still of the Night 夜静玺铃

Reading Aloud 书韵

Figure 2-9 The “First Great Suite” of the traditional Shandong.

### 2.3 *Sheng* and *Yin*: Examining Performance Technique in the Context of Traditional Composition

In modern Chinese the word for “sound” is *shengyin*, a combination of two characters—*sheng* and *yin*—which in classical Chinese denote “sound” and “music” respectively. The interrelationship between these two words was the guiding principle for making music in China’s past, as the *Yueji* (Record of Music), one of the earliest Chinese music sources, states: “All music (*yin*) rises from the human heart. Emotion stirs, taking shape as sound (*sheng*). Sound refined in patterns is music (*yin*)” (Gongsun c. 1<sup>st</sup>. cent. BCE, translated from the Chinese).

The combination of *sheng* and *yin* is mirrored in the construction and performance of the zheng, as each string has a different but interrelated function on either side of its bridge. The right hand initiates the sound by plucking the open strings to the right side of the bridges, which are tuned to the anhemitonic pentatonic scale of *gong* (do), *shang* (re), *jue* (mi), *zhi* (sol), and *yu* (la); and the left hand manipulates the sound by pressing and releasing the strings on the untuned left side of the bridges. The performer creates rhythmic complexity and density on the right hand, while using extensive left-hand techniques to add melodic refinement. The two sides of the strings thus perform different functions, yet unite in a single purpose: to initiate sound (*sheng*), then shape and refine it into music (*yin*).

In the study of traditional zheng, techniques of playing the instrument are often viewed as simply part of performance practice. Commonly overlooked is the inseparable connection between performance practice and the traditional process of composing

music, in which performance techniques form idiomatic patterns used for composition.

As Judith Becker states:

The musician in an oral tradition...has mastered a technique of composition, based on the manipulation of formulas, which allows him to perform and compose at the same moment. For this musician, the moment of performance is the moment of creation. (1980:20)

Many traditional zheng performance techniques were, in practice, compositional methods, as compositions were created “in the course of performance” (Nettl 1986:392).

In this section I will discuss performance technique for both hands, concentrating on their functions in the music creation process. In this context I am examining performance techniques as an integral compositional method in the context of traditional Chinese aesthetics. This will provide a better understanding of the roles that the musicians played in the creation process.

### **2.3.1 Right-hand Technique: Sound Initiation**

Melodic expansion is at the core of even the most fundamental right-hand technique. Three examples examined here include: 1) the basic plucking pattern *gou* and *da*; 2) *cui*, a variation technique used in the south; and 3) the use of *hua*, glissando in the Shandong zheng.

Traditional right-hand techniques are primarily fingering patterns combining the first and middle finger playing inward, known as *gou*, and the thumb playing outward, known as *da* (allowing for alternative terms used in different regions). Most often the thumb and middle finger either play together in octaves to emphasize the beginning of a phrase, or alternate between octaves, usually led by the middle finger. When an interval

is smaller than an octave, the first finger is used instead of the middle finger. These finger movements, according to traditional musicians, followed the principle of “begin with low [note] then follow with high [note]; start out heavily then follow lightly,” which was articulated in the poetic essay *The Odes to Zheng* (Ruan d. 212, in Ouyang 624, translated from the Chinese).<sup>63</sup> Hakka musician He Yuzhai identified eight essential patterns of *gou* and *da*, naming them *bafa* (Eight Methods; see Figure 2.10).

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| 一、合当             | <u>5</u> <u>5</u>   |
| 二、合当 合工 合当       | <u>5</u> <u>5</u> <u>5</u> <u>3</u> <u>5</u> <u>5</u>                                     |
| 三、合当 合士 合当       | <u>5</u> <u>5</u> <u>5</u> <u>6</u> <u>5</u> <u>5</u>                                     |
| 四、合当 尺工 合当       | <u>5</u> <u>5</u> <u>2</u> <u>3</u> <u>5</u> <u>5</u>                                     |
| 五、合当 尺六 尺工 合当    | <u>5</u> <u>5</u> <u>2</u> <u>5</u> <u>2</u> <u>3</u> <u>5</u> <u>5</u>                   |
| 六、合当 工六 尺工 合当    | <u>5</u> <u>5</u> <u>3</u> <u>5</u> <u>2</u> <u>3</u> <u>5</u> <u>5</u>                   |
| 七、合当 合工 尺六 尺工 合当 | <u>5</u> <u>5</u> <u>5</u> <u>3</u> <u>2</u> <u>5</u> <u>2</u> <u>3</u> <u>5</u> <u>5</u> |
| 八、合当 合五 工六 尺工 合当 | <u>5</u> <u>5</u> <u>5</u> <u>6</u> <u>3</u> <u>5</u> <u>2</u> <u>3</u> <u>5</u> <u>5</u> |

Figure 2-10 *Bafa*: Eight Fingering Patterns by He Yuzhai (He 2008:180), written in *gongche* notation on the left, and transcribed into cipher notation on the right.

The first pattern in Figure 2.10, “*he dang*” contains two notes (*sol* [5]) in different octaves, played by alternating the middle finger and thumb. This short passage then becomes the basis for expansion and variations that include the first finger to form the

<sup>63</sup> In the poem, “low” and “high” are depicted as *da* (big) and *xiao* (small). In classical Chinese, *da* and *xiao* (also written as *tai* and *shao*) are used in descriptions of low and high sounds (e.g., a drum with low sound is called *dagu*, or *taiko* in Japanese). The terms are also found in the inscription on the *Zenghuo Yi* chime bell (433 BCE), where the lower octave bells are marked with “*tai*,” and the higher octave bells are marked with “*shao*” (Zhongguo 1985:383).

other seven patterns (He 2008:181). Although He Yuzhai designated these as Hakka patterns, they embody the basic right-hand technique true to all the traditional styles. *Kuai sidian*, or “fast four points” of Zhejiang, is a typical example of the development of right-hand fingering technique. This technique features the basic patterns played either by the thumb and the middle finger alternating between two octaves, shown as the first pattern in the *bafa*, or in the order of “middle finger, thumb, first finger, thumb,” shown in pattern number five (the latter illustrated in Figure 2.11).

**Sanshisian Ban**  
Thirty Three Beats (excerpt) Zhejiang

♩ = 144

\ First Finger  
 ^ Middle Finger  
 L Thumb

Figure 2-11 Excerpt from *Sanshisian Ban* (Thirty-three Beats) of Zhejiang zheng.

The approach of varying the nucleus shown in the *Bafa* is a clear demonstration of *jiahua* augmentation and *jianzi* reduction, two principle compositional methods in the traditional zheng repertoire discussed earlier. He Song, He Yuzhai’s grandson, also states that the technical development is directly related to the difficulty level of pieces in the



repertoire, which indicates that the level of creativity corresponds with a musician's command of variation techniques.<sup>64</sup>

Another example of melodic expansion is found in the employment of *cui*, particularly in Chaozhou style. *Cui* "is a common technique for variation" (Lin and Chen 1981:42). *Cui* can be translated as "to increase" or "to propel." The term *cui* was used as a prominent tempo mark for acceleration in *daqu* (great suite), a genre performed as banquet music in the imperial court from the Sui to Song dynasties (581-1279), and later in opera traditions. On the *zheng*, *cui* signifies creating melodic variations through increasing note density by rearticulating a given note at one of several possible levels of subdivision of the pulse, without changing its total duration. A large stock of formalized patterns of *cui* were developed by Chaozhou musicians, with the most common being *dancui* (single *cui*) to rearticulate a given note once;<sup>65</sup> *shuangcui* (double *cui*) to rearticulate a given note three times; *shuangdie cui* (quadruple *cui*) to rearticulate a given note seven times; and *zhuliu* (insert six)<sup>66</sup> to interpolate the fifth of the scale in between two melodic notes (see Figure 2.12).<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> He Song states: "The eight patterns are applicable to all the pieces included in the two score manuscripts: *Zhongzhou Gudiao* (Ancient Tunes from the Central Plain) and *Hangao Jiupu* (Old Tune from the Hanjiang River). [As a beginner], the player usually starts with *Jiaochuang Yeyu* (The Night Rain Tapping on the Window), a piece with fewer *ban* [sections]...After practicing more, when the player has a better command of the techniques, move to play *Xunfeng Qu* (Tune of Warm Breeze)" (2008:182, translated from the Chinese). *Jiaochuang Yeyu* is not a *baban* piece and traditionally did not contain substantial rhythmic variation or tempo changes, while *Xunfeng Qu* includes many sections with a gradual reduction of beats and acceleration in each succeeding section.

<sup>65</sup> "Single *cui*" shares the same principle of *yuanban jiahua* (adding flowers to the original beats), discussed earlier in this chapter, which is to create new melodies by only increasing the note densities of the original *baban* without changing the beat value.

<sup>66</sup> The number "six" here refers to the six in *gongche* notation, which is the equivalent to *sol* in cipher notation.

<sup>67</sup> A similar technique is also found in the Hakka style known as *zhu* (to insert). Three common types of *zhu* are: 1) *zhuliu*, to insert *sol* of the scale in between two melodic notes; 2) *zhuche*, to insert *re* in between two melodic notes; and 3) *zhufu*, to insert a short glissando inbetween two melodic notes.

|                      |  |                 |                 |  |                 |                 |  |                 |                 |  |                 |                 |  |
|----------------------|--|-----------------|-----------------|--|-----------------|-----------------|--|-----------------|-----------------|--|-----------------|-----------------|--|
| <b>Original</b>      |  | <u>3 2</u>      | <u>3 5</u>      |  | <u>3 2</u>      | 3               |  | <u>6 1</u>      | <u>6 1</u>      |  | <u>3 1</u>      | 2               |  |
| <b>Single cui</b>    |  | <u>3 2</u>      | <u>3 5</u>      |  | <u>3 2</u>      | <u>3 3</u>      |  | <u>6 1</u>      | <u>6 1</u>      |  | <u>3 1</u>      | <u>2 2</u>      |  |
| <b>Double cui</b>    |  | <u>3 3 3 2</u>  | <u>3 3 3 5</u>  |  | <u>3 3 3 2</u>  | <u>3 3 3 3</u>  |  | <u>6 6 6 1</u>  | <u>6 6 6 1</u>  |  | <u>3 3 3 1</u>  | <u>2 2 2 2</u>  |  |
| <b>Quadruple cui</b> |  | <u>33333332</u> | <u>33333335</u> |  | <u>33333332</u> | <u>33333333</u> |  | <u>66666661</u> | <u>66666661</u> |  | <u>33333331</u> | <u>22222222</u> |  |
| <b>Insert “six”</b>  |  | <u>3 5 2 5</u>  | <u>3 5 5 5</u>  |  | <u>3 5 2 5</u>  | <u>3 5 3 5</u>  |  | <u>6 5 1 5</u>  | <u>6 5 1 5</u>  |  | <u>3 5 1 5</u>  | <u>2 5 2 5</u>  |  |

**Figure 2-12 Basic types of the technique *cui*.**

*Cui* is often applied to “propel” music when a melody moves from a slower section to a faster section. Sometimes the tempo does not necessarily increase in the new section, yet as the note density increases, a continued acceleration is perceived. A musician’s choice of using a specific type of *cui* is determined by the character of the piece s/he intends to create: lively or lyrical, faster or slower.

Another right-hand technique used in melodic elaboration is *jiahua*. Although *jiahua* was discussed earlier as a term for augmentation in composition, it also designates a right-hand technique of inserting *hua* (flowers) or glissandi in a melodic frame. There are two main usages of *hua*: one as grace notes played as anacrusis, the other as integrated in a melody played in time. Although all traditional styles add glissandi, Shandong zheng is distinguished by its marked use of *jiahua*, with abundant use of glissandi throughout many pieces, especially those in faster tempi (see Figure 2.13).

## Yejing Luanling

Tinkling Bells in the Still of the Night

Shandong

♩ = 144

gliss.

1 4 2̣6532 | 7̣'6̣ | 15321 | 5̣ 5̣ | 1 1 | 3̣653 | 26532 | 1 1 | 26532 | 7̣'6̣ | 15321 | 5̣ 5̣ |

1 1 | 3'5321 | 25321 | 65321 | 5 5 | 65321 | 55321 | 4'5321 | 25321 | 4'5321 | 25321 | 1 1 |

2 2 | 65321 | 4 3 | 5 5 | 5 5 | 7'165 | 321 7' | 1653 | 7165 | 7165 | 3 3 | 2 2 |

cont'd

Figure 2-13 Excerpt of *Yejing Luanling* (Tinkling Bells in the Still of the Night).

The application of *jiahua* creates excitement in the music, and its use in Shandong zheng was an overt display of virtuosity referred to by musicians as “one smart move” (*yizhao xian*; Zhao 1983:38, translated from the Chinese), in contrast to the performance criteria of southern styles.<sup>68</sup> *Gongche* notation marked glissandi in the scores with the written character for *hua* (flower); as a result, *gongche* notation for Shandong zheng is named *huazi gongche pu*, or flower *gongche* notation (a score written in *huazi gongche* notation will be included in the next section; see Figure 2.21).


### 2.3.2 Left-hand Technique: Manipulating Sound

The zheng is distinguished by left-hand techniques that shape and colour the sound creating a prominent aesthetic known in traditional zheng music as *yun*. The allocation of different functions between the two hands and their interrelationship, with the right hand plucking to the right of the bridges and the left hand depressing and

<sup>68</sup> Overuse of glissando is considered bad taste in the south, especially in the Hakka style, whose music is famous for carrying the essence of Confucian aesthetics: refinement and introspection. The differences in preference for the *jiahua* technique might be understood in the different functions that the two styles embody. The Shandong zheng was employed in an ensemble performing with *qinshu* narrative singing as entertainment, while Hakka small ensembles, such as *sixian* (silk string) and *qingyue* (pure music), were mostly played for self-cultivation.


releasing strings on the left, is known as *yi yun busheng* (using *yun* to enrich sound). *Yun* is in common usage in the Chinese language, however, it is quite a complex term carrying over a hundred connotations that are largely related to prosody, poetry, sophistication, refinement, and beauty, such as *yun* (vowel), *qingyun* (feeling or emotional tone), *yayun* (to rhyme), *fengyun* (inner gracefulness), or *youyun* (the delight of elegant reclusion). Many of these connotations apply to zheng music, and using *yun* to “enrich” sound (*yi yun busheng*) was an important part of traditional composition. However, *yun*, or what comprises *yun*, has not yet been unequivocally defined, since often it is presumed understood as a common parlance in zheng discourse; as zheng performer/educator Zhou Yanjia stated: “using *yun* to enrich the sound (*yi yun busheng*) is expected” (1986:34).


As there is no clear definition of the term *yun* in zheng music, for the purpose of this discussion I describe it as lingering tones that carry designated pitch movements and embody subtlety and nuance, which resonate with emotion, sophistication, and charm. The left-hand techniques to create *yun* can be largely categorized into six different types<sup>69</sup> serving three main purposes: 1) vibrato; 2) portamento; and 3) pitch alteration.


1) *Yin* : a light vibrato carried out in numerous ways. *Yin* connotes “to sing” or “to sigh” in classical Chinese. For a single note the vibrato can be long or short, realized at a uniform speed whether slow or rapid, or varied in speed throughout the note’s decay. This technique adds a subtle emotive vocalistic quality and is widely used in all styles.


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<sup>69</sup> Categorization of and terminology used for the left-hand techniques differ by region, individual musician, generation, and level of details. The categories listed here comprise my own summary, which utilizes commonly accepted terms in zheng music combined with my own definitions based on a personal understanding of the terms and experiences as a zheng performer.

2) *Zhan* : a heavy vibrato (slow or rapid) with audible pitch alteration. Like *yin*, it makes a note “sing,” however, heavy vibrato is a typical vocal style found particularly in operas and narrative singing genres in northern China. As a result, *zhan* is commonly used in Shandong and Henan styles, which are generally considered dramatic and earthy.

3) *Hua* : a single string portamento or slide in one direction (either up or down in pitch). Each string on the zheng can be easily depressed, causing up to a minor third fluctuation in pitch. Pitch bending is a reflection of the tonal nature of the Chinese languages transmitted from chanted poetry and other vocal genres to instrumental music, and has become a significant characteristic of Chinese music. The technique *hua* fulfills an important element of *yun*—a tone carrying designated pitch movement, either lifting or falling tones. The technique is widely used in all traditional styles.

4) *Nao* : returning portamento. The left hand bends a string down-up-down or the reverse, so that the portamento can move from either a higher to lower pitch, or lower to higher. The written character for *nao* is “monkey,” although it is seldom used in modern written language. This implies that the hand movement of *nao* is an imitation of a monkey grabbing an object.<sup>70</sup> *Nao* is very effective in expressing gentle, sad, or elegant emotions. Although it is used in all styles, southern styles are particularly famous for applying it.

5) *Dian* : a rapid press and release of a string sharply raising the pitch with an immediate return to the open string. In southern styles this technique is often applied in

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<sup>70</sup> *Nao* is also a left-hand technique found on the *qin*, the seven-string zither. In Van Gulik’s study of *qin* techniques, he believes the character means “to twist” and “to rub.” He also said that “the symbolic association may also have played a role: for the vibrato ritardando,” his term for returning portamento, “should suggest ‘the cry of a monkey while climbing a tree’” (1968:132).

sections with faster tempi and contracted beats, to create wavering movement and a bright spirited mood.

6) *An* ⑥: to depress a string to raise the pitch.<sup>71</sup> The technique can be used in conjunction with the fast motion of *hua* to slide into the raised pitch. Commonly the maximum interval of a minor third can be obtained by depressing an open string.

It should be mentioned that each category of the above techniques comprises numerous applications based on individual regional and personal styles, and various techniques are often utilized either simultaneously or consecutively. Furthermore, the difference in direction, duration, speed, intensity, and even a performer's varying energy in execution of these techniques all play a role in their outcomes. Taken together these left-hand techniques give the player a large palette of gestures that may be applied to create newly composed material. Their application within a single piece can confer what is felt to be a powerful and deep emotional aesthetic.

One central element of the *yun* is that of a single tone in fluid motion between fixed pitches. This movement, whether it be either a simple bending of a pitch or a complex amalgamation of pitch bends combined with multiple vibrato, is described as a *yaosheng*, or moving tone.<sup>72</sup> Representing *one* note in constant motion, the concept of a moving tone is inherent within Chinese tonal languages and transmitted through various vocal traditions. "A *yaosheng* is distinct from ornaments in Classical European Music

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<sup>71</sup> The number in the circle indicates the cipher note of the open string that is being pressed.

<sup>72</sup> To my knowledge, *yaosheng* is not traditionally utilized by zheng musicians nor contemporary Chinese instrumentalists in general. The term has been (re)introduced in contemporary literature by the scholar Du Yaxiong (1999), and a few more recent writings, as a traditional Chinese music concept related to the outcomes of the left-hand techniques associated with stringed instruments such as the zheng, *qin*, and *pipa*. However, there was no historical source cited or mentioned in these writings. On the other hand, *yosŏng*, a Korean term for vibrato, is an established traditional concept for Korean music. A discussion of *yosŏng* with extensive citation of historical sources is found in *Han'guk chŏnt'ong ūmak ūi akcho* (The Modes and Scales of Korean Music) (Hwang 2005). *Yosŏng* is also found referring to a wide and slow vibrato on the Korean *kayagŭm*, a descendant of the zheng (Kim 2008:69).

which are a combination of two or three distinct tones played in rapid succession. Rather, it is best described as a progression of ascending or descending pitches, such as the sound of a police siren—to give a crude example” (Du 1999:41).

An example of *yaosheng* can be demonstrated by the moving tone *la* in *Fengbai Cuizhu* (Bamboo Swaying in the Wind), one of the Ten Great Suite pieces of Shandong. Each of these moving tones carries a large portamento between *la* and *do* (a minor third) combined with different treatments of vibrato. In the *gongche* score of this piece, each moving tone is notated by a single 四, or *la*, representing the open string where the moving tone originates. The following cipher transcription, however, notates the moving tone as 7 (*ti*) (see Figure 2.14). Since it is impossible to accurately capture and notate the entire process of this moving tone in cipher transcription, the notator arbitrarily chose *ti*, the middle of the moving tone, with fingering symbols for bending up the note or applying light vibrato on the note. This is a typical example of the codification of traditional music, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

**Fengbai Cuizhu**  
Bamboo Swaying in the Wind Shandong

♩ = 120

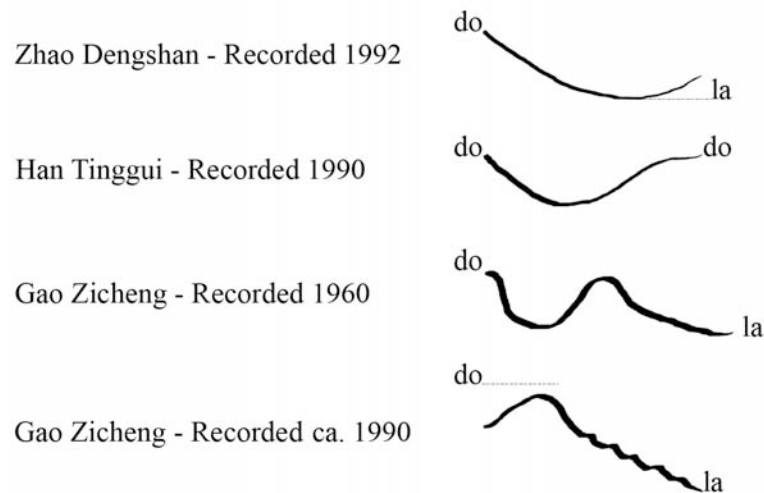
1 | 5̣ 3̣ 2̣ ị | (7̣) | ị 7̣ 7̣ | 7̣ 7̣ | ị 7̣ 7̣ | 7̣ 7̣ | 5̣ 7̣ | 1̣ ị |

4 | 5̣ 3̣ 2̣ ị | 7̣ | ị 7̣ 7̣ | 7̣ 7̣ | ị 7̣ 7̣ | 7̣ 7̣ | 5̣ 6̣ | 5̣ 5̣ | <sup>cont'd</sup>

Figure 2-14 Moving tones in *Fengbai Cuizhu* (Bamboo Swaying in the Wind).

Moving tones, especially those created on *la* and *mi*, are a strong part of the regional music identities in the north. As the *zheng* was actively used in narrative singing traditions (*qinshu* in Shandong and *dadiao quzi* in Henan), the moving tones typically mirror the tonal inflections of the local dialects and the musical characteristics of these narrative singing styles. The traditional steel-string *zheng* with its long resonance was an ideal vehicle to create and experience the variety of contours and voicings created by left-hand manipulations.

I have analyzed four different versions of beat two (circled 7), the first quarter note of the piece, performed by three traditional musicians. The result illustrates that the directions of a tone moving between *la* (open string) and *do* (the maximum distance for bending on the string) differ among performers. In addition, two renditions by Gao Zhicheng, recorded thirty years apart, show slight differences from each other (see Figure 2.15).



**Figure 2-15** A comparison of different directions of moving tone *la* in *Fengbai Cuizhu* (Bamboo Swaying in the Wind).



This analysis suggests that in the process of adding *yun* to their compositions, musicians produced a variety of moving tones that not only reflected regional styles but also displayed highly developed individuality. In creating *yun* the pitch movement reflects the performer's feelings, therefore, it is not static but varies from style to style, composition to composition, musician to musician, and occasion to occasion.

One function of moving tones in traditional zheng practice is to change or alter the *diao* (scale or mode). To create scales outside the pentatonic tuning of the open strings, the strings corresponding to *mi* and *la* can be pressed (*an*) to reach *fa* (*bianzhi*) and *ti* (*biangong*), respectively. These altered pitches are then known as *er bian* (two altered notes).<sup>73</sup>

One example where different scales are utilized can be seen in the Chaozhou zheng. As briefly examined earlier in this chapter, Chaozhou music uses *ersi* notation, a system which employs seven Chinese numerals (the numbers two through eight) to indicate nine tones, with the number three 三 representing both “*la*” and “*ti*” and the number six 六 representing both “*mi*” and “*fa*.” *Gongche* notation, in contrast, uses a specific Chinese character for each tone including the numbers four 四, five 五, and six 六. To understand the relationship between the *ersi*, *gongche*, and cypher systems, I have provided a comparative table in Figure 2.16.

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<sup>73</sup> Using extra tones outside the pentatonic scale has been one of the major practices in Chinese music. The relationship between the tones within the pentatonic scale and those outside is explicated in this famous quote from *Zuo Zhuan* (Chronicles of Zuo), one of Confucius' classics on discussions of music: “[All] nine songs, eight winds, seven sounds, and six temperaments serve the five tones” (Zuo c. 400 BCE). Chinese scholar Cai Zhongde explains: the five tones refers to those of the pentatonic scale; six temperaments refers to the pitches that form the twelve tones; seven sounds refers to the tones of a diatonic scale; eight winds refers to the diatonic scale plus one extra accidental; and nine songs refers to the combination of five tones of the pentatonic scale and four accidental notes (4, 4 sharp, 7 flat, and 7) (1988:36).

|         |     |    |    |    |    |    |    |     |    |
|---------|-----|----|----|----|----|----|----|-----|----|
| Ersi    | 二   | 三  |    | 四  | 五  | 六  |    | 七   | 八  |
| Gongche | 合   | 四  | 乙  | 上  | 尺  | 工  | 凡  | 六   | 五  |
| Cipher  | 5̣  | 6̣ | 7̣ | 1  | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5   | 6  |
| Solfège | Sol | La | Ti | Do | Re | Mi | Fa | Sol | La |

Figure 2-16 Comparison of the three main notational systems used for the zheng.

The Chaozhou “light three-six” scale is identical to the pentatonic tuning of the open strings: *sol, la, do, re, mi*. However, the scale changes to “light three and heavy six” if the *mi* (six 六) is pressed to become a neutral *fa* (*sol, la, do, re, fa*) in the course of playing. The “heavy three and six” scale is used when *la* (three 三) is pressed to a neutral *ti* and *mi* (six 六) is pressed to a neutral *fa* (*sol, ti, do, re, fa*). The “lively five” scale contains a neutral *ti* and a neutral *fa* combined with a distinctive heavy vibrato centred on a neutral *re* (five 五). A modal variant of “light three and heavy six” that starts on its dominant is called “reverse string.” Following is a complete list of the Chaozhou scales and modes (see Figure 2.17).

|                   |    |     |     |   |     |    |   |   |
|-------------------|----|-----|-----|---|-----|----|---|---|
| Ersi              | 二  | 三   | 四   | 五 | 六   | 七  | 八 |   |
| Light 3 - 6       | 5̣ | 6̣  | 1   | 2 | 3   | 5  | 6 |   |
| Light 3 - Heavy 6 | 5̣ | 6̣  | 1   | 2 | 4↑  | 5  | 6 |   |
| Heavy 3 - 6       | 5̣ | 7̣↓ | 1   | 2 | 4↑  | 5  | 6 |   |
| Lively 5          | 5̣ | 6̣  | 7̣↓ | 1 | 2̃↑ | 4↑ | 5 | 6 |
| Reverse String    | 1  | 2   | 4↑  | 5 | 6   | 1̇ |   |   |

Figure 2-17 Chaozhou scale and modal system.

The neutral tones *ti* and *fa*, unlike the fourth and seventh in the Western diatonic scale, are positioned between a semi-tone and whole-tone above *la* and *mi*. With the combination of pressing (*an*) and vibrato (*yin* or *zhan*), these two notes move up and down fluidly creating two moving tones, known as *bitter* or *crying* tones (*kuyin*),<sup>74</sup> for they connote sorrow or sad beauty.

An example of one Chaozhou piece played in multiple scales is *Liuqing Niang* (Madam *Liuqing*) (see Figure 2.18).

**Liuqing Niang**  
Madam Liuqing  
(Thirty Beats)

Chaozhou  
Lin Maogen's  
performance score

①  
Light Three Heavy Six ♩ = 92–108

$\frac{4}{4}$   $\overset{\frown}{6}$   $\overset{\frown}{6}$  - 1 |  $\overset{\frown}{2}$  4  $\overset{\frown}{1}$   $\overset{\frown}{2}$   $\overset{\frown}{6}$  1 |  $\overset{\frown}{2}$  1  $\overset{\frown}{2}$  - 4 | 2 6  $\overset{\frown}{5}$   $\overset{\frown}{3}$   $\overset{\frown}{2}$  3 2 6 |

②  
Heavy Three - Six ♩ = 58–76

$\frac{4}{4}$   $\overset{\frown}{1}$   $\overset{\frown}{1}$   $\overset{\frown}{5}$   $\overset{\frown}{7}$   $\overset{\frown}{1}$   $\overset{\frown}{3}$  2 1 |  $\overset{\frown}{7}$  11  $\overset{\frown}{7}$  1 2 |  $\overset{\frown}{1}$  21  $\overset{\frown}{7}$  6 |  $\overset{\frown}{5}$  5 7 12 3 2 1 |  $\overset{\frown}{6}$   $\overset{\frown}{6}$   $\overset{\frown}{7}$   $\overset{\frown}{6}$  5  $\overset{\frown}{4}$   $\overset{\frown}{5}$  2 4 |

③  
Lively Five ♩ = 69–88

$\frac{4}{4}$  7 1 |  $\overset{\frown}{5}$  5 -  $\overset{\frown}{7}$   $\overset{\frown}{6}$   $\overset{\frown}{7}$  |  $\overset{\frown}{2}$   $\overset{\frown}{2}$  1  $\overset{\frown}{5}$  1  $\overset{\frown}{7}$   $\overset{\frown}{6}$   $\overset{\frown}{7}$  |  $\overset{\frown}{1}$  - 1  $\overset{\frown}{6}$  |  $\overset{\frown}{5}$  5 7  $\overset{\frown}{1}$  1 |

①  $\overset{\frown}{5}$   $\overset{\frown}{5}$  5 5 |  $\overset{\frown}{4}$   $\overset{\frown}{5}$   $\overset{\frown}{4}$  6  $\overset{\frown}{5}$  6  $\overset{\frown}{4}$  5 |  $\overset{\frown}{2}$  3 2 6  $\overset{\frown}{5}$   $\overset{\frown}{5}$  5 4 | 3  $\overset{\frown}{3}$  3 2 1 2  $\overset{\frown}{6}$  1 | cont'd

②  $\overset{\frown}{5}$   $\overset{\frown}{5}$   $\overset{\frown}{2}$   $\overset{\frown}{1}$  1  $\overset{\frown}{4}$  5 |  $\overset{\frown}{6}$   $\overset{\frown}{1}$   $\overset{\frown}{5}$   $\overset{\frown}{6}$   $\overset{\frown}{7}$  6 |  $\overset{\frown}{5}$  5 \* | 2 2  $\overset{\frown}{6}$  4  $\overset{\frown}{5}$  5 25 | 4 4  $\overset{\frown}{5}$   $\overset{\frown}{4}$   $\overset{\frown}{5}$   $\overset{\frown}{3}$  2 | cont'd

③  $\overset{\frown}{4}$   $\overset{\frown}{5}$   $\overset{\frown}{4}$   $\overset{\frown}{2}$  4 | 5 6 5 4 |  $\overset{\frown}{2}$   $\overset{\frown}{4}$  2 1 |  $\overset{\frown}{7}$  1  $\overset{\frown}{7}$   $\overset{\frown}{6}$   $\overset{\frown}{7}$  7 | 5 4 |  $\overset{\frown}{2}$  4  $\overset{\frown}{2}$  5 4 |  $\overset{\frown}{5}$   $\overset{\frown}{6}$  5 | cont'd

Figure 2-18 Excerpt of *Liuqing Niang* (Madam *Liuqing*), Lin Maogen's performance score.

<sup>74</sup> *Kuyin*, or bitter tones, have been found in many instrumental music genres as well as operas, especially regional opera traditions in Shannxi province. A literature review on the study of *kuyin* is included in Li Mei's doctoral dissertation *The Temperament Phenomenon of Neutral Tone* (2005).

These pieces demonstrate that by changing scales, each version of *Liuqing Niang* is transformed into a new variant with unique moving tones (e.g., bitter notes) that cause the music to embody different types of culturally recognized emotions. The “light three, heavy six” scale (the first version) is the closest to the pentatonic scale, therefore “fluid and beautiful” (Li 1992:4), while “heavy three-six” (the second version) is “dark with mixed emotions” (Jiao 1998:23). The “lively five” (the third version) is more complex than the other two, as the scale includes three pressed tones *ti*↓, *fa*↑, and *re*↑. “When playing ‘lively five,’ the left hand lingers with much *yun* on each note. The subtle changes create a sense of beauty, or ‘love-sickness’ by the locals” (Li 1992:3, translated from the Chinese).

In its full application, *yun* is expanded from just crafting a single note to connecting all notes and phrases with uses of nuance and dynamics. This was described explicitly by Shen Yue, a renowned scholar from the fifth century:

If the intent is to move from *gong* (*do*) to *yu* (*la*), the low and high should be connected. If the beginning of the sound is fluid, the ending should be solid. Exhaust all nuances with one note, and contrast dynamics between two phrases. Only when reaching to this point is the music worthy of being called refined. (c. 487, translated from the Chinese)

What the traditional zheng musicians accomplished with *yun* was a continuum of the aesthetics manifested in Chinese literature, poetry, and music for thousands of years. The exercise of *yun* on the zheng connects the music with emotion, sentiments, and passion, which is precisely what confers cultural authority on the instrument.

## 2.4 Notation and Oral Tradition

Zheng music was traditionally transmitted from teacher to student through a combination of written scores and oral/aural transmission. Through analyzing the contents and functions of several scores, I will argue that while notation carried essential structural information, the wealth of the zheng tradition—the intricate and extensive knowledge of how to materialize and elaborate on the compositional structure and utilize the idiosyncrasies of the instrument—was transmitted orally and aurally.

### 2.4.1 Notation and its Function in Traditional Performance Practice

Traditionally, the two separate notational systems of *ersi* and *gongche* were employed for zheng music. A notated score often contained the “generic” compositional elements applied to the majority of the regional styles, which included a main melody, the basic beat-form, and/or scale. Some scores, however, also included “idiomatic”<sup>75</sup> elements of specific techniques to one style or even one musician. The surviving zheng scores from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have shown that both *ersi* and *gongche* notation systems manifest what has been defined as “prescriptive” music-writing by Charles Seeger, in that a score functions as “a blue-print of how a specific piece of music shall be made to sound” (1958:184).

#### 2.4.1.1 *Ersi* Notation

*Ersi* notation, a system unique to Chaozhou music in the south, employs seven Chinese numerals. The script is written vertically and read from right to left, which is

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<sup>75</sup> The term “generic” and “idiomatic” are borrowed from Terri Miller in his study of *phleng Thai derm*, Thai “classical” melodies.

customary for classical written Chinese.<sup>76</sup> An example of *ersi* notation can be seen in a score for *Liuqing Niang* (Madam *Liuqing*) (see Figure 2.19). The first line or title line (written larger and in darker characters) contains the name of the tune in the first three Chinese characters. The next three characters below designate the scale of “heavy three-six,” which indicates the change of pitch *la* (three 三) and *mi* (six 六) to a neutral *fa* and neutral *ti*, respectively. The next three characters indicate a total of thirty beats, and the last two identify the beat-form known as *touban* (the first section), which delineates one accented beat *ban* followed by three weak beats *yan*. In the score proper, twenty-eight *ban* are marked with “○,” while two are marked with a “⊥,” an instruction to repeat the previous pitch.

The score indicates a skeletal melody grouped with spaces between phrases; the uneven lengths of the phrases are analogous to the uneven versed classical *cipai*,<sup>77</sup> suggesting that the phrasing is a vestige of the zheng’s association with sung poetry and narrative singing.

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<sup>76</sup> It has been suggested that the *ersi* notation was handed down from the Tang dynasty (Chen 1978:54) and was specifically created for string instruments (Cao 1980:87). To my knowledge there is no conclusive evidence to support such a claim.

<sup>77</sup> *Ci* is a form for Chinese classical poetry, and *pai* refers to “name or label.” *Cipai* are title forms with fixed verse, number of words and phonological structure. *Ci* was often sung with music accompaniment. *Liuqing Niang* is a *cipai*.

|   |   |   |   |   |                         |
|---|---|---|---|---|-------------------------|
| 六 | 四 | 四 | 六 | 四 | 柳青娘<br>重六調<br>三十板<br>頭板 |
| 七 | 五 | 五 | 七 | 三 |                         |
| 六 |   |   | 六 | 四 |                         |
| 五 | 三 | 三 | 五 |   |                         |
|   | 五 | 五 | 四 | 三 |                         |
| 六 | 四 | 四 |   | 五 |                         |
| 七 | 三 | 三 | 七 | 四 |                         |
|   | 二 | 二 | 六 | 三 |                         |
| 八 | 三 |   | 五 | 二 |                         |
| 七 | 四 | 三 |   | 三 |                         |
| 八 |   | 二 | 三 | 四 |                         |
| 七 | 三 |   | 四 | 三 |                         |
|   | 二 | 五 | 七 | 二 |                         |
|   | 六 | 六 | 六 | 六 |                         |
|   | 五 |   | 五 | 五 |                         |
|   | 二 | 二 | 四 | 二 |                         |
|   | 四 | 四 | 五 |   |                         |
|   | 三 | 五 |   | 四 |                         |
|   | 二 | 四 | 四 | 三 |                         |
|   |   |   | 五 | 二 |                         |
|   | 三 | 三 | 三 | 三 |                         |
|   | 二 | 六 | 四 | 二 |                         |
|   |   | 三 | 四 |   |                         |
| 五 | 四 | 六 | 五 |   |                         |
| 五 | 五 | 五 | 七 |   |                         |

Figure 2-19 An *ersi* score of *Liuqing Niang* (Madam *Liuqing*).

A comparison of the *ersi* score to a cipher transcription of a performance of *Liuqing Niang* by Chaozhou musician Lin Maogen shows that each number in the *ersi* score has the beat value of a quarter note. However, in performance musicians add more notes (*jiahua*) to each written beat, as well as creating numerous rhythmic variations (see Figure 2.20).

**Liuqing Niang**  
Madam Liuqing  
(Thirty Beats)

Chaozhou  
Lin Maogen's  
performance score

Heavy Three - Six ♩ = 58-76

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>4/4</p> <p style="font-size: small;">cipher</p> <p>1̣. 1̣   5̣ 7̣   1̣. 3̣   2̣ 1̣   7̣ 11̣   7̣ 1 2   1̣ 21̣   7̣ 6̣   5̣ 7̣   12̣ 3̣   2̣ 1̣   6̣ 67̣   6̣ 5̣   4̣. 5̣   2̣ 4̣  </p> <p style="font-size: small;">ersi</p> <p>四   三   四   三   五   四   三   二   三   四   三   二   六   五</p> | <p>5̣</p> <p>5̣. 2̣   1̣ 1̣   4̣ 5̣   6̣. 156̣   7̣ 6̣   5̣   2̣ 2̣   6̣ 4̣   5̣   4̣ 4̣   55̣ 4̣   55̣ 3̣ 2̣  </p> <p>二   四   三   二   三   二   五   七   六   七   六   五</p> |
|--|--|

Figure 2-20 *Liuqing Niang* comparison of ciphers and *ersi* notation.

#### 2.4.1.2 *Gongche* Notation

*Gongche* notation employs nine Chinese characters to represent *sol*, *la*, *ti*, *do*, *re*, *mi*, *fa*, *sol*, and *la* as fundamental pitches (see Figure 2.16).<sup>78</sup> *Gongche* notation, like *ersi*, is written vertically and read from right to left. The notation was initially developed around the tenth century,<sup>79</sup> and from the sixteenth century onward it was widely used as “a tonic solmization in opera and narrative songs” (Chen 2002:125, translated from the Chinese). As zheng compositions were mostly constructed on *qupai*, or named tunes (i.e., *baban*) inherited from opera and narrative song traditions, *gongche* notation was adopted for use with the traditional zheng repertoire.

Zheng scores written in *gongche* notation compiled in *Shandong Zhengqu Zhenchao Ben* (An Original Copy of Shandong Zheng Music, Cao 1954), *Hanyue*

<sup>78</sup> Extra characters are used in different regions, and sometimes radicals are added to the basic *gongche* characters to identify different octaves. A detailed description of *gongche* notation in English can be found in Yan-Zhi Chen’s Ph.D. dissertation (1991:196-201).

<sup>79</sup> *Gongche* notation was developed from *suzi* notation (notation for folk music), which was originally used to notate melodies played on various flutes at the beginning of the Northern Song dynasty (960-1227) and formalized in the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) with slight variances among genres (Chen 2002:124-125).



*Zhengqu Sishi Shou* (Forty Hakka Zheng Pieces, Shi 1985), and *Zhongzhou Gudiao* (Ancient Tunes of the Central Plain, He 2008) (also Hakka) are clear variants of the original “mother tunes” (*baban*), containing many more melodic details and/or indications of technique than the original *baban* mother tune. These scores are important in that they mark the progression in the development of *baban* pieces. While retaining the basic *baban* structure—e.g., beat-form, formalized phrases and end-note—they display regional variations and the individuality of each performer’s style.<sup>80</sup>

An example of a score written in Shandong *huazi gongche* notation is *Fengbai Cuizhu* (Bamboo Swaying in the Wind) (see Figure 2.21). *Hua*, or flower, is a Shandong term for glissando as discussed in 2.1. The title contains the label “fourth section” (*daban disi*—a discussion on “section” in Shandong Zheng is in 2.2), signifying its position in the Great Ten Suites, while also indicating that the piece contains only *ban*, or strong beats (1/4), played in a fast tempo.

The main melody is written in eight separate phrases with the phrase number indicated in parentheses under each line. These phrases directly correspond to the eight phrases of the *baban* form. The fifth phrase takes two lines as it contains twelve beats. The character for “flower,” or the glissando (denoted by an arrow in the score example), is inserted throughout the score where required, and the symbol for *ban* “—” (written on

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<sup>80</sup> I examined and compared several scores of the *baban* repertoire, chosen from *Shandong Zhengqu Zhenchao Ben* (Cao unpublished), *Hanyue Zhengqu Sishi Shou* (Shi 1985) and *Zhongzhou Gudiao* (He 2008), with the zheng part in *Sixteen Beats*, a composition for *xiansuo* string music (Rong 1814) as well as with the *baban* mother tune. I concluded that with the exception of extra dots added after certain notes as signs for rhythmic variation, the zheng part in *Sixteen Beats* is not substantially different from the *baban* mother tune, while scores for solo zheng developed at a later date contain more melodic content, rhythmic indications, and fingering symbols.

the right of a note) indicates an accented beat.<sup>81</sup>

風擺翠竹 大板第四

(其一) (其二) (其三) (其四) (其五)

Figure 2-21 *Fengbai Cuizhu* (Bamboo Swaying in the Wind) (Cao 1954).

A comparison of the *gongche* score to the cipher transcription (Figure 2.22) shows that the number of notes notated in the *gongche* score is identical to what is actually played. However, the rhythmic groupings are not specified in the score. The sign for a left-hand bend (女) provides a clear indication of which string to bend.

<sup>81</sup> There is no explanation for the use of the symbols. However, from my own experience of playing this piece, it is safe to assume the following: 女 = left-hand press, written to the right of a note; ㄥ = play the note in octaves, written to the left of a note; and • = play a single note, written to the left of a note.

**Fengbai Cuizhu**  
Bamboo Swaying in the Wind Shandong

♩ = 120

1/4 | 5̣ 3̣ 2̣ ị | 7' | ị 7 7 | 7 7 | ị 7 7 | 7 7 | 5 7' | 1 i |

花      四女 上 四女 四女 四女 四女 上 四女 四女 四女 四女 合 四女 上 上

| 5̣ 3̣ 2̣ ị | 7̣ | ị 7 7 | 7 7 | ị 7 7 | 7 7 | 5 6̣ | 5 5 |

仄花      四女 上 四女 四女 四女 四女 上 四女 四女 四女 四女 合 四女 合

cont'd

Figure 2-22 A comparison of cipher and *gongche* notation of *Fengbai Cuizhu*.

In comparison to the Shandong *huazi gongche* notation, the Hakka scores compiled by He Yuzhai do not contain technique symbols. What is unique about these scores, however, is that each *gongche* character has a number of “variant” characters that share the same or similar phonation but in the Hakka dialect have tonal inflections (e.g., rising or falling). These tonal inflections more directly represent the shape of the numerous moving tones characteristic of Hakka music (see Figure 2.23).

| Cipher | Gongche | Hakka variants                               |
|--------|---------|--|
| 6̣     | sì - 士  | sī - 思, sǐ - 使, shí - 时, yí - 而              |
| 4      | fán - 凡 | fán - 环, fàng - 犯, fān - 番, fǎn - 反, fàn - 唤 |

Figure 2-23 Examples of Hakka variants for *gongche* notation.

Qian Rechu, a Hakka scholar/musician, wrote in 1934 that “[*Gongche* notes] change tone in music... Without being taught in person, it is hard to know these changes...

With [variant] characters, [students] do not need to have a teacher, because [the spoken tones of these characters] fit the music” (cited in Wu 2009:36, translated from the Chinese). Cao Zheng also writes in the preface of *He Yuzhai Zhengpu Yigao* (Manuscript of Zheng Score by He Yuzhai) that “The pronunciations of these [characters] are in ancient Hakka dialect, which reflect the Hakka music characteristics. [By using variants], the ancient folk tunes can be preserved and handed down accurately and truthfully” (cited in He 2008, translated from the Chinese).

Both *ersi* and *gongche* are non-deterministic prescriptive notations, each with their own approaches to what is notated and what is not. These notations were not intended to indicate precise rhythms or even melodic contents. On the contrary, they were purposely created to specify a foundation that allowed for musical development and re-creation. As Chen Yingshi states:

Han music pays particular attention to how a singer or instrumentalist embellishes a melody. In *Qulü* “Rules for Songs,” Wang Jide (1542-1623) wrote that “the framework of music is its melody; its interest lies in the singing.” What he meant by “melody” was its core, whereas “singing” referred to embellishment, that is, the element of melodic recomposition in the singer’s performance. (2002:122)

The relationship between “melody” and “singing” mentioned in the above statement is indeed reflected in the relationship between what is notated and what is *not* in traditional zheng scores. By leaving rhythmic space, musicians could apply *jiahua* (adding flowers) or *jianzi* (reducing notes) to vary the framework; and by not dictating exact embellishments, musicians could manipulate a single note to create moving tones and *yun* with personal touches. What is revealed in the relationship between the notation and the musician’s re-creation is how such a tradition can reflect and enact both deeply communal and personal values.

He Yuzhai finished his two compilations of Hakka scores in the early 1930s, a period when solo zheng performance became more prominent both in the region and in other metropolitan cities (addressed further in Chapter Three). The Shandong *huazi gongche* scores handed down by Zhao Yuzhai, on the other hand, were copied in 1954, a year after he commenced teaching at the Shenyang Music Conservatory. The increase in melodic content evident in both these compilations, when compared with the earlier “bone tune” scores, reflects changes in the traditional zheng world. During this period the zheng transitioned from being a regional ensemble instrument to a solo concert instrument, with the primary function of self-cultivation changing to one of entertainment. As more melodic content and performance techniques were fixed in the scores, the role of the musician as composer became less prominent.

#### **2.4.2 Oral Teaching Tradition**

The oral tradition of the zheng subsumes teaching, composition, performance practice, and philosophy. Its traditional pedagogy encompasses three stages: 1) an initial imitation of instructors; 2) a departure from the instructor’s method to create an individual style and interpretation of compositions; and 3) developing spontaneity so that each performance is distinctive.

Traditionally, the knowledge of making music and the techniques of playing the zheng were transmitted orally. This process is known as *kouchang xinshou*, an idiom literally translated as “oral transmission of teaching from the heart,” with the implied meaning of “oral teaching inspires true understanding.” Chinese scholar Fan Zuyin addresses oral transmission in Chinese music as follows:

Traditional Chinese music, no matter [if] it was folk or literati music; religious or court music, always used “*kouchang xinshou*” as their main method for transmission. Although many of them had notated scores... they could not desert the method of “*kouchang xinshou*.” The traditional system of notating music interconnected and supported oral teaching... [Teachers] used their “mouth” and “heart” to teach what could not be notated... Through singing, playing and verbal communication, students reach the understanding of the essence of the music. (1996:21, translated from the Chinese)

A central component of traditional *kouchuan xinshou* teaching method is to vocalize the melody before learning to play it on the instrument. As the majority of the zheng repertoire was derived from regional vocal traditions, authentic singing of a style helps to grasp the core of the melody and the nuances within it.<sup>82</sup>

*Kouchuan xinshou* was an essential part of my own training. As a young student, the most memorable aspect of my study with Gao Zicheng was his singing during the lessons. Each time I commenced learning a new piece, he put the score (written in cipher notation) in front of the instrument, and started to sing the melody as I listened and read. His singing carried a strong flavour of *qinshu*, the narrative song form from Shandong, which, for a student like myself who had never been to the province nor heard *qinshu* before, was extremely valuable. After he sang, he asked me to imitate him to sing phrase by phrase until I grasped the melodic nuances. In doing so, when moving on to play the piece on the instrument, rather than simply reading the score, I already had the “correct” sound of the melody in my head for my hands to follow. At that time I was playing a sixteen metal-string zheng, which, by pressing the strings with the left hand, clearly reproduced melodic details and nuances and allowed me to mimic the melodies that my

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<sup>82</sup> Most traditional zheng musicians were either singers themselves or worked closely with vocal genres. For instance, Gao Zicheng began to learn singing *qinshu* at the age of eight. Cao Dongfu, the famous Henan zheng musician, was a *dadiao quzi* singer himself, and Yang Guangquan became script-writer and the director of a local *Chaoju* opera group in the 1940s.

teacher sang. If my left hand did not play a bent note properly, my teacher would stop me and sing that note again until I could both sing and play it correctly. My teacher seldom referred to the score when teaching me a traditional piece. He knew every note by heart and he wanted me to learn it by heart as well.

Zheng musician Li Wei (b. 1961) had a similar learning experience with his teacher Yang Guangquan (1915-1987) in Chaozhou. He recounts:

What I benefited most from my teacher was not some playing technique, but to know how to sing a piece, which very few [zheng players] can do nowadays. Learning a piece always meant to sing first then to play. My teacher said that *yun* was most important for the zheng. If you want to play [them] well, you need to sing well first. If you can sing well, you can play well. (2011, personal communication)

Li also stated that his teacher simultaneously integrated onomatopoeic mnemonic terms “*long*” (pronounced as “*luŋ*”), “*ding*,” and “*dong*” for right-hand fingerings of the middle finger, first finger and thumb respectively into the melody. So he learned to sing both the melody and the fingering at the same time.

Rather than teaching fixed content, the core of traditional teaching reflected in the notation was to relay the musical style while providing a set of performance and compositional techniques. Musician Cao Dongfu told his students to be creative in learning the zheng. He expresses his own experience as a musician as “to learn, to practice, to teach, to perform, and to ameliorate repeatedly” (cited in Feng 2004:241, translated from the Chinese). He often uses the famous quote from Qi Baishi, the renowned Chinese fine artist: “Those who learn from me survive, those who copy me do not” (Feng *ibid.*, translated from the Chinese).

As individual musicians had developed unique composition and performance techniques, it was common for musicians to learn from each other. Therefore, there was

no heredity nor a strict hierarchy of master-disciple relationship established in the tradition of the zheng, such that students were free to study with more than one teacher and from each other. As Cao Zheng recalls:

Before the 1930s, most zheng musicians went to visit and play with others as amateurs. In Zhejiang [province], this kind of activity was called *wan ke* [playing guests]. In Shandong and Henan [province], they were known as *wan you* [playing mates].<sup>83</sup> These activities were meant to exhibit the virtue of refinement; therefore, there was seldom a teacher/student relationship. (1993:1, translated from the Chinese)

Apart from *wan ke*, zheng musicians often performed in small ensembles, and this experience was also an important part of the development of a performer. The spontaneous heterophonic nature of small ensembles required each musician to adjust their own timbre, rhythmic divisions, and melodic interpretations in relation to the other player's interpretation to create a balanced musical entity. The extemporaneous nature of these ensembles that performed without a leader or even a discussion of the music challenged the performers to listen and respond instantly, developing a flexibility and spontaneity which benefited their solo performance.<sup>84</sup> Most zheng musicians were also capable of playing several other instruments, and often switched between instruments in

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<sup>83</sup> The term *wan* denotes "to play," as in "playing a game," which suggests the amateur spirit in these activities.

<sup>84</sup> The complex texture and the variety of techniques used in ensemble playing is best described in *Bapu Mingyuan* (Explanation of Eight Parts):

When [a phrase] should continue, it breaks; when it should break, it continues. Nonetheless, continuous does exclude the finite, and vice versa. When [one should] play a long tremolo, play a single note; when [one should] play a single note, play a long tremolo. Playing a long note should not exclude a short note, and vice versa. Thus, long and short, or continuous and finite are blended. Notes are varied, but the beat [*ban*] is the same. Pitches are varied, but the mode is unified. Eight parts are eight different versions, eight different names and eight different orders. Some are sparse, some are dense; some are light, some are heavy; some are ingenious, some are classic; some are muddy, some are clear. The five notes tumble about and not a single phrase is the same. It is true ecstasy to create Eight Parts according to eight beats. (Yi 1762, cited in Yuan 1987:163, translated from the Chinese)



ensemble settings, providing opportunities to play both leading and supporting roles.<sup>85</sup>

Oral transmission and associated practices engaged the musician's ears, voice, and mind in addition to their eyes. Scores were simply frameworks for teachers to build upon and musicians to create within and around. To approach an instrument meant to engage the voice, to experience the language, to participate in the culture, and to create one's own part in contrast and in unison with others.

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<sup>85</sup> In a *peng baban* ensemble the zheng plays the main role. However, the ensemble is led by the *yangqin*. According to Zhao Yuzhai, the *yangqin* player had to be a very experienced player who could make changes spontaneously and move the ensemble whichever way he wanted (1983:35).

## 2.5 Cross-fertilization of Aesthetic Principles

The practice of traditional zheng embodied many fundamental cultural values and aesthetic principles that were shared by society and the world of Chinese music in general. These values, attributed to Confucianism and Daoism (Taoism)—two distinctive but interconnected philosophical ideologies established in ancient China—delineated the ideal sound and meaning of music, as well the proper mindset in its performance. As mentioned in the Literature Review, because the zheng was primarily transmitted orally, very few historical accounts documented performance or discussed theories of the music. This was especially true in comparison with the amount of written literature on the *qin*, the seven-string zither favoured by Chinese literati and elite classes, as the zheng and *qin* generally served different social classes.<sup>86</sup>

Literature on aesthetics of the traditional zheng was initially created in the first half of the twentieth century, compiled by zheng musicians who practiced the instrument for self-cultivation. Thus zheng aesthetics borrowed heavily from *qin* literature and philosophy in combination with zheng tradition. Although there is only a modest amount of literature on the zheng, it became the foundation of the philosophy and aesthetics for the instrument. Unfortunately, as zheng was considered a “folk” music genre, analytical studies of zheng aesthetics, especially within the context of Confucian and Daoist

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<sup>86</sup> Zheng music was regarded as unsophisticated with few aesthetic values by *qin* players, and the separation between the elite position of the *qin* and the lower class of the zheng was embodied in the culture, where *qin* players were still socially or economically an elite class. In *Xishan Qinkuang* (Aesthetics of the Qin at the Xishan Mountain), one of the most important *qin* treatises, it states explicitly: “If the sound of the *qin* is not morally lofty, the player had better to switch to play the zheng” (Xu 1673, translated from the Chinese). This quite clearly demonstrates the general attitude towards zheng music and reflects the hierarchy in Chinese music tradition.

influences, are still lacking. Consequently, the philosophy and aesthetic values behind traditional zheng composition and performance are still largely unrecognized by Chinese scholarship and almost unknown to the younger generations of zheng performers.

### 2.5.1 Social Harmony and Self-cultivation

Traditional zheng musicians believe that the music they inherited is refined music (*yayue*), which embraces the essence of Confucian ideology. Stressing equilibrium (*zhong*) and harmony (*he*), Confucian principles have been the foundation and guidance for personal cultivation, as well as for Chinese rulers to create a well-ordered society throughout its history. As stated in *Yue Ji* (Book of Music), a harmonious society can only be achieved through correct and benevolent governing as well as individuals obtaining virtue. Music “connects with [ethical] human relationships and principles. ... Music harmonizes the people’s voices. Administration is used to carry them out” (Gongsun c. first century BCE, translated from the Chinese). This Confucian concept of a well-ordered society remains a core underpinning of Chinese values in the present day.

In traditional societies where the zheng was performed, playing music was often viewed as a social activity. In regions of the Shandong style, for example, each village had several bands. During summer nights or fallow time, the musicians accompanied *qinshu* performances to entertain the villagers. After the shows were finished and the audience had left, they would start playing *peng baban* (Cheng 1993:266), which the local musicians call *yayue* (refined music). The small ensemble genre in Fujian where the zheng is utilized as a lead instrument is simply called *heyue*, a term that in Chinese uses two interchangeable characters, both pronounced *he* (合: unified and 和: harmonious).

Hakka musicians believe that playing *qingyue* (pure music), a small ensemble music rooted in the old Han culture, is an important way to bring harmony to society. Alan Thrasher affirms this idea in his research and studies of small ensemble music in the south:

That social harmony (*xiehe*) would be identified is significant. The Chinese term *xiehe* ('harmonious') suggests a sense of concordance or social agreement—a major Confucian goal. Could there actually be a musical manifestation of 'social harmony'? Musicians say as much. In the southern cultures, the instrumental traditions are primarily ensemble traditions, rarely performed by fewer than three musicians, normally with between five and eight...ensemble texture requires interaction among musicians, not unlike a conversation at a social gathering. While musicians may not know the old Confucian sayings 'music unites' (*yuetong*) and 'music harmonizes the people's voices' (*yuehe minsheng*), they understand the deeper sense of these concepts because 'harmonious' interaction is an admitted cultural value of ongoing importance. (2008:163-64)

Self-cultivation, also based on Confucian ideas, was the other essential reason for one to play the zheng. In the past, zheng musicians came from a variety of familial and socio-economic backgrounds and learned the zheng for different reasons, in contrast to *qin* practice where practitioners were almost exclusively scholars and from the elite classes. Many, especially those from the north—such as Cao Dongfu from Henan, and Zhao Yuzhai and Gao Zicheng from Shandong—came from musical or other low class families and initially learned to play instruments as a skill to make a living. Others, however, came from wealthy families and were well educated; their main reason for practicing music was for self-cultivation. For example, Liang Tsai-ping from Hebei in the north received his higher education both in Beijing and, later, at Yale University in the United States. Mr. Liang played both the zheng and *qin*. Hakka musician He Yuzhai was

similarly born into a rich family, growing up practicing the “four art forms” of scholars.<sup>87</sup> Luo Jiuxiang, He’s student, went to university in Shanghai before taking zheng lessons (Wu 2009:32-42). These zheng musicians took up the zheng for self-cultivation, with the same purpose that ancient scholars undertook the *qin*, and they approached the instrument as if it was the *qin*. As Luo Jiuxiang States:

*Qingyue jia* (virtuous musicians) are literary and refined scholars who express their sentiments by serenading the moon and chanting to the breeze. The way their music is played is patterned after the ancient *qin* music, which esteems nobility. That is why the music is also known as *qingdiao* (tunes of virtue). (cited in Ju 1995:193-4, translated from the Chinese)<sup>88</sup>

This statement suggests that musicians like Luo Jiuxiang not only had a deep understanding of the zheng tradition (*qingyue* of Hakka is believed to have come from the ancient Han tradition which carries a Confucian essence), but also consciously approached traditional zheng music with the *qin* spirit of nobility, blending the two traditions naturally.

## 2.5.2 Performance Aesthetics

Daoist principles are the basis for the aesthetics of a variety of traditional Chinese art forms. Whereas Confucianism governs the relationship between man and society, Daoism reveals the connection between man and nature. Daoism forms the foundation of *qin* philosophy. As a number of traditional zheng musicians either practiced the *qin* as well or were familiar with *qin* philosophy through their education, it is safe to assume

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<sup>87</sup> The four art forms are *qin* (music), *qi* (go chess), *shu* (calligraphy), and *hua* (painting), which were utilized as the standard to define the achievement of self-cultivation as a well-educated man.

<sup>88</sup> This statement of Luo Jiuxiang was part of an article by the same author published in *Yueju Yuekan* (Journal of Musical Theater and Music) in the 1930s. Partial writings of the article were later hand copied by Luo’s student Shi Zhaoyuan (Ju 1995:209).

that, in many cases, the zheng and the *qin* share a similar aesthetic foundation. The realization of these aesthetics may differ in terminology and application of fingering techniques, yet the goal for the musicians remains the same: to create an ideal sound, to use technique correctly, to create appropriate relationships between players and the music, and to place emphasis on the programmatic content of the music.

As was discussed previously, when performing the zheng the right hand plucks strings to generate *sheng* (sound), while the left hand manipulates the sound to create *yun*—the ideal artistic expression. Using *yun* to enrich *sheng* (*yi yun busheng*) was widely applied in traditional zheng performance practice. Additionally, the proper balance between *sheng* and *yun* should be less generated sound and more cultivated *yun* (*shengshao yunduo*). As Gao Zherui, an older generation zheng musician, prescribes: “Thirty percent of plucking and seventy percent of bending” (1994:14, translated from the Chinese).

The concept of less generated sound and more *yun* is clearly a desire for a sophisticated expression rather than simply plucking notes, emphasizing the cultivation of a minimum of sounds into an expansive artful expression on the zheng. This notion directly corresponds to the Daoist philosophy of “great music has less sound” (*dayin xisheng*), an aphorism by the Daoist philosopher Laozi (Lao-Tzu) in his renowned *Daode Jing* (*Tao Te Ching*). It is uncertain whether this concept was an outcome of *qin* influence on traditional zheng; it is certain, however, that it has had a profound impact on *qin* music.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> In his study of *qin* philosophies, DeWoskin states that: “Zither without strings and soundless music are most highly venerated. As the mind advances, aural skill improves. The mind is more responsive to subtle stimuli, which, like those that dislodge that ash from the cosmic *ch’i* tubes, may be inaudible” (1982:160).

Hakka musician Luo Jiuxiang summarized and selected the most essential contents of the twenty-four aesthetic principles for the *qin* from *Xishan Qinkuang* (Aesthetics of the Qin at Xishan Mountain, Xu 1673). These aesthetic principles encompass both practical and spiritual components. The first and foremost principle, according to Luo, is “to unify the strings (*xian*) with the fingers (*zhi*); then to unify the fingers with the music (*yin*); and next to unify the music with intention/artistic conception (*yi*)” (cited in Lan 1984:21, translated from the Chinese).

“To unify the strings with the fingers” suggests developing a deep sense of sensitivity and connection to the instrument when performing. Subtlety is established through appropriate touch and dynamic change. Henan zheng musician Cao Dongfu was well-known for his impeccable control of the technique “*youyao*”—a rapid tremolo produced by moving the first joint of the right thumb only while simultaneously moving along the length of the string. “He invented ‘*youyao*’ ...and seamlessly combined this fingering with the left-hand bending, altering tone colours from dark to bright, and gradually changing dynamic from soft to loud” (Feng 2004:239, translated from the Chinese). Both examples demonstrate unification of the fingers and strings.

“To unify fingers with music” requires musicians to develop a deeper level of understanding of the purpose, needs, and effects of the music, so that the performer’s intent is realized. The performers must be equally active as listeners to further deepen their sensitivity to all aspects of the music from the moment their fingers touch the strings until the sound touches the listener’s ears. This leads the performer to play with purpose, to take command of the music, and to shape it carefully. Luo advised his students that “Vibrato (*yin*), portamento (*hua*), pressing (*an*) and open string (*kong*) should all be clear

and precise” (Shi 1985:6, translated from the Chinese). His performance philosophy was as follows: “[Play] slowly but not idly; [play] fast with stability; [play] simply but remain refined, and stress the intention” (cited in Shi 1985:6, translated from the Chinese).<sup>90</sup>

The twenty-four aesthetic principles of playing the *qin* discusses different attacks executed by various fingerings, such as smoothness (*yuan*), solidness (*jian*), lightness (*qing*), heaviness (*zhong*), and fluidity (*liu*). Moreover, a variety of ideal sounds proposed—such as quietness (*jing*), clearness (*qing*), brightness (*liang*), and brilliance (*cai*)—are what the musician seeks in applying “To unify fingers with music.” Although these principles are commonly found in many music traditions, Chinese approach them with a particular philosophical bent such that each principle is applied not just to the sound of the music, but also to the musician’s demeanour, the effect upon the listener, and the influence on the environment in which the music is played.

“To unify music with intention/artistic conception (*yi*) ” poses the ultimate philosophical challenge to musicians. *Yi* suggests subtly different levels of meaning ranging from a musician’s intention to his or her artistic conception. *Yijing* is the setting where *yi* is realized, and is often applied to an idealized place or philosophical state suggested by a poetic title and the programmatic contents of the piece that supports the setting. *Yijing* is one of the most important and unique aesthetics of Chinese culture, as Edward Ho elucidates: “[it is the] ideational/contemplative realm: the state of sublimation of an artistic image” (1997:43). He continues: “The quintessence of Chinese classical music is the feeling, the mental image, the inner vision, or the artistic conception that is

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<sup>90</sup> Cao Dongfu prefers “Busy but not chaotic, whereas slow but not broken” (Feng 2004:239, translated from the Chinese).



communicated. It is heavily charged with poeticism, and it is this artistic conception that music performers strive for” (1997:43).

In the application of *yijing*, the majority of zheng compositions contain such idealized poetic titles and programmatic contents, which are similar to those found in *qin* music. However, unlike the *qin*, whose programmatic contents are contained in literary sources often attached as prefaces to the scores, the programmatic content reflected in the titles of traditional zheng music are only passed through oral transmission. Some traditional zheng compositions apply *yijing* through storylines that provide images of characters as well as emotional incentives for musicians, while more often compositions only have poetic titles that offer a mood or setting, such as *Hanya Xishui* (Lonely Crows Playing in the Winter Stream) from Chaozhou or *Qingting Dianshui* (A Dragonfly Touching Lightly on the Water) from Fujian. Some pieces have borrowed their titles directly from the *qin* repertoire. *Gaoshan Liushui* (High Mountain Flowing Water) of Shandong, for instance, borrows its title from a famous *qin* piece, whose programmatic content tells the story of Bo Ya (a *qin* player) meeting with Zi Qi (a devout listener), a legend known since the third century BCE.<sup>91</sup> This piece is a suite of four individual *baban* compositions, each having a separate title.<sup>92</sup> The addition of a well-known *qin* title to traditional zheng pieces suggests a desire for an association with *qin* aesthetics.

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<sup>91</sup> Bo Ya (also known as Yu Boya) was a *qin* player, and Zi Qi (also known as Zhong Ziqi) was a great listener. When Bo Ya played the *qin* while contemplating big mountains, Zi Qi reacted by saying: “How excellent! Impressive like the *Taishan* Mountain.” Then Bo Ya thought of flowing water as he was playing, and Zi Qi responded: “How excellent! Broad and flowing like rivers.” When Zi Qi passed away, Bo Ya broke his *qin* and never played again, as he believed that nobody would be able to understand his music and therefore it was not worth playing any more (see Zhongguo 1981: 41).

<sup>92</sup> Shandong *Gaoshan Liushui* is comprised of *Qinyun* (The Charm of the Qin), *Fengbai Cuizhu* (Bamboo Swaying in the Breeze), *Yeijing Luanling* (Tinkling Bells in the Still of the Night), and *Shuyun* (Reading Aloud).

The idealized artistic realm of *yijing* helps to define the relationship between musicians and the music. An inspiring title could stimulate a musician's imagination in creating music, as the stories and images alluded to often carried cultural information that informed the interpretation and understanding of a piece, which then guided the musician's artistic expression and performance. For example, *Chushui Lian* (Lotus Emerging from Water), a famous Hakka composition, depicts a scene of a lotus bud emerging from the water. In Chinese culture the lotus is a symbol of purity and transformation. Emerging from mud, the lotus is believed to be pure in body and soul. The body of the lotus flower is light and exquisite, but its spirit is strong and noble. This sentiment is translated into zheng technique as a light touch with a profound feeling, while the whole performance reflects nobility, purity, strength, and beauty.

### **2.5.3 Spontaneity and Amateur Spirit**

The programmatic content, on the other hand, could also inspire spontaneity in performance. An individual musician could create many different versions and interpretations of one given composition based on his mood and thoughts at the moment of performance. Shi Zhaoyuan reflected: "Musicians often recreated based on their own understanding of the music...therefore, the new pieces were different from person to person. They reflected the musician's mastery of technique and music, as well as their artistic achievement" (1985:6, translated from the Chinese).

It should be pointed out that for the older generation of traditional musicians the philosophical idea of spontaneity is deeply ingrained in their performance techniques and personal being, and thus would easily manifest. When Shi Zhaoyuan commented on his

teacher Luo Jiuxiang's performance, he noted: "Mr. Luo's performances were often improvisational. Using his effortless techniques, he was able to blend his own feeling completely with the music. It looked so easy, but sounded profound. His superb techniques for variation were so unpredictable that the same piece was often played differently each time" (1985:6, translated from the Chinese).

Luo Huiwen, granddaughter of Luo Jiuxiang, also recalled: "My grandfather's playing depended on his mood. When he was in a good mood, the music sounded nice with more 'flowers.' When he was not in a good mood, he played simply and it sounded sad" (in Wu 2009:51, translated from the Chinese). Li Wei also recorded how Zhao Yuzhai once gave an exciting performance of a Shandong piece at a conference. The next day, however, he played the same piece again but with much less embellishment. When Li asked him why the performance was so different, Zhao smiled and simply answered: "I feel sleepy today" (2011, personal communication).

Traditional musicians believe that when performing music, a performer's motivation ought to be pure so that they can transform themselves through the music. Cao Dongfu stated, "Musicians should express zheng, not the zheng express musicians" (Feng 2004:241, translated from the Chinese). For the literati and educated men music is "a means for guiding and nurturing the spirit, and for elevating and harmonizing the emotions" (Ji Kang 223-63 in Gulik 1969:70). This spirit of practicing art for self-cultivation is known as the *amateur ideal*. As Thrasher explains:

... 'amateur ideal' does not imply lack of training or low quality in performance, for the Chinese literati were often highly skilled in the arts. To the literatus-amateur, the reasons for writing poetry, painting landscape, writing calligraphy or performing music were simultaneously those of self-entertainment and expression of cultural values... Professionalism (i.e. the acceptance of money for performance) was seen

as a motivation associated with merchants, entertainers and the ethically untutored. (2008:164)

Confucian and Daoist philosophies are deeply integrated in traditional zheng performance and outlook. Confucian principles were at the core of self-cultivation and community practice in traditional zheng music, whereas Daoist ideas guided composition and performance aesthetics and fostered artistic individualism. The duality of the two philosophies reflects the Chinese concept of *yin* and *yang*, conflicting and contradictory while each contains the other.

Even though very few traditional zheng musicians engaged in a philosophical discourse about their music, their rhetoric on the interrelationship between the fingers and strings, as well as between music and intentions, exemplifies a deep understanding of these philosophies, and they are conveyed through the rich *yun* created in their music.

### **3 MODERNIZATION, WESTERNIZATION, AND PROFESSIONALIZATION**

Nothing that is Chinese can be improved upon. It will require complete destruction, for there can be no great innovation without complete destruction. The absurd preference for antiquated things must be destroyed and current vices swept away. Be creative as long as it benefits the country; if you cannot create, then borrow. (Zeng 1904, cited in Zhang 1998:209, translated from the Chinese)

The contemporary metamorphosis of the zheng is an outcome of complex social, political, economic, and cultural developments in China. Beginning in the early twentieth century, the zheng migrated from rural Chinese roots to urban centres. This transformation was further accelerated in the second half of the century as it developed into a concert instrument performed by professionals, which caused its musical identity to shift from traditionally “vocalistic” to an instrumental form incorporating pianistic and other influences.

In this chapter I discuss the modernization of the zheng from the beginning of the twentieth century to the demise of the Cultural Revolution in China at the end of the 1970s. This includes: 1) the zheng’s initial transformation from rural to urban communities; 2) the institutionalization of the zheng in the 1950s, encompassing the formation of instructional pedagogy, the standardization of teaching materials and performance techniques, and the fostering of the first generation of professional zheng performers; 3) morphological standardization between the 1960s and the 1970s; 4) the advent of compositions conveying political messages while emphasizing Westernized performance techniques, and 5) the change of performance context. In discussing these

topics I will analyze how the performance techniques, compositions, aesthetics, functions, and transmission of the traditional practice of the zheng were affected through this period.

### **3.1 Modernization of Chinese Music from the Late Nineteenth to the Early Twentieth Centuries**

China's modernization began with its comprehensive exposure to the West in the late nineteenth century. The introduction of Western culture and the implementation of Western educational models in the Chinese system directly affected the evolution of Chinese music including the zheng. In this section I will begin with a brief overview of the Western influences on Chinese music education at the beginning of Chinese contemporary history in order to contextualize the modernization of zheng music and its performance practice.

#### **3.1.1 Adopting Western Models**

It is commonly held by Chinese historians that contemporary Chinese history begins in 1840, marked by the eruption of the Opium War between China and Great Britain. By the dawn of the twentieth century China had been occupied by Western powers for more than fifty years.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> The first Opium War between China and Great Britain began in 1839. With the rise of Western interest in the Chinese economy, continuous wars between China and Western European countries lasted from the 1840s to the 1870s. Confronting a superior military power, China was quickly defeated and forced to open to the West. Treaties signed between the defeated Qing court and the Western powers permitted a number of Western countries to own concessions and develop industries in the main cities along China's Pacific coast. Although the Qing court remained the official government, foreign powers took control of China's major trade and industry, turning the country into a semi-imperial and semi-colonial state.

Contemporary Chinese history was not initiated by the Chinese people, instead it was forced open by the gunfire of the Western imperialist invaders. This reality decidedly proves that from the very beginning Chinese modernization was in a passive state ... The direct challenge from the West was military and economic, however, from macro-historical viewpoint, it was the confrontation between Western and traditional Chinese cultures. (Bao 1987, cited in Liu 1992:21, translated from the Chinese)

As the Chinese people struggled to resist European aggression, they became increasingly enraged and humiliated by their own weakness and the realization that China was no longer the “centre of the world.”<sup>94</sup> Many patriotic intellectuals blamed their “backward” (*luohou*) traditional culture for the country’s weakness, suggesting that in order to regain strength and prosperity China needed to abandon the traditional Chinese educational system, study Western knowledge (*xixue*)—meaning science and technology—and reform the political system according to Western constitutional models.<sup>95</sup>

To counteract what was perceived as one of the most significant threats to Chinese society and culture, a government initiative of “Chinese learning as substance, Western learning for application”<sup>96</sup> (*zhongxue weiti, xixue weiyong*) was put forward in 1898. By advocating the synthesis of Confucianism with Western modern technology as the solution to the dichotomy of China verses the West, the government attempted to avoid a profound change in China. However, the trend of Westernization became

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<sup>94</sup> The literal translation of “China” (*Zhongguo*) is “the central kingdom.”

<sup>95</sup> Kang Youwei (1858-1927) initiated the *Gongche Shangshu* (Candidates Petition) in 1895, urging reforms in government administration. In 1898 another controversial book *Kongzi Gaizhi Kao* (Confucius as a Reformer) was published, which attempted to legitimize reforms within the framework of Confucian ideology. Yan Fu (1852-1921) used Darwin’s evolutionary theory to argue that if China was not going to change, it would be eliminated by the world.

<sup>96</sup> This initiative was proposed by Zhang Zhitong (1837-1909), a Confucian scholar and liberal official.

unstoppable, and at the turn of the twentieth century the idea of discarding traditional ideologies and replacing them with Western models was widespread.

In the early years of the twentieth century China witnessed a series of revolts against the old society and everything associated with it. In 1905 the imperial civil service examination system (*keju*), in practice since 605 CE, was abolished. In 1911 the Qing court (1644-1911) was overthrown and the Republic of China was established (1911-1949), ending China's imperial era that had lasted for more than two thousand years; and in 1919 the "May Fourth Campaign" erupted<sup>97</sup> when anti-traditional and pro-Western sentiments reached a peak in the nation. As students and scholars wholeheartedly embraced Western "science" and "democracy," Confucianism and Confucian classics became the major target for ridicule.

Westernization was inclusive of cultural elements, such as European music, which rapidly spread in China.<sup>98</sup> In 1895 the first European military band was established in Beijing, and in Shanghai the first Western string orchestra was formed in 1908, while the first Chinese music conservatory, the National Conservatory, was founded in 1927. The conservatory's curriculum followed a Western model, stressing Western instrumentation and composition. In 1933 the first concert hall was built in the capital city Nanjing (Liu 1988:15-23):

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<sup>97</sup> On May fourth, 1919, students of Beijing University led a demonstration against Beijing's role at the Paris Peace Conference after the end of World War I and the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles, which allowed Japan to gain control of the erstwhile German-leased territory of Chinese Shandong province. The protest soon spread from Beijing to other Chinese cities and developed into a national campaign denouncing traditional culture.

<sup>98</sup> The introduction of European music to China can be traced to as early as the thirteenth century when Catholic and Christian missionaries brought church music to China. Early records of introducing Western music and musical instruments to China include: 1) Italian missionary Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) presented a clavichord to emperor *Shenzong* of the Ming dynasty in 1601; 2) Portuguese musician Thomas Pereira (1645-1708) contributed writings about Western music to *Lülü Zhengyi* (Basic Principles of the System of Pitches, 1713); and 3) a performance of Nicolò Piccini's *La Cecchina* was presented at the imperial Qing court (Liu 1992:63). However, it was not until late nineteenth century when Western music became increasingly popular in urban China.



Perhaps because they [Chinese] were impressed by Western economical and military achievements, they assumed that Western music, like Western technology, was probably based on ‘advanced’ and ‘scientifically objective’ principles. Chinese scholars in this period often discussed Western music in terms of its “scientificness.” Believing that music followed an evolutionary path and could be ‘improved’ over time, they began to propagate the emulation of Western musical techniques. (Gild 1998:116)

Recommended by European-educated intellectuals, Western music was integrated into the Chinese public educational system at the beginning of the twentieth century. As a result, public schools nationwide instigated a mandatory course for “school songs” (*xuetang yuege*) comprised of Western and Japanese songs refitted with new lyrics.<sup>99</sup>

### 3.1.2 National Music (*guoyue*) and Instrumental Reform

In contrast with the rapid acceptance and spread of Western music, traditional Chinese music was under close scrutiny. There was a general pessimistic consensus among Chinese music educators that traditional Chinese music, past and present, was underdeveloped in comparison with Western music. They believed that music represented a nation’s spirit. If China desired to be strong and independent, it must have new music that could represent the new nation. In such an environment, change was inevitable; how to change the music, however, became a topic of debate. As the nation moved towards modernization, a central concern became what kind of music would be

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<sup>99</sup> “School songs” were designed to invoke a national and patriotic spirit; therefore, traditional Chinese tunes or instruments were not selected. Famous “school songs” include the American tune *Dreaming of Home and Mother* (John Pond Ordway), the French melody *Frère Jacques*, and the German children’s song *Alle Vögel sind schon da*.

suitable to be proclaimed as true *guoyue* (national music).<sup>100</sup> One solution was to replace Chinese music with Western music. As Chinese music was “for the elite and not for the masses,” “not progressive but vile,” Chinese instruments were “crude and hard to learn” and musical notation was “unclear” (Fei 1903, cited in Zhang 1998:189-91, translated from the Chinese);<sup>101</sup> it should be “eradicated” (Chen 1933, cited in Liu and Wu 1994:6) and replaced by Western music. “We have to choose between Chinese and Western music. We cannot have both” (Qing 1934, cited in Liu and Wu 1994:7, translated from the Chinese).<sup>102</sup>

In the same context, musicologist Wang Guangqi (1891-36) presented an opposite solution: to create a new type of music fashioned after Chinese tradition. Wang’s strategy

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<sup>100</sup> The term *guoyue* denotes different genres at different times. The earliest use of *guoyue* was found in the *Suishu* (Dynastic Book of Sui, 589-618), referring to Han court ritual music. After the Tang dynasty the word was used to differentiate between Han and non-Han music. Since the early twentieth century it has changed from the initial use of distinguishing Chinese from Western music, to now being mainly used in Taiwan and Hong Kong to delineate genres performed by traditional Chinese instruments. The equivalent term in Mainland China is *minyue*.

<sup>101</sup> Fei Shi (1884-1959) was one of the music educators who firmly believed that Chinese music should be replaced by Western music. His view is systematically presented in his 1903 article “Zhongguo Yinyue Gailiang Shuo” (Discourse on Chinese Music Reform). Although he uses “reform” in the title, his entire argument demonstrates a view of “revolution” instead. His discourse on four main issues against traditional music is backed with detailed discussions. He argued that music played by the *qin* or *se* (25-string zither) was too quiet and too elite, therefore not suitable for the masses; and the sound of Kunqu and *beiqu* opera was profligate, representing a dying nation. Fei also made many comparisons between Chinese and Western musical cultures. He argued that Chinese instruments, made of bamboo and silk, were too simple and unintuitive compared to those of the West, and that the Chinese notation system was undeveloped compared to Western staff notation as it was unable to clearly convey information and preserve tunes. This article made a great impact on the further Westernization of Chinese music in the early twentieth century. As Chinese scholar Feng Changchun describes: “Fei Shi’s article was like a huge rock being thrown into a calm lake. It is also like a broken dam. After 1904, more and more modern intellectuals and composers started criticizing the old music and advocating bringing and applying Western music in China. Studying Western music, then, became a social trend” (Feng 2007:62, translated from the Chinese).

<sup>102</sup> Chen Hong (1907-2002) and Qing Zhu (1893-1959) were two prominent composers and music educators trained in Europe. Chen states: “Our [Chinese] music died a long time ago. The so-called musicians now are lower class amateur bands, prostitutes, the blind, and the homeless. Their music is either extravagant or degenerate. If music represents culture, our nation of *li* (rite) and *yue* (music) has become bestial. This kind of traditional music should definitely be eradicated” (1933, cited in Liu and Wu 1994:6). Qing stresses, “In my opinion, there is only one type of music that can be considered as art, that is Western music... In the opinion of some patriotic citizens, Western music coming to China is a form of ‘art invasion.’ If this is true, then let it happen. We have to choose between Chinese and Western music. We cannot have both” (Qing 1934, cited in Liu and Wu 1994:6-7, translated from the Chinese).

was to first systemize the ancient music, collect folk tunes through which to discover Chinese music's essence, and then to use it as the foundation for *guoyue* (1924, in Wang 1993:42, translated from the Chinese).

A third strategy was to “improve” Chinese music by borrowing Western models. This was predominantly voiced by Xiao Youmei (1884-1940), one of the most distinguished Chinese musicologists of the twentieth century. In many of Xiao's fifty-six published writings he proposed implementing a series of changes to Chinese music, affecting composition (Western harmony and scales), instrument reform (Western technology to improve the acoustics of the traditional instruments), and notation (standardization, use of staff notation):

Chinese people are very musical. If Chinese musical instruments are improved on the basis of Western technology, Chinese music will have the possibility of continuous development. I hope that one day in the future, China imports standardized notation and harmony. [If that happens], it would be a new era for Chinese music whose melody is so rich; it will generate a new life for ancient music while keeping its Chinese sentiment. This type of music is already a boon for Chinese people, and it will forever be a treasure. (1916, cited in Liu and Wu 1994:208, translated from the Chinese)

With the mandate of “adapting Western performance techniques to Chinese instruments, and implementing reforms of the traditional instruments” (Liu and Wu 1988:79) Xiao formed the National Music Reform Society (*Guoyue Gaijin She*) in Beijing in 1927.

Given the larger social and cultural environment of the country, Xiao's vision of “improving” Chinese music was especially apt and subsequently became the doctrine for Chinese music reform. Under this vision a new style of national music (*guoyue*)—compositions that borrow classical Western compositional forms and harmonize Chinese pentatonic melodies—was created. The ideology of Chinese music reform and that of

traditional instruments also paved the way for further modernization and standardization in the second half of the century. The result of the implementation of common Western music practice in Chinese music led to a gradual abandonment of many idiosyncratic performance characteristics that defined traditional Chinese music. As Chinese musicologist Han Kuo-huang observed: “In many cases, modernization was synonymous with Westernization. Musicians trained in Western style began to think and hear music in terms of Western intonation, harmony, tone color, range, and above all, standardization of musical instruments” (1979:13).

Concurrently, *guoyue* reforms played an important role in the survival of traditional instruments and music: patriotic artists who were enthusiastic about “upgrading” Chinese music composed new solo works for traditional instruments; numerous music clubs and societies were formed in major cities, many of which presented performances of traditional instruments; and a number of music schools offered courses in traditional Chinese instruments.<sup>103</sup>

### **3.1.3 Initial Urbanization of the Zheng**

China’s extensive social and economic changes in the early twentieth century brought about the initial urbanization of the zheng. In search of further education, a number of zheng players left their hometowns in rural China to move to urban areas where they had new opportunities to perform and teach their music. As discussed in Chapter One, the main purpose of performing the zheng for many traditional zheng musicians was for self-entertainment and self-cultivation, and the main music activity

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<sup>103</sup> Both the Beijing University’s Conservatory of Music and the National Music Conservatory in Shanghai included several traditional Chinese instruments in their courses. However, only a couple of students enrolled in these courses.

was playing with other instruments in ensembles. While this still held true, urban life provided many new opportunities to perform public and private concerts. These new performance contexts triggered a subtle transformation of zheng practice that had broad implications for the zheng's social function, repertoire, transmission, and dissemination.

Lin Yongzhi (1892-1928) from Chaozhou, Guangdong province was one of the first two documented zheng players to introduce zheng music to Beijing. In 1924, when Lin was studying law at Beijing University, he joined performances organized by the Music Research Society of Beijing University (Cao in Yan 1993:275, translated from the Chinese). Another early urban pioneer was Wei Ziyou (1875-1936) from Suiping County of Henan province in the North, a former scholar-official of the Qing dynasty. Wei performed and taught Henan zheng music at the Beijing *Daode Xueshe* (Virtue Music Society) around 1925. He also assembled *Zhongzhou Gudiao* (Ancient Tunes from Central China), a score collection of the Henan repertoire (Ding 1993:273). Among Mr. Wei's many disciples, Liang Tsai-Ping (1910-2000) and Lou Shuhua (1907-1952) subsequently made significant contributions to the zheng's composition and propagation.

Liang Tsai-ping was born and raised in Gaoyang County, Hebei province in northern China. At the age of fourteen he moved to Beijing, and later he enrolled at Beijing *Jiaotong* University to study applied science. There he studied zheng with Wei Ziyou and Shi Yinmei, a former student of Lin Yongzhi. Mr. Liang wrote *Ni Cheng Pu* (A Sketch of the Zheng), an instruction book that included a short essay on the zheng's history, in 1938. In addition to notating and creating new arrangements of traditional pieces, Liang composed numerous new pieces for solo zheng. His composition *Beijing Scenes* contains four sections titled after famous city attractions. Although Liang Tsai-

ping's work is virtually unknown in Mainland China, he is well known for popularizing the zheng overseas.<sup>104</sup>

Lou Shuhua, another student of Wei Ziyou, is credited with composing *Yuzhou Changwan* (Fisherman Singing in the Twilight) in 1938, the first recognized contemporary composition for solo zheng.<sup>105</sup> Unlike most traditional zheng pieces constructed on a single compositional frame (e.g., *baban*), *Fisherman Singing in the Twilight* contains two main sections with distinctive melodic motifs marked by contrasting dynamic and tempo changes, separated by a short transitional segment. According to its program notes the music portrays a fishing boat on a calm sea at sundown, and depicts the fisherman's serene contented mood. While it is unclear whether the description for the composition was written by the original composer, this transparent programmatic approach has become common in contemporary zheng composition.

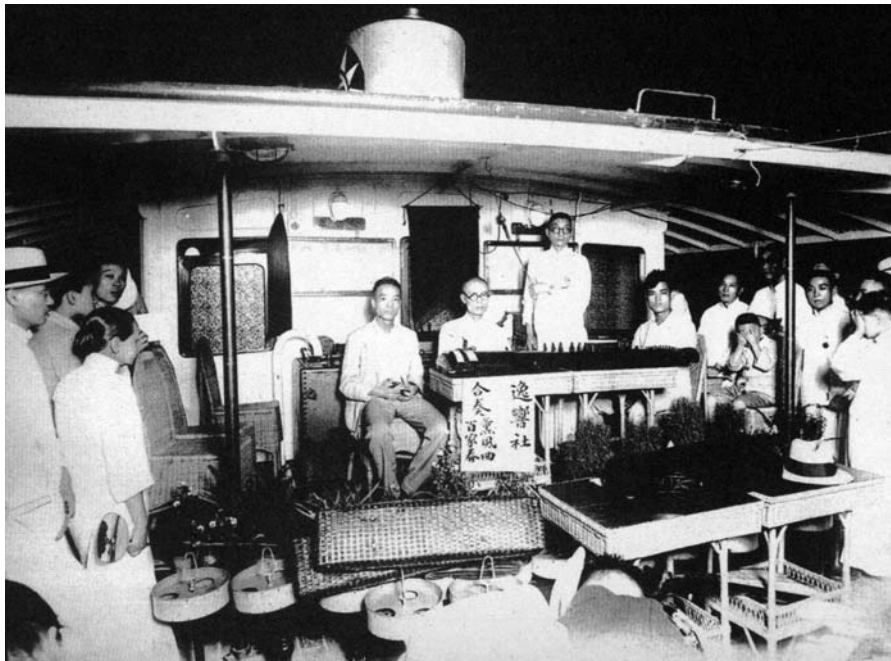
Hakka zheng representative He Yuzhai founded the *Chaomei* Music Society in Guangzhou in 1930. He then moved to Shanghai in 1932, where he founded the *Yixiang She* (Tranquil Sound Society, 1932-35) through which he actively performed and promoted Hakka music, "leading the way to establishing the zheng as a solo performance instrument" (Wu 2009:36-38, translated from the Chinese) (see Figure 3.1). During this period He also compiled the *Zhongzhou Gudiao* (Ancient Tunes of the Central Plain) and

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<sup>104</sup> In 1945 Liang Tsai-ping attended Yale University, where he presented music of the zheng. After residing in Taiwan in 1949, he co-founded the Chinese Classical Music Association in Taipei in 1953. For the rest of his life Liang dedicated himself to introducing zheng music internationally, making over thirty recordings. Liang also played the *qin*, through which he met Robert van Gulik, the renowned Dutch sinologist. He taught the zheng and *qin* to American composer Lou Harrison and Dr. Fredric Lieberman. Liang's biography is included in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (1984).

<sup>105</sup> There are several versions of *Fisherman Singing in the Twilight*, resulting in a debate about the origins of the piece. According to Wang Yingrui, the traditional Shandong piece *Shuangban* (Double Ban) and sections of other local tunes were combined by Jin Zhuonan to form his 1912 composition *Fisherman Singing in the Twilight*. Wang continues to insist that Lou Shuhua's version was an arrangement of Jin Zhuonan's piece (2007:28-29).

the *Hangao Jiupu* (Old Tunes of the Han), two score books that include sixty traditional Hakka pieces written in *gongche* notation system. The Tranquil Sound Society worked together with the *Xiaozhao Yuetuan* (Eternal Void National Music Society, 1925-35) (He 2008:162), of which Wang Xunzhi of the Zhejiang style was a member.



**Figure 3-1 He Yuzhai (seated behind the zheng) at a performance in Shanghai, 1934 (photo in Public Domain).**

The Chaozhou zheng player Guo Ying (1914-2002) came to Shanghai in 1931 and joined the *Xinchao Sizhu Hui* (New Chaozhou Silk Bamboo Society) to perform *xianshi yue* (string-poem music), a traditional Chaozhou ensemble genre. Guo is credited as one of the first to create solo zheng pieces “out of ensemble parts of *xianshi yue*.” His landmark performance of traditional Chaozhou zheng at the Shanghai *Lanxin* Theatre in 1941 was the first formal concert hall performance of solo zheng in Shanghai (Guo and Guo 1996:2-3, translated from the Chinese). In contrast to the increasing popularity of solo zheng music in Shanghai, the *Datong Yuehui* (Great Unity Music Society, 1920-37)

“pays much attention” to the zheng by including it in a modernized *yanyue* (banquet music) ensemble in an attempt to restore ancient court ensemble music (Gulik 1951:25).

Cao Zheng (1920-98) from Liaoning, northeastern China, began to learn the zheng with Lou Shuhua in Beijing in 1936, and went on to study with Liang Tsai-ping in Nanjing in 1946. In 1948 he was hired to teach the zheng at *Guoli Yinzhuang* (National Conservatory of Music) in Nanjing for one semester (Zhou and Zhu 1994:2-3).

The development of the zheng in the early twentieth century is the first stage of its modernization. Just as China was redefining its national and cultural identity, becoming modern through the adoption of Western practices and models, the zheng also underwent an initial change of its identity to become a modern instrument. Urban centres fostered the advent of concert performances, which encouraged the creation of solo works taken from traditional ensemble parts and, more notably, individually composed and fully scored pieces. The shift to an urban cultural context changed the zheng’s practice from personal to public, and from amateur to professional. In addition, the compilation of scorebooks marked the initial codification of the traditional repertoire and the demise of its oral tradition. All these transformations set the stage for the further transition of the zheng into a popular instrument in the new China in the second half of the twentieth century. As Van Gulik predicted:

The cheng [zheng]... may serve a double purpose. First, it may play an important role in preserving and popularizing ancient Chinese music of a lighter genre. And second, the cheng may be utilized for developing a modern, purely Chinese music, accessible to broader circles: an indispensable factor in national life. (1951:25)



### **3.2 The Institutionalization of the Zheng's Dissemination**

After more than half of a century of turmoil and war, the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949 under the direction of the Communist Party and its leader Mao Zedong. The country followed the totalitarian model of the Soviet Union where all aspects of daily life were tightly controlled by the Party; as a consequence, the development of arts and music was dictated by and intertwined with national politics. This critical doctrine dictates that my study of the zheng's modernization in this period be contextualized within its larger sociopolitical background, especially in light of Fairbank's comment that "it is simply not meaningful to examine any part of Chinese society except in the context of the Communist Party's efforts to transform it" (Fairbank 1987:xiii).

In 1949 the Party's Central Committee introduced a comprehensive plan to "foster professional composers, singers, and instrumentalists" in the newly founded state (Liang and Ming 2008:30, translated from the Chinese). To accomplish this, two tiers of music schools were established throughout the country: national and provincial. At the national level the National Music Conservatory was established in 1949 in Nanjing, then renamed the Central Conservatory of Music and moved to Tianjin in 1950 (there was also a branch in Shanghai that was later renamed the Shanghai Conservatory of Music as an independent institution). At the provincial level music departments were set up in art institutions and normal universities in every major city across the land. The first National Art Education Forum held in 1953 set the program for undergraduate study in music to five years at national level conservatories, and three years provincially. Meanwhile,

affiliated secondary and senior elementary school programs, set at six and two years respectively, were established in both the Central and Shanghai conservatories (Liang and Ming 2008:31).

### **3.2.1 New Students, Old Tradition**

Changes to the zheng in this period began with the institutionalization of its teaching methods. In 1951 Mao Zedong wrote the directive for the formation of the Chinese Drama Research Institute: “Let a hundred flowers bloom and create the new through the evolution of the old” (*baihu qifang, tuichen chuxin*). This famous metaphor became the foundation for a new initiative in developing Chinese arts. As an important part of “creating the new through the old,” performance courses in traditional musical instruments were established in both national and provincial music institutions. Within a decade traditional zheng musicians were enlisted to teach in conservatories (see Appendix A for the list of the most influential and prolific traditional zheng musicians recruited for the conservatories). The establishment of zheng studies as a conservatory course signified a new beginning for these zheng artists, as they felt they were provided opportunities to put their talents to good use in teaching and performing. Therefore, they were dedicated to passing on their music and traditions to new generations, allowing the music to grow in the new social environment.

The newly established courses for zheng performance in many conservatories faced a challenge in attracting students. According to the *China News Analysis*, a rare English newsletter following Chinese political and social trends (founded in Hong Kong in 1953), very few students enrolled to study Chinese instruments at the Central

Conservatory of Music in the early 1950s (Anon. 1961:5). The newsletter also pointed out that the Party's position was to encourage musicians and music students who played Western instruments to switch to traditional instruments, a movement known as *minzuhua* (nationalization) in China. The article quoted a leading Party bureaucrat and music critic, Lü Ji (1909-2002), expressing his position on this issue:

The time when the leading role in music belonged to the piano is past. It was a time of bourgeois individualism. Today we live in the period of the masses. Music also enters into the period of the masses. The masses want vocal music and not instrumental music, much less Western piano and violin solos. ...

Lü Chi [Lü Ji] encouraged the study of Russian popular choruses and the study of Chinese instruments. This done, one might be allowed to practise Western instruments as well. He had a peculiar grudge against the piano because as he put it, "One cannot carry a piano about and one cannot have a piano in every village. In our world the piano is not required." He reprimanded those who think that Chinese music is inferior to Western music... and he argued that it is not correct to say that Western music is scientific and Chinese music is not. (ibid. 1961:3)

It is unclear if Lü's remark was his reaction to and interpretation of "Let the past serve the present and let foreign things serve China" (*guwei jinyong, yangwei zhongyong*), another famous assertion of Mao's made in 1956. Following Mao's instruction, "nationalization" was instigated in 1958 to redirect musicians playing Western instruments to learn Chinese instruments. At the Shanghai Conservatory of Music six students were transferred from majoring in piano to the zheng, including Xiang

Sihua, Fan Shang'e,<sup>106</sup> and Zhang Yan,<sup>107</sup> who later became celebrated zheng performers, composers, and instructors. They initially studied the Zhejiang zheng style with Wang Xunzhi, then later the Chaozhou style with Guo Ying and the northern style with Cao Zheng (see Figure 3.2).

Xiang Sihua was born into a middle-class family. Her father was a medical doctor who studied medicine in Germany whose interest in music, Beijing Opera, and Kunqu (a regional opera from Shanghai) influenced the decision to let Xiang Sihua learn piano at a young age. In 1956 Xiang was accepted by the secondary school affiliated with the Conservatory to major in piano performance. Discussing her experience transferring from playing piano to the zheng, Xiang Sihua recalls:

In 1958, three years after I enrolled in the School, the discussion of nationalization (*minzuhua*) began. Jin Cuntian, the deputy director, who was a thoughtful old revolutionist, posed a question: What path should Chinese music take? His question had nothing to do with politics; it was a discussion in response to the Westernization of traditional music in Japan. He believed that China should take its own way. The Traditional Music Department was established in the Conservatory in 1956, however there was a lot of discrimination against Chinese music at the time in Shanghai. So Jin said: "Many old folk musicians are not literate. They will take their knowledge away with them when they pass." He encouraged good students [who played Western instruments] to switch to studying Chinese instruments, and to inherit the tradition. He also said: "This road is hard and I hope you become pioneers." So eight of us—six were pianists—transferred to the Traditional Music Department. I was called by this movement. Although some people said it was a waste, I felt it was meaningful, even if it meant a tough road ahead. The idea of

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<sup>106</sup> Both Xiang Sihua (b. 1939) and Fan Shang'e (b. 1942) were born and raised in Shanghai and enrolled in the Secondary School of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music to study piano. In the 1970s they individually performed with several prominent orchestras and ensembles in Beijing before moving abroad. Xiang Sihua left China for Hong Kong in 1981 and immigrated to Canada in 1991. She lives and teaches in North Vancouver. Fan Shang'e went to Northeast Illinois University in 1990 and immigrated to Canada, now living and teaching in Toronto.

<sup>107</sup> Zhang Yan (1945-96) was born in Wuxi, Jiangsu province before moving to Shanghai at an early age. She was the zheng soloist at the Shandong Provincial Orchestra from 1973 to 1978, and transferred to the Chinese Oriental Song and Dance Troupe in Beijing in 1979. In 1984 she moved to San Francisco. She performed in many prestigious venues internationally and collaborated with jazz musician Jon Jang. I studied with Zhang Yan from 1977-78.

nationalization was to raise the status of traditional music. During my study of the zheng, teacher Jin said two things: learn the tradition truly and thoroughly, and adapt Western ideas to the instrument. These two instructions have guided me in my fifty years of practice of the zheng. (2009, personal communication)

Fan Shang'e had a similar experience, enrolling in the same program at the same school in 1954. However, the reason for her switch to the zheng was somewhat different:

Honestly, when we were asked to switch to the zheng in 1958, I didn't even know what the zheng looked like and I had no curiosity about it at all. I remember signing up for the *yueqin* (a moon shaped lute), because I saw a movie in which Nie Er (the composer of Chinese national anthem) played one. Back then, everybody who studied Western instruments in the school signed up to change to Chinese instruments, because if not, you would be considered *sixiang luohou* [a common term referring politically backward or incorrect in mind that stands in the way of progress]. For some, although they did not want to give up playing piano, they were afraid of telling the truth and to say "no" to this. I was then asked to play the zheng, although I never heard what the zheng sounded like. (2000, personal communication)



**Figure 3-2** Cao Zheng teaching Xiang Sihua in 1960 (photo by permission of Xiang Sihua).

Xiang Sihua's and Fan Shang'e's experiences were typical for Chinese artists of their generation, where personal artistic choices had to comply with the Party's policy position. While the nationalization movement changed their careers, their previous piano training and perspectives on teaching music have in turn contributed greatly to zheng performance, as well as the transformation of traditional oral teaching to a new contemporary pedagogy.

Both Xiang and Fan acknowledged that they faced two challenges when switching to the zheng: the acoustic disparity between the piano and the zheng, and the difference between traditional Chinese and Western inspired teaching methods. Both of them began their studies on a silk string zheng whose sound, according to Xiang Sihua, was "hard to take" (*nanting*). Xiang explained that "switching from studying piano to learning the zheng was not easy. From Beethoven to sixteen silk strings, the first challenge was the sound." The tone colour of silk strings is dull in comparison to that of the piano and the strings break easily. When I asked whether the problem was the instrument itself, she said: "No, it is the concept of tone colour. In the past, [the tone colour of] folk music was rough. Of course, the instruments were not well made either. But more critically, it was the lack of a systematic approach to performance technique: as long as the instrument sounded, it was okay. On the contrary, my piano teacher was very strict about tone and stressed that to learn an instrument, great attention should be paid to tone from the very beginning. The way to play the instrument is important" (2009, personal communication).

The second challenge was that the method of teaching zheng at the time was "lacking a system" (Xiang 2009, personal communication). Both Xiang and Fan

mentioned that their teacher Wang Xunzhi could not effectively demonstrate on the instrument. They had to interpret his often vague verbal instructions and experiment with different fingerings themselves. Eventually they assisted Wang Xunzhi to formulate the Zhejiang fingering system.

Another hurdle was a lack of teaching material. Xiang Sihua recalls: “There were times we had either no score or an incomplete one. Moreover, the scores often changed from time to time. Some people joked that our teacher used us to experiment on” (2009, personal communication). According to Fan Shang’e, Wang worked very hard to prepare material for his students. He went as far as to notate *Jiangjun Ling* (General’s Command) in staff notation in order to prevent his students from feeling that his method of teaching was “unscientific.” However, after learning the simpler pieces, such as *Sanshisian Ban* (Thirty-three Beats), they were left with little to work with because they lacked scores of more advanced pieces. Thus, they proceeded to notate traditional pieces themselves. Fan Shang’e described how, through fully scoring the piece, she helped to standardize *Haiqing Nahe* (Falcon Catches Swan), a traditional piece from the Zhejiang repertoire in 1961:<sup>108</sup>

I was the first one to play *Haiqing Nahe*. Back then there was no score, except for one written in *gongche* notation, which was most probably a part from an ensemble score. It was not a zheng score. My teacher would sing the melody with *gongche* syllables and I wrote down what he sang. The piece had a total of 18 sections, and we went through one section each week, so it took four months to complete the notation. (2010, personal communication)

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<sup>108</sup> According to both Xiang Sihua and Fan Shang’e, they also notated and standardized *Yue’er Gao* (The High Moon) and *Gaoshan Liushui* (High Mountain and Flowing Water), two traditional pieces of the Zhejiang style that Wang Xunzhi inherited from his teacher Jiang Yinchun.

What Xiang and Fan encountered was a clash between two cultures. As young trained pianists they were not prepared to navigate between two very different but equally valid transmission systems—one a modern model based on the highly methodical Western classical system, the other a traditional practice of oral transmission. The former provides students with an organized method of learning technique through repetition and a reliance on a fixed detailed notation that allowed performers to focus on accuracy, speed, dynamics, and expression. The latter, on the other hand, is based on the method of *kouchuan xinshou* (oral transmission of teaching from the heart), not a reliance on notation. This oral tradition required students to totally immerse themselves in mimicking, memorizing, interpreting, and drawing information from their teacher.<sup>109</sup> The spontaneous nature of the music manifests variation, as a teacher could play a piece differently each time, including changes in fingering, nuances, dynamics, and even sections of melody, as demonstrated in Chapter Two. This method requires students to take a substantially longer time to learn a piece, as they had to look deeply to grasp the inner structure of the music in order to understand how numerous variations and interpretations are created. Only when the method of traditional oral teaching, and its relationship to the notation, is grasped can the reason for unfixed fingerings, passages, and dynamics be understood.

Xiang Sihua's and Fan Shang'e's foundation in piano performance undoubtedly benefited their performing on the zheng with technical and artistic ability to creating

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<sup>109</sup> Like most contemporary Chinese musicians, I was mostly trained in a Western system, even though I was lucky to have experienced some elements of oral teaching through studying with Gao Zicheng and Zhao Yuzhai, two traditional musicians. I was not very aware of pedagogies in oral tradition until I took a gamelan performance class with Dr. Michael Tenzer in my first year at UBC in 1996. At first I was afraid of making mistakes by not being able to memorize what I was taught in class and I tried to write everything down. Through this class and further studies about oral traditions around the world, I finally understood the profound difference between Western classical pedagogy and that of oral traditions.



highly refined and well-crafted music rich in expression and dynamics. Their achievements also contributed to the development of zheng music through using a pianistic approach to the contemporary zheng.

The campaign of “nationalization” had an immense impact on traditional music. Regardless of their initial intention to propagate tradition, old ways of teaching gradually retreated, giving way to Westernized methods. According to the *China News Analysis*, Wei Zhongle (1908-97), a famous *pipa* player and an influential figure in traditional music, believed that “government actions did harm to traditional music.” The article continues: “A great number of musicians who performed on foreign instruments were forcibly transferred to Chinese operatic troupes and there, following their own bent, they transformed traditional music into Western-styled music, to the great detriment of the purity of the tradition” (Anon. 1956:5).

### **3.2.2 Codifying Scores and Standardizing Performance Fingerings**

Instruction on the zheng in conservatories was dictated by two movements at the time: 1) politically, the use of Communist ideology to reform Chinese traditional culture; and 2) artistically, the adoption of a Western classical conservatory model by the Chinese educational system. The purpose of learning the instrument shifted from self-cultivation to the pursuit of a professional career. The concepts of “accurate,” “rigorous,” and a “scientific approach,” common terms in conservatory pedagogy, were adapted to the new approach of zheng instruction. In the meantime, a politicized cultural policy of “rescuing the heritage and inheriting the tradition” put great pressure on the educators to bring their old teaching methods up-to-date, including setting a systematic curriculum, standardizing

teaching material, codifying musical content, transcribing to staff or cipher notations, and unifying performance fingering symbols. In this context the First National Forum on Selecting Zheng Teaching Material (*Guzheng Jiaocai Bianxun Zuotan Hui*), the first official meeting of the nation's zheng performers in history, was held in Xi'an in August 1961. This Forum was significant for many reasons and determined the future course for zheng education and composition. Most of the traditional zheng artists who had become conservatory instructors, together with their students, attended the meeting.

Under the slogan of “rescuing the heritage and inheriting the tradition” each musician attending had been asked to prepare notated scores (written either in cipher or staff notation) of his repertoire to bring to the Forum. Wang Xunzhi, with the assistance of his students, brought a two hundred and seventy six page manuscript for instruction, which included one hundred eighty two pieces for the practice of basic technique, one hundred seventy one études, and forty five compositions, all Zhejiang style written in staff notation (Wang 2007:37). Other scores attendees brought included twenty Hakka pieces categorized in “beginner,” “intermediate,” and “advanced” three levels, nine Chaozhou pieces, ten Henan pieces (Wang 2007:37-38), and Gao Zicheng's collection of forty Shandong pieces. As a supplement to the notation, the participants recorded numerous works.<sup>110</sup> The Forum also announced that musicians would be visiting each conservatory as guest lecturers to teach their repertoire, thereby enabling each school to learn all the styles (Zhou 2009, personal communication).

Prior to the meeting zheng instructors had begun to standardize their performance fingerings as was done in the Shanghai Conservatory, where zheng students assisted their teacher Wang Xunzhi in systemizing fingerings. Cao Zheng, in his 1958 book *Guzheng*

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<sup>110</sup> To my knowledge, no recording made at the meeting has survived, or is available.

*Yanzou Fa* (Method of Playing Guzheng), also assembled basic fingerings and assigned symbols to each of them. According to zheng scholar Wei Jun, Cao's compilation was utilized as the foundation for the standardization of fingering symbols at the Forum (2004:71), in which twenty-two symbols for right hand technique and nine for the left hand were designated as the standard fingerings for the zheng.<sup>111</sup>

This Forum was considered a turning point for the creation of contemporary zheng education. Wei Jun remarks:

The end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s saw the beginning of the education of zheng culture and art. It was the primary stage that zheng's performance course was offered in musical institutes. The hired instructors were representatives of different regional zheng schools. These older masters had rich artistic experiences and superb performance skills. However, the common inadequacy shared by these musicians was a lack of professional knowledge of [music] theory. Some were not even able to read notation, and solely depended on the traditional method of oral transmission (*kouchuan xinshou*).

Moreover, the scores they did have were hand copied. The older ones were even written in *gongche* or *ersi* notations. Often, one piece had different fingerings, which was very unregulated. Plus, because the pieces they played were mostly from regional opera music, tunes of *qupai* and folk songs...even though their styles were diverse and colourful, the fingerings were formed individually... The standardization of fingering symbols, on one hand, demonstrated the general state of zheng's development prior to the Forum, on the other hand, it set the foundation for zheng's further development, dissemination, exchange, and innovation. (2004:71-2, translated from the Chinese)

Wei expounded that the rationale behind the Forum and his rhetoric indeed reflects a general modern Chinese conception towards traditional methods of

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<sup>111</sup> The number of performance fingering symbols for the zheng has grown exponentially since the 1961 Forum. One publication listed sixty-four types of right hand technique symbols, seventeen for left hand techniques, and fourteen for both hands (Wei 2004:72). Zheng instructor Su Qiaozheng affirmed in her paper presentation at a meeting in 1986 that there were over two hundred and thirty different fingering symbols, including two groups of six symbols of  $\nabla$ ,  $\mathbb{W}$ ,  $\mathbb{WW}$ ,  $\gamma$ ,  $\gamma\gamma$ ,  $\gamma\gamma\gamma$  assigned to differentiate the length and the speed of vibrato. I argue that fingering symbols, especially those used to indicate the left hand string pressing techniques, can only provide relatively accurate instructions for the actual movement of the sound.

transmission, such that *gongche* and *ersi* notation systems are often considered “incomplete” because they do not record precisely what is being sounded. Such systems, therefore, were considered inadequate for conservatory teaching, while fully scored traditional repertoires were in demand. Many Chinese scholars view the government campaign to transcribe traditional music from *gongche* or *ersi* notation as responsible for the survival of the music.

It is debatable, however, whether “rescuing the heritage” through the transcription of traditional pieces is the best choice, or the only way, to preserve and propagate the music. Opinions on this issue vary and are divided between Chinese scholarship and Western ethnomusicology; between Chinese scholars and zheng educators; and between different generations of zheng performers. The view that traditional notation systems are inadequate and out-of-date, reflected in Wei’s article, is still largely held today among many zheng performers and educators. It is also supported in the Chinese zheng literature, especially university theses written in the last few years by young graduates. However, some Chinese scholars, especially those who have thoroughly studied the tradition and/or are aware of Western ethnomusicology, understand that traditional notations serve a different function as opposed to cipher or staff notations. As Shi Zhaoyuan (b.1932), an older generation zheng performer/scholar, stresses: “If attempting to notate each piece accurately, it would have created dozens or even over a hundred versions. This kind of notation, in fact, can only chase the ‘look,’ but cannot catch the ‘essence’” (1985:6, translated from the Chinese).

Another zheng scholar Wang Yingrui believes that Chinese and Western notations represent two different mentalities:

As the traditional Chinese notation system only notated the bone tunes, it does not use the notation to “limit” players, but provides room for players to create, which is a very important concept in Chinese art. On the other hand, cipher or staff notation are measurable systems, and western classical music was created according to scores, every note must be played, not more, nor less. Therefore, these two notation systems reflect the character of Western music making and their way of thinking. (2007:23, translated from the Chinese)

It should be pointed out that while Wang accurately summarizes the relationship between traditional Chinese notation and music performance, her interpretation of notation’s role in Western classical music represents a common Chinese understanding of Western music which was largely based on the practice of nineteenth-century classical music. Her comments also reflect the rigorous Chinese approach to notation, in that once a composition is scored it must be strictly followed, and individual interpretation is very limited.

As Judith Becker points out, many Western ethnomusicologists who study non-Western traditional music believe that “the concern for preserving old compositions is a European concern reflecting European reliance upon notation” (1980:13). In her study of Javanese gamelan, Becker views negatively the impact of fully notating oral traditions, describing this process as “the most pervasive, penetrating, and ultimately the most insidious type of Western influence” which “goes largely unnoticed” (ibid.:11). She states:

[O]ral traditions [represent] a process of continual re-creation [in which] every piece is at once contemporary and the cumulative result of ageless tradition. Each performance is both unique and a summation of all previous performances of that piece as known to those particular players. Past and present coexist in the moment of performance. (ibid.:13)

The outcomes of codification and standardization of traditional music and techniques as a result of moving to notation has shown that only a fraction of what traditional musicians performed was transmitted from oral practice into notation. By transcribing and codifying the content of traditional music, the chance is that one performance of one version with one performer's interpretation was then cemented and eventually became the *authentic* score for this piece while many other versions were eliminated. More crucially, as the Chinese harvested the “crop”—existing compositions created in the past—they abandoned the “seeds”—the process of creating new pieces upon an old compositional form; as a result the traditional forms, such as *baban*, are no longer in use in China, hence discontinuing some of the most valuable practice of traditional music—an act paradoxical to the intention of “rescuing the heritage.”

As shown in Chapter Two, traditional zheng music exemplifies spontaneity and individual interpretation within the parameter of regional styles. Consequently, the degree and the amount of detailed information in its sound cannot be accurately captured and sufficiently displayed in any type of “descriptive” notation. Seeger views the “assumption that the full auditory parameter of music is or can be represented by a partial visual parameter” as a hazard “inherent in our process of writing music” (1958:184).

Codification unavoidably omitted certain important information in the score. For example, the unfixed moving tone—which has many regional and personal variations that define individual styles—is simplified or omitted altogether in the process of notating. By subordinating oral and aural teaching to that of reading, which has unfortunately become the norm in the zheng world, the “diverse and colourful” quality described in Wei's article has been compromised. I have listened to many performances and recordings of

*High Mountain and Flowing Water* in the Shandong style, but am unable to find a variety of moving tones as I did among the three traditional Shandong musicians, illustrated in Chapter Two (2.4).

### 3.2.3 Establishing *Liupai* and Reinventing a Traditional Style

The etymological term for river tributary, *pai* or *liupai*, is commonly used in Chinese arts to denote a branch or school of an art form, as well as an individual style of an artist with an assumption of legitimacy or authenticity. Historically *liupai* was often reserved for high art forms, such as *qin* music, poetry, or calligraphy. It was first used with the zheng in 1936 as the term *beipai* (“northern style”) on the cover of Lou Shuhua’s record *Tianxia Datong* (Universal Consonant). Since studies of the zheng were included in conservatory courses, the social and cultural status of the instrument was raised from a so-called folk (*minjian*) instrument to a professional level. Accordingly, different traditional styles began to be labeled as *liupai*, reflecting the growing prominence of the instrument and the artists themselves. Cao Zheng provided a historical perspective of the application of *liupai* for the zheng:

It is a modern idea to form *liupai* for the Chinese *guzheng* based on regions or individual musicians. Before the ’30s, most zheng players met teachers and other players in activities for amateurs or music lovers’ to exchange music and friendship. This was called *wanke* (playing guest) in Zhejiang and Jiangsu regions; and *wanyou* (playing friends) in Shandong and Henan, which seldom accentuated the teacher-student relationship. In the ’40s and ’50s, due to the thriving development of national and folk music, educational institutes and [professional] performing groups, there was a demand for *guzheng* art. As a result, many older zheng performers joined the teaching force. This gradually formed the model of regional and personal characteristics. Moreover, in order to carry on the tradition and to respect the art and its teachers, this term was applied. (1993:1, translated from the Chinese)

Musicians at the 1961 Forum started to use *pai* or *liupai* to differentiate their styles from each other, and as such they came into standard usage to distinguish the various regional styles (e.g., Henan school or Chaozhou school) and individual performance styles (Zhou 2009, personal communication).

Before 1961 a regional style of Shaanxi zheng did not exist, in spite of many early historical records that referred to the zheng as *qinzheng* (*Qin* was a State in ancient China located in modern day Shaanxi province). In 1956 Zhou Yanjia (b. 1934), a fiddle player in a *mihu* (a local opera genre) group in Shaanxi, began to play the zheng and went to study with Cao Zheng at the Shenyang Conservatory. After learning the history of the instrument, Zhou realized that even though it was the birthplace of the zheng, Shaanxi did not even have its own *liupai*. He believed that the *qinzheng* should be brought back to its origins. Based on the fact that the repertoires of the Northern styles came from local song traditions, he transcribed many tunes of local opera *mihu* and compiled a collection of *Guzheng Mihu Quxuan* (Selected *Mihu* Tunes for the Zheng), bringing them to the Forum.<sup>112</sup> Subsequently, seventeen pieces were chosen as part of the standard traditional Shaanxi repertoire, and as such the regional Shaanxi zheng style was (re)created<sup>113</sup> (Zhou 2009, personal communication).

Zhou Yanjia also pointed out that this was the time when solo zheng repertoires evolved from their original ensemble form:

In the past, teachers such as Gao Zicheng and Cao Dongfu mostly played to accompany [narrative songs], there were no solo performances. When they were invited as individual musician to teach at conservatories, they did not have ensembles to play with, so the music they played became solo

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<sup>112</sup> The main opera genres of Shaanxi region, such as *qin qiang*, *wanwan qiang*, and *mihu diao*, all apply the identical scale as the Chaozhou zheng, which contains *fa*↑ and *ti*↓.

<sup>113</sup> Zhou Yanjia has gradually added more tunes that were derived from *qinqiang* and *wanwanqing*, two other Shaanxi operatic genres, to enrich the style.



pieces. What teacher Gao played was the zheng part in a *peng baban* ensemble. Further more, since he played it as a solo piece, the music needed to portray an image. Is it happy or sad? In addition, the piece [as solo] needed an introduction and ending, so [they] arranged the pieces. (2009, personal communication)

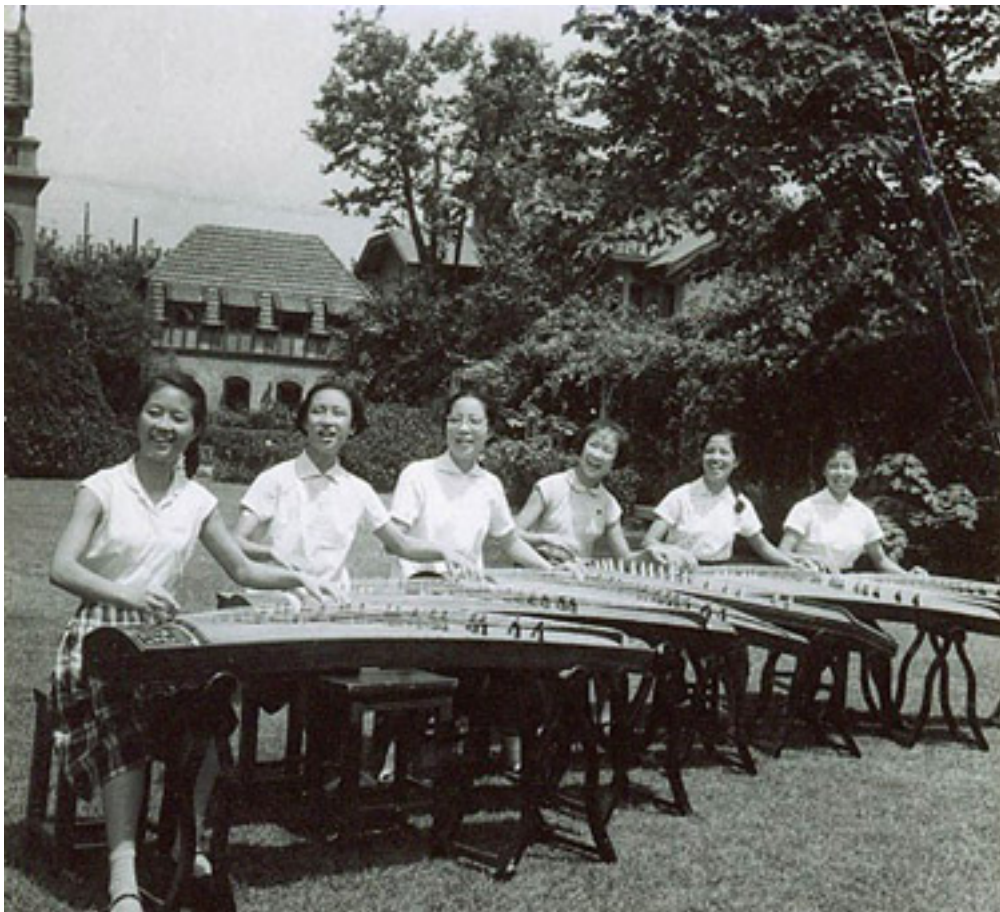
When arranging pieces for solo zheng, musicians sometimes took the liberty of altering the traditional structure, making the music more cohesive and attractive to listeners not familiar with the music. In Gao Zicheng's arrangement of *Gaoshan Liushui* (High Mountain and Flowing Water), for instance, he shortened the piece from the original four sections—standard for *daban* (great suite) pieces (discussed in 2.2)—to three. In so doing, the traditional symmetric principle of performing four sections in Shandong zheng structure was broken. In the same arrangement, Gao also added an introduction and an ending, each containing four chords and dramatic long glissandi to depict water. Similar alterations are also found in Su Wenxian's arrangement of Chaozhou music. In creating the new version Su linked the *touban* (the first and slow section) of one piece to the *kaopai* (the third and fast section) of another piece, which changed the traditional common form of having three sections played in the order of “slow-moderate-fast”<sup>114</sup> (Chen 1993:2). Programmatic descriptions of some traditional pieces were also either created or amended to be suitable for the new political and cultural environment.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Yang Yinliu observed that similar occurrences happened in other traditional genres as well. Once a Party cadre watched a wind and percussion band (most probably a Buddhist or Daoist band) perform a half-hour long piece. Afterward he commented that the “peasant’s music is too long,” so he instructed the musicians to cut the length of the piece to under five minutes. In another case a traditional musician complained to Yang about a proposed plan to shorten the *pipa* piece *Shimian Maifu* (Ambush All Sides) by only taking the sections that had fighting scenes (1953:31).

<sup>115</sup> Zhao Yuzhai describes the opening of the Shandong peice *Hangong Qiuyue* (The Moon Hanging on the Han Palace) as portraying the lonely despair of the Imperial court concubines, while the climax depicts strong condemnation of and opposition to the feudal society (1983:36).

In 1962 the zheng students at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music performed an ensemble piece for Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai. During the concert a female singer sang *Honghu Shui* (The Water of Hong Lake), a song from Zhou's hometown Hubei province. After the performance Zhou said to the zheng players that they should sing as well. Zhou's instruction motivated them to start singing *tanchang* (play and sing together), a narrative song genre (Fan, personal communication, 2010; see Figure 3.3).



**Figure 3-3** The *tanchang* group at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, 1962. Left to right: Zhang Yan, Xiang Sihua, Sun Wenyan, Wang Zheng, Fan Shang'e, and Guo Xuejin (photo by permission of Liu Qichao).

Historically the zheng was used to accompany female singing long before it was introduced to rural China where it became a male instrument. As discussed in the Prelude, early genres of *zaju* (miscellaneous) opera and *sanqu* (scattered tunes) narrative songs from the Chinese Yuan dynasty featured female singers that utilized the zheng as accompaniment. Unfortunately the potential to revive this ancient tradition by reconnecting the zheng to narrative singing did not come to fruition. However, the skills the women gained through performing *tanchang* later created an opportunity for one of the zheng students, Wang Changyua, to perform her composition *Battling the Typhoon* for Mao Zedong's wife Jiang Qing during the Cultural Revolution, which led the zheng's metamorphosis onto a new stage (this will be discussed later in this chapter).

The founding of the new China in 1949 brought a drastic change to the lives of traditional zheng musicians. As they transformed from “amateur” to “professional,” and played a new and much more prominent role in the new educational system, their traditional way of making music and their methods of instruction clashed with Western oriented pedagogy in conservatories. This cultural dichotomy had a substantial impact on the dissemination, instruction, and modernization of the zheng. Meanwhile, direct government involvement created a new platform for the development of the zheng. With a new generation of zheng performers fostered in conservatories, the art form of the zheng was promptly transformed from self-entertainment to the concert stage.

### 3.3 Innovation and Standardization in Zheng Construction

Concurrent with the zheng's institutionalization, a campaign of modifying the instrument itself was commenced. The construction of the zheng has gone through several changes throughout its history of over two thousand years. The first documented modification occurred around the first century CE, transforming the instrument from its initial bamboo body with five strings to a wooden rectangular soundbox with twelve silk strings. The twelve-string zheng was first mentioned in a third-century poetic essay by Fu Xuan: "Its [zheng's] upper part is convex like the vault of heaven; its bottom flat like the earth; its inside is hollow to accommodate the six points of the compass; and its twelve strings with their bridges symbolize the twelve months of the year" (Fu c. 265, translated from the Chinese). The instrument continued to slowly evolve over the next two millennia, gradually increasing the range of the number of strings to include up to sixteen. By the beginning of the twentieth century, both the 13- and 16-stringed zheng, tuned to an anhemitonic pentatonic scale, were in common use in the northern and southern styles respectively. Although silk strings were still being utilized, steel and copper strings emerged in the mid-nineteenth century and became common in the twentieth century.

In the early 1950s, under a governmental mandate to make comprehensive and systematic improvements of traditional art forms, a reform of traditional Chinese instruments was implemented. As society was rapidly changing, a new unified national cultural identity was formed such that traditional instruments that used to be performed in regional music genres by folk musicians were targeted for transformation to better

represent the new national culture. “We should pay attention to the reforms of all the old art forms that are based in the masses,” stated Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai (1898-1976), “[and] first and foremost in this kind of reform is content. However, the old forms also require gradual appropriate reforms to reach harmony and unity between content and structure” (1949, translated from the Chinese). As the government was eager to create a fresh and unified national cultural identity that could showcase the “proletariat,” new compositions for orchestra and other large ensembles that reflected the “spirit of the time” (*shidai jingshen*) quickly grew to dominate the national music scene. The creation of a modern orchestra for Chinese traditional instruments and the demands of the compositions written for these orchestras subsequently became the incentive for the modernization of the traditional instruments.<sup>116</sup>

The first Forum on Instrument Reforms<sup>117</sup> was held in October 1954 in Beijing, at which time Li Yuanqing, the director of the Chinese Music Research Institute, identified four main areas where traditional instruments required reform: temperament, pitch range, projection, and standardized scale (1959:494-99). In his speech, Li conveyed explicitly the rationale behind the necessity for such reform:

Chinese musical instruments have prominent characteristics in their construction, performance and tone colours. Chinese people have used

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<sup>116</sup> The Chinese National Broadcasting Orchestra (CNBO), officially formed in 1953, was a model for the development of large orchestras employing traditional Chinese instruments. Following the model of a standard Western symphonic orchestra, the CNBO is comprised of over eighty musicians. Many traditional instruments were modified to perform in this orchestra in order to achieve a standardized tuning, a greater pitch range, and a balanced timbre throughout. To become fully chromatic, new frets were added to the *pipa*, the *yangqin* (hammered dulcimer) was enlarged to accommodate more strings, and the 17-pipe *sheng* became larger with more pipes added (currently a 36-pipe *sheng* is common). New instruments were also created to broaden the pitch range of certain instrumental voicings so that the overall timbre of the orchestra approximated the Western orchestra, including: the *zhonghu* (medium-sized *erhu*), *dahu* (bass *erhu*), *daruan* (bass lute), and *liuqin* (high-pitched lute), to name a few.

<sup>117</sup> The Forum was organized by The Chinese Music Research Institute, The Chinese National Musician’s Association, and the Music Research Institute of the Central Conservatory of Music. Over fifty instrument designers and makers attended the meeting, and over seventy newly designed or reformed instruments were introduced (Zhongyang 1956:1).

them to create and preserve tremendously outstanding music. However, it cannot be denied that the slow development of feudal society has affected the improvement of the instruments. Therefore, many of them unavoidably remain in their “infant” state, unlike Western musical instruments, which have undergone a capitalist revolution, and are impacted by modern science, resulting in their construction being greatly improved. Today, as vast changes in people’s life are occurring in China, we feel in certain ways that [our] instruments, as a unique part of music expression, are not completely suitable for this new life, ideas and emotions. If we consider the future of our traditional musical instruments as part of the brilliant prosperity of the socialist society, we feel even more the importance of instrument improvement. (1954:492-93, translated from the Chinese)

Li’s political perspective understandably mirrored that of the government, which as a cultural official he was obliged to reiterate. Nevertheless, his rhetoric on the state of Chinese musical instruments and the comparison to Western practices was remarkably analogous to that of Xiao Youmei’s made decades before: “Europeans often apply scientific principle to reform their musical instruments, to expand pitch range, and to achieve the purpose of using sound to depict the variety of life. The ranges that Western music used a thousand year ago are identical with what is being used on Chinese instruments currently” (1920, in Feng 2007:148, translated from the Chinese). It is evident that despite substantial social and political changes, the perception that the *guoyue* (national music) creators held in the early twentieth century toward traditional instruments and their development had been passed on to the new society of communist China.

This campaign of instrument reform was initially called *gailiang*, meaning “to improve,” but the term was soon replaced by *gaige*—“to reform” or “to change.” Although the difference between these two Chinese words seems subtle, there is a fine distinction between them. I would argue that while the term *gailiang* suggests that the

basic morphology and function of the instrument provides an adequate foundation on which further adjustments will be an asset, the term *gaige* implies a disparagement of the fundamental morphology and function of the instrument and calls for major reforms, which insinuates a negative attitude towards traditional instruments.

Although not originally included in the new traditional instrument orchestras, the zheng was subject to reforms as well. The initial modification of the zheng was in response to the needs of the concert stage and new compositions. The traditional 16-string zheng's range of three pentatonic octaves was not large enough to perform new works which demanded the left hand alternately perform chords or a bass line to the melodies played by the right hand. The traditional silk and more contemporary steel strings of the zheng were not under high tension and as such were best suited for slower music where the idiosyncratic, delicate expressive bending and the subtleties of sustain could be heard. The new compositions, however, demanded more volume, deep bass tones, and rapid picking which traditional strings could not handle. Consequently, a strategic objective was established to increase the zheng's size to accommodate more strings with greater projection, and to develop new strings that were stronger with greater tension. As the zheng was gradually included in orchestras, demand for its ability to change tonality grew, which led to the production of varying key-changeable zhengs by the nation's major musical instrument factories. The overall result was a substantial expansion of the number of types of zheng within a short period of time, all with different purposes, repertoires, and attributes.

### 3.3.1 Development of the Twenty-One String Zheng and the Use of Nylon Strings

In the early 1950s many new works for solo zheng emerged on the national stage, most of which were meant to express the lives, happiness, and heroic spirit of the working class in the new communist society. The addition of chords, both hands plucking the strings on the right side of the bridges, and rapid passages in the new pieces challenged the limits of the traditional zheng. Composers sought a greater range of pitches and dynamics. As a result, in 1957 Zhao Yuzhai, who was teaching at the Shenyang Conservatory of Music, suggested to the musical instrument factory affiliated with the Conservatory to enlarge the soundbox and increase the number of the strings (Yan and Xu 1997:3), resulting in the production of the 21-string zheng.<sup>118</sup> The addition of five strings to the 16-string zheng provided an extra octave, with a range from D to d<sup>3</sup>.

In 1960 Xu Zhengao of the Shanghai Musical Instrument Factory, in consultation with Wang Xunzhi (the zheng instructor at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music), created the 21-string “S” shaped zheng.<sup>119</sup> In contrast to the straight *shankou* (nut on the performer’s left side) found on previous zheng, the nut of the new zheng is closer to the fixed bridge (on the performer’s right side) under the higher strings and curves through a gentle “S” shape to end at a much greater distance from the fixed bridge under the bass register, lengthening the body by approximately one-fourth (see Figure 3.4). The concept of a curved nut was adapted from the orchestral harp to accommodate the length of the strings while maintaining an even string tension, producing a fuller tone colour

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<sup>118</sup> According to Liang Tzai-ping, a twenty-one steel string zheng was made by Zhao Yuzhai’s teacher, Wang Dianyu (1899-1964) (1971:6). Liang did not provide any further details or the date of the instrument; as Liang left China in 1949, however, Wang’s creation may have predated his departure. One can only speculate if this instrument was the genesis for Zhao Yuzhai’s later creation.

<sup>119</sup> Although Xu Zhengao is now considered to be the founding father of the “S” shaped zheng, sources suggest that Xu was working together with Dai Chuang of the Shanghai Music Conservatory and his master Miao Jinlin from the Shanghai Musical Instrument Factory who replicated ancient court instruments for the *Datong Yuehui* (Great Unity Music Society) in the 1930s.



throughout the range. Meanwhile, the older wooden tuning pegs, usually placed on the top of the soundboard, were replaced with metal pegs on the side at one end to accommodate the increased string tension and for accurate tuning (Figure 3.5 a and b). In 1965 the “S” shaped 21-string zheng was patented under the name *Dunhuang* and has since become the standard size zheng played by modern conservatory-trained zheng musicians,<sup>120</sup> whereas the 13-string and 16-string zheng are no longer in common use.



Figure 3-4 Twenty-one string “S” shaped Dunhuang zheng.

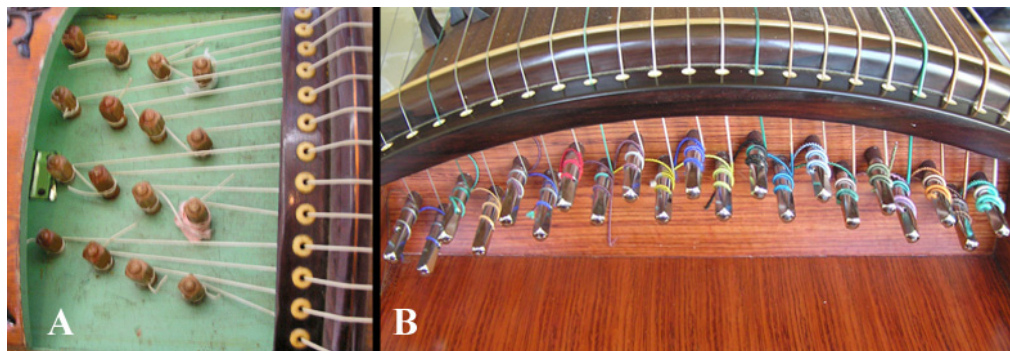


Figure 3-5 Comparison of zheng tuning pegs (A: wooden pegs; B: metal pegs).

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<sup>120</sup> Similar reforms to the Japanese koto occurred in Japan around the same time. Both the 17-string and 20-string koto were created from the original 13-string prototype. Unlike the reforms to the zheng, the two types of newly developed koto did not replace the 13-string koto, but were used as complementary instruments.

The desire for increased volume and speed, combined with the larger size of the zheng, fostered the need for a new type of string that was stronger, had a good tone, and could be tuned at a much higher tension. Professional musicians considered silk strings<sup>121</sup> too hard to keep in tune, too quiet, and too easily broken under tension. They felt as well that the strings had a muted tone and a short sustain when compared to metal strings. Xiang Sihua recalls: “Silk strings sounded awful, especially as I just switched from playing piano to the zheng [at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music]. I found them hard to handle, they didn’t generate any volume, they didn’t have a clear sound and when tuned too tight, they broke” (2009, personal communication). Steel strings, which were quite thin and tuned at a low tension, became popular in the mid-twentieth century for their subtle nuanced pitch manipulations and long sustained lingering tones, and for these reasons still remain the string of choice for Chaozhou zheng. However, they were quite soft, had a somewhat noisy attack when plucked, were easily broken, and would not keep a pitch when struck hard in modern fast forceful passages. Thus a need existed for a new string that could respond to the demands of modern music and techniques.

In the late 1950s Wei Hongning, a zheng student from Shanghai working together with his teacher Wang Xunzhi, invented a new type of zheng string (Fan 2010, personal communication). The string consisted of three components—a metal core covered by a layer of silk and wound with nylon—and was much stronger when compared to silk or steel strings.<sup>122</sup> It also produced a brighter sound with rich overtones. With a range of

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<sup>121</sup> The silk-string zheng was still common in the early 1950s due to many Japanese *koto* left abandoned in Chinese cities after World War II. The *koto* could be easily found discarded in back alleys or storage rooms throughout Beijing and Tianjin. Shi Zhaoyuan, an older generation zheng performer who used to live in Tianjin, related that he and many other zheng players used the *koto* in place of the zheng as they were readily available for free.

<sup>122</sup> One of the five strings in each register (usually pitch A) is coloured green, as a visual reference for performers.

gauges, a set of twenty-one strings generated a fairly balanced tone colour inclusive of the bright high and deep low registers. These new strings were considered ideal for contemporary compositions and were greatly preferred by zheng players over silk or steel strings. Nylon strings have been the most commonly used zheng strings since the 1970s,<sup>123</sup> while the use of silk strings has practically ceased. Metal strings are still favoured by some musicians and are common in Chaozhou and other regional styles.

The 21-string zheng with nylon strings was a new, versatile modern instrument; in combination with the larger soundbox and thicker strings at a higher tension, it generated greater volume and a substantially lower bass register that better suited modern music. The high tension of the nylon strings, however, has greatly reduced the ability to manipulate the strings, as they are harder to depress, less responsive, and do not have the sustain of metal strings nor the complexities of silk. Although the subtle nuances of *yun*—a defining aspect of the traditional zheng—are still present, they are diminished, a factor that contributed to left hand techniques playing a lesser role in contemporary compositions.

### **3.3.2 Creating the Pentatonic Key-Changeable Zheng**

In the early 1960s many state-owned musical instrument factories independently experimented in producing key-changeable zheng. The result was a variety of key-changeable instruments built over the subsequent two decades, exploring two main approaches: hand controlled mechanisms and foot pedals.

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<sup>123</sup> The *dunhuang* nylon string, recently named type “A,” was officially designated as the standard zheng string in 1975. In 1997 and 2005, type “B” and “C” were respectively created due to the demands of the continued increase of string tension (Li 2009:105-106).

The hand controlled, key-changeable zheng was initially designed in 1963 by the Zheng Reform Unit (*zhenggai xiaozu*) of the Shenyang Musical Instrument Factory, in consultation with the Shenyang Conservatory of Music. Led by Zhang Kun, the Unit constructed a 22-string pentatonic hand controlled, key-changeable zheng in 1965 named *Model 65* (see Figure 3.6). Designed to be able to provide pentatonic scales in all twelve keys, as well as accidentals, the principle of changing keys on *Model 65* was achieved through adjusting the length of the string. The individual movable bridges were fixed to the soundboard, with the key change mechanism installed on the right side of the main fixed bridge. This mechanism was comprised of eleven switches on the player's side of the instrument attached to five connecting rods which ran through the interior box, on which sat forty-four rotating tuning posts which extended through the top of the instrument just to the left of the main bridge. There were also metal screws attached to each string for fine-tuning. At the top of each tuning post sat a small cap with two pegs that the string ran between. When the tuning switch was moved sideways it turned the tuning post, which rotated the cap so that the pegs stopped the string, thereby shortening its length and raising the pitch. There were two tuning posts per string with each raising the string a semitone, and each tuning post was attached to a connecting rod so that pitches in all octaves were adjusted simultaneously. I personally found that the metal strings of *Model 65* went out of tune very quickly, and that the tuning mechanism was quite noisy.<sup>124</sup> In addition, the instrument was very heavy and it was impractical to tour with.

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<sup>124</sup> I played a *Model 65* key-changeable zheng when performing with the Qianjin Orchestra from 1975-1979.

In 1972 a newer and improved pentatonic key-changeable zheng—*Model 72*—was developed based on the previous model. Similar to the *Model 65*, a key change device was installed on the right side of the instrument, though it was simpler and lighter. A report on this project stated that besides having improved the tuning mechanism, making it more precise, the instrument makers also flattened the soundboard, which made it easier to play (Shenyang 1973:2-4).



Figure 3-6 *Model 65* key-changeable zheng (artistic recreation).<sup>125</sup>

The Yingkou Musical Instrument Factory of Liaoning province made another example of a pentatonic key-changeable zheng in the mid 1970s, with a four-button control replacing the switches. This 21-string zheng was considered a successful model for its capacity to change to five keys (D-G-C-F-B<sup>b</sup>)—which was thought adequate for most compositions—but also, more importantly, because it was lighter and more practical for a touring musician (see Figure 3.7).<sup>126</sup> Nevertheless, the weight of the instrument

<sup>125</sup> The numbers in the picture are: 1. tuning switches, 2. the caps of the tuning posts containing two pegs, 3. the lid, 4. tuning pegs, 5. bridges, 6. strings, and 7. fine-tuning screws.

<sup>126</sup> I was invited by the designer Li Taigang along with Zhang Yan and Wang Li, two prominent zheng performers at the time, to try his new model at a showcase conference held by Yingkou Music Instrument Factory in 1979. I purchased one key-changeable zheng and used it for many years with the Zhanyou Ensemble on such rigorous tours through the grasslands of Inner Mongolia and along the Chinese-Russian border by truck and boat.

eventually became a factor, especially as the lighter *Dunhuang* zheng became more commonplace. Although the ability to change keys quickly was an asset, professional musicians were able to change keys on the *Dunhuang* zheng almost as quickly by moving the bridges.



**Figure 3-7 21-string Yingkou key-changeable zheng, played by the author.**

In 1974 Zhang Kun of the Shenyang Musical Instrument Factory created a 24-string, five pedal pentatonic key-changeable zheng modeled after the orchestral harp. The pedals were located on a column placed under the right side of a large diagonal mechanism fixed midway along the top of the instrument. This mechanism supported small movable bridges that were operated by the foot pedals, which would move the bridges forward and back to change the pitch of the string (see Figure 3.8). Although several top performers tested this foot pedaled, key-changeable zheng, the weight and size of the instrument made it cumbersome to move, and therefore it did not become common.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Under the direction of the Ministry of Culture, a special instrument reform team known as the *Qin, Zheng, and Se Reform Unit* was active in Beijing from 1974 to 1975 to test a number of foot pedal, key-changeable zhengs. The team was led by zheng performer Kang Mianzong and also included Xiang Sihua.



Figure 3-8 Pentatonic 21-string pedal zheng (Liu 1992:206, photo by permission of the Chinese Music Research Institute).

### 3.3.3 Diatonic and Chromatic Key-changeable Zheng

During the same period that pentatonic key-changeable zheng were being invented, other musical instrument factories were devising diatonic key-changeable zhengs. Although the pentatonic key-changeable zheng was seen as an improvement, the restrictions of the pentatonic scale itself were still a hindrance to the instrument's use in the orchestra.<sup>128</sup> In particular, when large Chinese orchestras were being developed following the Western model, the zheng was the closest to fulfilling the role of a harp-like instrument. However, most compositions written for these orchestras were combinations of Chinese melodies with Western harmony, which required instruments capable of harmonic progression and modulation. As a result, a concerted effort was made to create a diatonic and chromatic key-changeable zheng to fulfill these functions.

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<sup>128</sup> In 1962 both Xiang Sihua and Fan Shang'e performed the new zheng arrangement of Haiqing *Nahe* (Falcon Catches Swan). Originally written in a diatonic scale for pipa, the performers had to use a pentatonic and a diatonic tuned zheng placed side by side to accommodate the various passages of the piece. This was interpreted as evidence of the zheng's deficiency.

As discussed in the previous chapter, tuning the open strings of the zheng to a pentatonic scale facilitated the use of moving tones, which were at the core of traditional practice. The impetus for the left hand technique was to create these moving tones such as *fa*↑ and *ti*↓ from bending the corresponding open strings of *mi* and *la*. Tuning to a diatonic scale with a fixed *fa* and *ti* is a fundamental change to the identity of the zheng. When discussing the standardization of Chinese scales, scholar Liu Yuanqing commented:

We admit that *fa*↑ and *ti*↓ are characteristic of the Chinese scale, but it is not the sole characteristic of Chinese music, it is only a small part. It does not play a decisive role as an ethnic characteristic. Europe originally did not have a unified scale [before using the twelve-tone scale], and the widespread use of the twelve-tone scale did not obliterate their ethnic characteristics. Obviously, if we lack the courage to abandon a minor “characteristic” that binds us and inhibits us from advancement, it will be impossible for us to advance the whole of our national music characteristic in a much larger arena (e.g., changing key and applying harmony). (1959:496, translated from the Chinese)

It is understandable that Chinese scholars had to follow the party line and government instructions, however, Li’s comments reveal a Western bias that was commonly held by Chinese music scholars and instrument reformers in this period.

The most well known of the diatonic key-changeable zhengs were the 36-string (see Figure 3.9) and 44-string instruments (see Figure 3.10), both created by Zhang Ziyue of the Suzhou Musical Instrument Factory of Jiangsu province in 1972. Both featured a pedestal with numerous pedals that depressed small padded hooks arranged in two rows between three main fixed bridges. As a pedal was depressed, the hooks would pull the appropriate strings down into contact with the second bridge to raise the pitch a semitone or the third bridge to raise a tone. Both instruments maintained the movable bridges of



the traditional zheng to allow for fine-tuning, something that was second nature to an accomplished player.



**Figure 3-9** Thirty-six string diatonic key-changeable zheng (Liu 1992:204, photo by permission of the Chinese Music Research Institute).



**Figure 3-10** Diatonic 44-string pedal zheng (Suzhou 1972, photo by permission of the Chinese Music Research Institute).

In 1978 He Baoquan, a zheng instructor at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, designed a 49-string chromatic key-changeable zheng named the *Butterfly (dieshi) zheng*, due to its shape (He 1981:14) (see Figure 3.11). The *Butterfly zheng* was constructed with

the main fixed bridge at the centre of the instrument with soundboards on either side. The majority of the strings were stretched in both directions from the fixed bridge over a series of movable bridges to pass over a nut on each side of the soundboard. The main strings were tuned to a pentatonic scale on each side of the instrument, a semi-tone apart, with D sharp and D as the lowest pitches respectively. In addition, there was one extra string per octave on both sides that rose from their own individual bridges on top of the sound board, then crossed a movable bridge to end at their own individual nut. These additional strings then provided a hexatonic scale: D sharp-F-G-G sharp-A sharp-c on the right side, D-E-F sharp-A-B-c sharp on the left side, together furnishing a full chromatic selection of pitches.



**Figure 3-11 Butterfly Zheng (Liu 1992:208, photo by permission of the Chinese Music Research Institute).**

Although the idea of making a key-changeable zheng was very popular from the 1960s to the 1970s, these experiments were not considered successful overall. Most of

the players who tried these new instruments did not favour them. According to Xiang Sihua who tested the *Butterfly zheng*, only one pentatonic key (D) could be played comfortably on this instrument. To play in other pentatonic keys the player had to skip over strings, which was not intuitive with traditional hand positions (2000, personal communication). As a result, the zheng has played only a minor role in the orchestra providing occasional “colour” (mainly with glissandi), a position it still holds today in many cases.

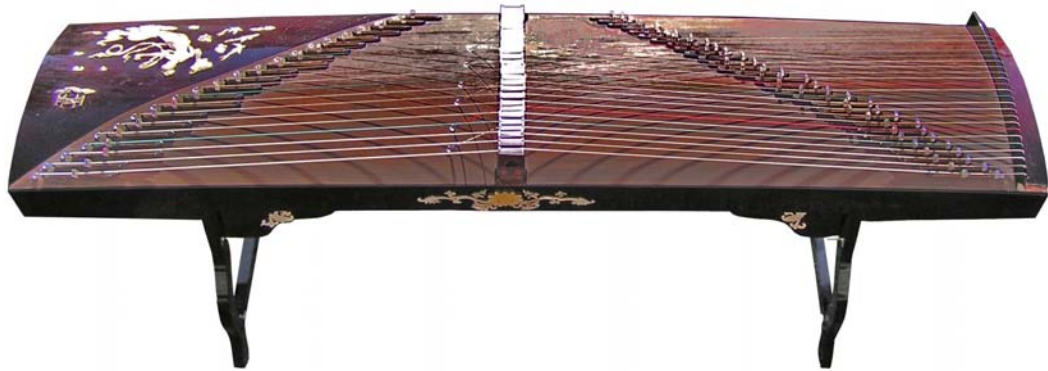
The tuning mechanisms of key-changeable zheng were seldom accurate and often quickly put the instruments out of tune. In order to accommodate key changes, strings were tuned to twelve-tone equal temperament. However, most zheng performers were trained to tune the zheng by ear in just intonation using *sanfen sunyi fa*<sup>129</sup> (adding and subtracting one-third), an equivalent method to the Pythagorean circle of fifths. Tuning by ear to just intonation was integral to the training of most zheng performers, even though most were probably not consciously aware of the theory behind it. Playing a key-changeable zheng in equal temperament challenged the ear of many performers, who then constantly tried to readjust the tuning to match the just intonation in their ear. The consequences were frustrating and disastrous.

Since the 1980s attempts to build new types of zheng declined, though experimentation in zheng morphology continues. Recent experiments include a “W” shaped chromatic version of the *Butterfly zheng*, manufactured by Pan Haixin and Pan Haiwei of Hebei province since 2000, which features strings arranged in a diatonic scale

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<sup>129</sup> *Sanfen sunyi fa*, documented in *Guanzi* (Book of Master Guan, c 645 BC), is a method of calculating temperament by string length. If the total length of a string is divided into three parts evenly, and the whole length of the string carries a basic tone, by adding and subtracting one-third of the string a pure fifth and a pure fourth lower are produced, creating the five tones *gong*, *shang*, *jue*, *zhi*, and *yu*. In the same book the calculation obtains twelve complete pitches, known as six *lü* (律) and six *lü* (呂).

on one half of the instrument while on the other there is a pentatonic scale, together creating a full chromatic instrument (see Figure 3.12).



**Figure 3-12 “W” shaped Zheng.**

The two decades of the 1960s and 1970s were the most active period for the modification and modernization of the zheng in the instrument’s two thousand year history. These changes were ultimately in response to the intense political activity of the period and the need for the music and instruments of the time to reflect these changes. They were also the result of corresponding shifts in musical content, performance styles, and social context.

Although the initial motivation was to design a new zheng that was bigger,<sup>130</sup> louder, more versatile, and able to modulate, the end result was the creation of new instruments designed for specific purposes. The *Dunhaung* zheng has become the most popular of the new instruments and is certainly louder, larger, and more versatile than previous instruments, yet it still maintains the essential design of the traditional zheng with moveable bridges under each string and the ability to manipulate the sound plucked with the right hand by depressing the same string on the left of the bridges, allowing for

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<sup>130</sup> While 21-string zheng are standard, 23, 26, and up to 50 stringed zheng are also found.

moving tones. Unfortunately the complex, highly nuanced voice of the silk string zheng has been virtually silenced after two thousand years,<sup>131</sup> though hopefully it will be revived in some form in recognition of the essential voice of Chinese culture it embodies. The 16-steel string zheng, although not a mainstream instrument, is still valued for its long sustain and subtle nuances.

Musical instruments as artifacts are arguably one of the most identifiable markers of cultural identity. Some zheng scholars, especially those of the older generations, believe that the morphology of the zheng should be left unchanged. In my conversation with Zhou Yanjia, he addressed this issue with a heavy heart: “Our zheng is twenty-seven hundred years old and it still cannot settle into a stable form. We should utilize its merit instead of imposing musical ideas that the instrument was not created for” (2009, personal communication). Whereas the traditional zheng was designed to create highly sophisticated and nuanced horizontal music (a single melodic line), there was a drive to reform the instrument to also be capable of the vertical (Western harmonic) musical expression of modern compositions and orchestras. This led to a number of instruments whose shape and function transformed them into new instruments, including the button, pedal, and butterfly zheng. These then fulfilled all the original goals but made the instruments impractical for performing traditional works.

In two short decades many new instruments have been developed under the name of zheng, each with their own abilities, forms, functions, and virtues. Hopefully with time they will be valued for their idiosyncrasies, and will remain to give voice to a wide range of musical possibilities for the zheng.

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<sup>131</sup> Silk strings are still used for the Korean *kayagŭm* today. Compared to modern zheng strings, *kayagŭm* silk strings are not as bright and resonant, but have a more complex timbre.

### **3.4 The Development of Composition, New Techniques, and the Transformation of Musical Style**

Composition constitutes the most significant component of the zheng's modernization, exemplifying the impact of the social and political atmosphere and its interconnection with the instrument's institutionalization, professionalization, and morphological reform. Issues regarding composition discussed in this section include compositional method, programmatic content, and technical developments that played an important role in the zheng's musical style.

The professionalization of traditional zheng musicians dramatically increased the instrument's exposure on a national level, which in turn spawned a flurry of solo zheng compositions. While each work brought new compositional ideas, techniques, and sounds to the instrument moving it forward with each fresh vision, they all shared a common theme—depicting the lives of working class. “Our literature and art are for the masses,” Mao Zedong asserted, “first and foremost for the workers, peasants, and soldiers” (1942:804, translated from the Chinese). Mao's dogma was later iterated by Zhou Yang, the deputy minister of the Cultural Ministry in 1953 with further instructions: “[Artistic works] ought to educate the people with lofty patriotism and socialist ideology” (1953:3, translated from the Chinese). I should point out that although Mao's entire tenet directly emanated from Marx and Lenin through the Russian revolution in the early twentieth century, music as a means to serve social and moral principles is a concept of Confucianism, as already discussed in the previous chapter. Whereas Confucian ideology was strongly attacked and banned by the Communist party since 1949, it seems beyond

doubt that China's Confucian cultural roots spawned a fertile soil for Marxist and Leninist ideology to flourish in China. In compliance with this political imperative, new compositions for the zheng from the 1950s to the 1970s unavoidably bore a strong political imprint.

### **3.4.1 *Celebrating the Harvest: A Departure from Traditional Composition***

In the early 1950s the Communist Party set forth its new cultural policy of “revolutionizing, nationalizing, and massifying” (*geming hua, minzu hua, qunzhong hua*) in an effort to create new works that reflected a new life, and to replace traditional music. Yang Yinliu pointed out that traditional music “reflects the old life of ancient feudal and capitalist societies,” and therefore was no longer suitable. In making the new, “we are actually conducting socialist transformation of the traditional music” (1964:91, translated from the Chinese). Following this policy, the first wave of new compositions emerged throughout the country.

Compositions written in this period were mostly composed by the zheng performers themselves, many of whom were traditional musicians who had become conservatory teachers or performers recruited by state owned musical ensembles. Most of these musicians felt indebted to the government for giving a new life to their art and themselves. In exchange, they wanted to transform their old music and the folk image of their instrument into something that belonged to the modernized society and art community. As Zhao Yuzhai expresses: “Born in the old society, I followed my teacher to busk everywhere. I would have never dreamed of being escalated to become an instructor at an advanced educational institute. The music conservatory opened my eyes,

like a bee that finally finds nectar. I was studying literature, piano and music theory voraciously. Gradually, as my knowledge was enriched and my vision was widened, I realized that problems existed in zheng's artistic expression" (1984:62, translated from the Chinese).

In 1955 Zhao Yuzhai composed *Qing Feng Nian* (Celebrating the Harvest), fully scored with over two hundred measures and multiple sections. To portray "a thriving agricultural scene in the countryside" (Zhao 1984:63, translated from the Chinese), the main melodic materials are derived and developed from six measures of a *baban* melody as well as from a *qinshu* narrative song from rural Shandong. With the application of many distinctive traditional Shandong techniques such as *hua* (flower) or glissando, tremolo picking with the thumb, wide vibrato, and idiosyncratic bends, the piece possesses an unambiguous "earthy" flavour distinct to Shandong.

This work contained a significant development for the instrument that affected the traditional function of the left hand: the introduction of harmony. Before composing the piece, Zhao posed these questions to himself:

Why can't the zheng play chords like the piano to reinforce and support the harmony? The zheng has a wide pitch range, why can't it play long glissandi like the harp to enrich the colour of the music and to add atmosphere?... I believe by borrowing performance techniques from other instruments, the zheng will increase its ability to express; it will increase the range of its dynamics, therefore, gaining the flavour of the current time... [In composing *Celebrating the Harvest*], I wanted to pay attention to absorb and invent new techniques, in order to meet the demands of new content and to make the music more visual. (1984:63-4, translated from the Chinese)



The composer's intent of adapting new techniques from Western instruments can be seen in his inclusion of chords and harmonic intervals in the piece.<sup>132</sup> The piece opens with two hands plucking alternately (see Figure 3.13); in addition, passages of glissandi are played by the left hand as a separate voice in response to the main melody (see Figure 3.14). "Adding *hua* on the left hand," as Zhao explained, "helps to add dynamic changes, as if scenes of celebration arise from all directions, portraying an excellent harvest" (Zhao 1984:67, translated from the Chinese).

**Qing Feng Nian**  
(Celebrating the Harvest)

Zhao Yuzhai, 1955

(Intro.)

cont'd

**Figure 3-13** The opening section of *Celebrating the Harvest*, exhibiting the early development of two hands plucking the zheng.

<sup>132</sup> The left hand plucking technique had already been applied in traditional Zhejiang style. However, Zhao might not have been aware of this at the time he was composing this piece. Most of the chords played by the left hand are accompaniment to the melody carried on the right hand.

In 1956 Zhao Yuzhai performed *Celebrating the Harvest* at the First National Music Week in Beijing, the biggest music festival showcasing new compositions. The piece received very positive reviews from music critics, praising Zhao Yuzhai as “an innovative performer” who “liberated his left hand to play melody and harmony simultaneously and enriched the life of this ancient instrument” (Li 1956:8, translated from the Chinese).

**Qing Feng Nian**  
(Celebrating the Harvest) Zhao Yuzhai, 1955

$\text{♩} = 160$

cont'd

Figure 3-14 Excerpt from *Celebrating the Harvest*, exhibiting the transformation of glissando from the right hand to the left hand.

Zhao Yuzhai's innovative compositional method and performance techniques are representative of many zheng compositions written at the time, which demonstrate a similar desire by other composers for creating a new voice for the zheng. Influenced by this approach, some musicians even began to apply harmony to traditional pieces as well.<sup>133</sup>

It should be pointed out that the “liberation” of the left hand challenged its traditional role while marking a divergence in zheng music, pursuing a stronger, faster, and more dynamic expression. As the left hand was increasingly used to pluck strings, new compositions began favouring fewer moving tones, and some of the notes that traditionally and stylistically should have been treated as moving tones became unadorned. This shift of function of the left hand transformed zheng music from horizontal music stressing melodic subtlety and nuance to vertical music stressing harmony and counterpoint.

As new methods of composition were introduced, the use of *baban* as a fundamental skeletal form disappeared in new zheng music. In my survey of writings during the 1950s and 1960s, I found very little discussion or mention of support for the use of *baban*, or any exploration of its adaptability to new compositions. Only one article came to light on this issue, in which renowned Chinese music scholar Yang Yinliu answered questions on *qupai* by government cultural officials:

Is a single *qupai* able to express different emotions? Some comrades have doubts, believing using a few fixed *qupai* to express various emotions was unreasonable and unscientific. In fact the term “fixed” here is not totally accurate. The truly fixed part of *qupai* is only the melodic frame, [while] the details in melodic development are not fixed and what is most relevant

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<sup>133</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter, my teacher Gao Zicheng arranged and added a four-chord short introduction and ending to *Gaoshan Liushui* (High Mountain and Flowing Water), a Shandong *baban* suite, and composed *Fengxiang Ge Bianzou Qu* (Variations on Melody of *Fengxiang*).

to express emotions is exactly this development... One comrade asked me: “Was the reason for the unlimited variations of folk *qupai* tunes because of its imprecise notation?”... [The variations] were a conscious choice responding to the requirements for different content. Although [new] pieces should be composed to demonstrate new life, [we] should still borrow existing compositional forms of folk music. (1953:29-30, translated from the Chinese)

Clearly there was a lack of understanding of the nature of traditional composition and the function of *qupai* forms such as *baban* in musical development among government cultural officials and the public. As such, it is not surprising that *qupai* such as *baban* ceased to serve as a compositional structure in the modernized music environment. Ironically, in Maoist China Western compositional methods were adopted to create new works as part of “rescuing the heritage,” while composers abandoned the traditional Chinese compositional forms.

As discussed in Chapter Two, musicians were composers in traditional zheng practice, as music was created through extemporization over *qupai* forms and folk melodies and the repertoire was developed over time. Although almost all zheng compositions from this time were still written by zheng performers, the introduction and practice of a Western concept of composition eliminated these spontaneous elements from zheng composition and performance. Rather than allowing for improvisational moments, pieces became fully composed and scored. This was the first step in the separation of musician from composer in the performance practice of the zheng.

### **3.4.2 *Battling the Typhoon: A New Model for Zheng Composition***

*Zhan Taifeng* (Battling the Typhoon, 1965) is another landmark composition for the zheng, written a decade after *Celebrating the Harvest* by Wang Changyuan (b.1945,

see Figure 3.15). This piece depicts a scene of a group of longshoremen rushing to unload cargo as a typhoon approaches the dock. *Battling the Typhoon* represents the typical compositional style and standard of zheng technical performance developed in the 1960s. In analyzing the compositional and performance aspects of the piece, a parallel examination of the composer's life surrounding the composition will also be given through which an ethnographic perspective will reveal the inextricable interconnections between national politics and Wang's individual artistic journey as both a composer and musician.



**Figure 3-15 Wang Changyuan in 1984 at Kent State University, Ohio (photo by permission of Gerry Simon).**

*Battling the Typhoon* was composed when Wang was a freshman at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music studying the zheng with her father Wang Xunzhi.<sup>134</sup> Wang recalls that as part of the school curriculum the students at the Conservatory were required to complete a certain amount of labour at either factories or on farms.<sup>135</sup>

I went to work at a dock every Thursday. At the time, I was planning to write a piece for the coming Spring of Shanghai.<sup>136</sup> When the workers knew that I was looking for compositional materials, they told me stories about their work and experiences of overcoming the destructive forces of a typhoon, which occurred often in Shanghai. These stories touched me. I also personally experienced a typhoon there... I first named the piece *Qiangxian* (To Rescue), but the deputy director of our school said the title was not heroic enough, and asked me to change it to *Zhan Taifeng* (Battling the Typhoon). (2011, personal communication)

Wang successfully premiered *Battling the Typhoon* at the Spring of Shanghai Festival and performed it again at the Guangzhou Trade Fair, the largest expo in China at the time. However, when the Chairman of the Communist Party Mao Zedong (1893-1976) instigated the Cultural Revolution (1966-76),<sup>137</sup> except for a few pieces all previous music was immediately prohibited from being performed, giving way to new

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<sup>134</sup> Wang Changyuan began learning the zheng with her father at the age of nine, and enrolled in the Affiliated Middle School of the Shanghai Conservatory in 1960 to continue her studies with her father. During that time she assisted him to produce fingering indications for traditional Zhejiang pieces and to create new compositions in the traditional Zhejiang idiom, such as *Haiqing Nahe* (Falcon Catching Swan) and *Lin Chong Yeben* (Lin Chong Elopes in the Night, 1962). After graduation she became the zheng soloist for the Shanghai Opera House, Shanghai Orchestra, and other art groups in China. Wang Changyuan went to the Kent State University in 1984 and has since moved to New York City to teach and perform the zheng.

<sup>135</sup> The initiative to send university students to work part-time in factories or on farms was put forward by Zhou Enlai, the Chinese Prime Minister, in his *State Government Work Report* of 1964. In the report Zhou stressed that the goal was “labourizing the intellectuals while intellectualizing the working class” (1964, translated from the Chinese).

<sup>136</sup> Spring of Shanghai is an annual music festival held in Shanghai. Created in 1960, the festival is the oldest and one of the most prestigious in the PRC.

<sup>137</sup> The Cultural Revolution, also known as the Proletarian Cultural Revolution, was a political campaign on the cultural front. It was initially designed by Mao Zedong as a political cleansing within the Party, as Mao believed that in all the years since the PRC was founded there existed many kinds of anti-revolutionists in the Party, including “right opportunists,” “bourgeoisie,” “anti-Party,” “anti-socialists,” “modern revisionists,” and people “who follow Capitalism.” The Cultural Revolution soon turned the nation into turmoil, affecting the lives of every family. The ten years of the Cultural Revolution has proven to be the darkest time in recent Chinese history.

revolutionary songs and the eight revolutionary model theatrical works (*yangban xi*).<sup>138</sup> Music conservatories suspended their teaching activities as the educational system was paralyzed nationwide. Wang Changyuan's father was arrested for his past work experience as a banker under the Republic reign. Wang eventually went to work at the Shanghai Opera House as a singer, forming a small narrative singing group with several female singer/musicians, including Min Huifen (b.1945), one of the most prominent *erhu* performers of the time.

Late in 1972 the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra put on a special performance<sup>139</sup> in Beijing for Jiang Qing, Mao Zedong's wife, who was then the chief commander taking charge of the country's cultural and art affairs. Wang's group was chosen to perform as a vocal ensemble in order to extend the length of the concert, and in addition each musician was asked to perform a solo piece on her instrument as they were also formally trained instrumentalists (Wang 2011, personal communication). Wang Changyuan thus had an opportunity to perform *Battling the Typhoon* again after its premiere seven years before.

Jiang Qing was very excited about the piece and declared that "*Battling the Typhoon* is worth promoting"<sup>140</sup> (Jiang 1973), as it was as a perfect example to guide and animate the development of Chinese instrumental music, as well as to fight against so-

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<sup>138</sup> The eight revolutionary model theatrical works (six Beijing opera and two ballet works) were produced under the direct supervision of Jiang Qing during the early stages of the Cultural Revolution. Most of these works were initially created before the Cultural Revolution, but were heavily revised to portray and idealize communist revolutionary history. Ironically, Beijing opera employed a mix of Western orchestra with traditional Chinese instruments.

<sup>139</sup> The orchestra was requested to perform a symphonic choir arrangement of *Zhiqiu Weihushan* (Taking the Tiger Mountain by Strategy), one of the eight model operas.

<sup>140</sup> According to Wang Changyuan, Jiang Qing mentioned *Battling the Typhoon* on many occasions. This statement was made on August 5th, 1973 in Jiang's meeting with the top Chinese pianist Liu Shikun (b. 1939), who was just released from five years in prison. Jiang instructed Liu to arrange *Battling the Typhoon* as a piano concerto.

called “non-titled” music.<sup>141</sup> Jiang’s approval brought unprecedented attention to *Battling the Typhoon*, greatly elevating its status to become the model for modern composition on traditional Chinese musical instruments.<sup>142</sup> A substantial editorial was published in *The People’s Daily* (*Renmin Ribao*), the official newspaper and voice of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, praising the composition as having “a practical significance in further promoting the reform of traditional music, and proves that instrumental music, with or without a title, is bound to, and must reflect a certain degree of social content” (Yin 1974:4, translated from the Chinese).

Despite the acclaim her composition received, Wang Changyuan was initially excluded from joining the National Art Troupe (*Zhongguo Yishu Tuan*), the most prestigious Chinese art group at the time, for her “tainted” family background.<sup>143</sup> However, this changed after Jiang Qing heard another zheng player perform *Battling with Typhoon* at a National Art Troup performance, expressing that it was “not as strong” (Wang 2011, personal communication). Following Jiang Qing’s enquiry, the Party cadres revealed that Wang Changyuan’s father had died in prison, so she was cleared for joining the National Art Troup. Wang’s performance of *Battling with Typhoon* as part of the

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<sup>141</sup> In 1973 two European musicians were invited to perform in China. A report on the concert sent to Jiang Qing written by the Central Conservatory of Music stated: “Most of the compositions have no titles nor clear content. They only express certain colour and emotion” (Ju 2002:118, translated from the Chinese). This report sparked a nationwide “mass criticism” (*da pipan*) against non-titled music.

<sup>142</sup> The overwhelming success of *Battling the Typhoon* made the piece the most frequently heard instrumental work on nationwide radio between 1973 and 1975, and a “must have” piece for Chinese Art Troupes visiting overseas. Its score was included in volume 7 of the *Wenyi Jiemu* (Art Program), a special score collection of nine instrumental compositions edited by the Chief Cultural Group of the State Council in July, 1974. *Battling the Typhoon* paved the way for other traditional Chinese instrumental compositions to be accepted by the government, and to be performed in public. These compositions included the *suona* solo *Shancun Laile Shouhuo Yun* (A Shop Assistant Coming to the Village) by Zhang Xiaofeng (1972), the *pipa* concerto *Caoyuan Xiao Jiemei* (The Little Sisters from the Grassland) by Liu Dehai and Wu Zuqiang (1973), and the *dizi* solo *Yangbian Cuima Yunliang Mang* (Riding the Horses to Delivering Crops) by Wei Zhongxian (1973).

<sup>143</sup> The group toured the United States in 1974, in exchange with an earlier visit to China by the Philadelphia Philharmonic Orchestra. Both visits were highlights in contemporary Chinese history, were highly politicized, and used as diplomatic means to repair the relationship between the two countries.



concert program of the National Art Troup was filmed by Beijing Film Studios (*Beijing Dianying Chipian Chang*) and released in an art documentary entitled *Baihua Zhengyan* (Hundred Flowers Blooming, 1976).<sup>144</sup> Apart from the modern revolutionary dramas, this film is the first, if not the only, music project that was filmed and distributed nationally.

Part of the success of *Battling the Typhoon* was the music's literal interpretation of the external events in the storyline clearly laid out in the program notes, scene-to-scene and gesture-to-gesture. Section A is enthusiastic, painting a busy working scene before the typhoon arrives; section B depicts the battle between the longshoremen and the forces of nature; section C's lyrical melody suggests the triumph in a bright clear sky and sunshine; and finally the recapitulation praises the workers' heroic spirit and joy of victory. Through the program notes directly decoding the sound materials, listeners are expected to be able to understand and follow the messages unambiguously. This was a tool that the Chinese Government found very useful to deliver political messages, as Mittler points out:

Music itself cannot possibly stand for an ideology for it does not speak the simple and straightforward language of the ideologues. It cannot by itself speak for or against any kind of regime. Its message is ambiguous if not arbitrary. Since this makes up its potential subversive strength, it is manipulated by those who govern by infusing words and texts, hence constructing safe and correct meaning. In order to tackle the implied threat music poses to them, Chinese governments simply supply their own explanation: interpreting and categorizing, by semanticizing the non-semantic in music, by speaking the unspeakable. (1997: 61-62)

Programmatic content, as discussed in Chapter Two, was an integral part of traditional Chinese music, with each poetic title or theme suggesting an idealized artistic mood (*yijing*). This content was used as a guideline for performers to apply appropriate

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<sup>144</sup> Available online at [http://v.youku.com/v\\_playlist/f3594195o1p11.html](http://v.youku.com/v_playlist/f3594195o1p11.html), *Battling with Typhoon* is found at the eighty-one minute mark.

aesthetics and for the audience to follow the music. Recalling Shi Zhaoyuan's quote from Chapter Two, "Musicians often recreated based on their own understanding of the music...therefore, the new pieces were different from person to person. They reflected the musician's mastery of technique and music, as well as their artistic achievement" (1985:6, translated from the Chinese). The direct relationship of musical gesture to storyline laid out in the program notes in *Battling the Typhoon* marked a distinct departure from the past: in this case the political message—the heroic spirit of the working class—is delivered directly. "What could be more straightforward? Every worker would understand the piece in a safe and proper way and would not be led astray by his own emotions and thoughts" (Mittler 1997:63).

### **3.4.3 Artistic Expression while Negotiating Politics**

In his article "Music as Propaganda" Arnold Perris poses the question: "Can an artistic mind function fully if bound to the strictures of a political ideology?" According to Perris, an outsider might judge that "extramusical controls must ultimately diminish quality and inhibit imagination" (1983:1). He further suggests:

The artist of China must be brought to such a uniformity in the face of artistic individuality. But cultural and political awareness continue to stimulate the artists' desires for control of their craft. In a doctrinaire government the artist, like all citizens, are explicitly and systematically politicized. The more dogmatic and autocratic the state censorship, the more that artists—or some artists—will struggle, dissemble and compromise their artistic judgments and preferences. Is it possible that an authoritarian regime can long mold all artists into "one mode of expression...one color"... and to prohibit all alternatives? Mao observed that a people cannot be satisfied by the phenomena of their daily routine; they crave art to lift them outside themselves. Artists are among these same people. Their aesthetic needs by the nature of their uncommon talent are more vivid, more imaginative, than those of the masses. (ibid.:18)

As Perris suggests, outside of China compositions such as *Celebrating the Harvest* and *Battling the Typhoon* can be easily regarded as propaganda, since they share a common political undertone reflected in their titles, programmatic themes, and program notes.<sup>145</sup> It is true that within the Chinese cultural environment conformity with the state politics was not negotiable, and that demonstrating an individual artistic voice through the creation of music content became unfeasible. Yet, one common statement from my conversations with several prominent zheng composers/performers who contributed greatly to zheng composition in this period is that they all wanted to create something idiosyncratic from traditional works and each other's pieces.

One method employed by zheng artists to maintain their artistic integrity while not running afoul of the cultural mandate was to borrow, or even directly quote, melodic materials from “approved” folk songs or previously composed vocal pieces.<sup>146</sup> Creating new compositions upon an existing popular melody was a common practice in Chinese music, and the making of instrumental zheng versions of popular songs increased the attractiveness of the instrument amongst common people.

Another effective method for zheng artists to “lift” themselves from the “daily routine” of political control over their creations was to find new methods of expression through the innovative use of techniques, be it the transformation of traditional

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<sup>145</sup> Although Perris's work cited here is about China during Mao's time, the philosophical underpinning is broader, which begs the question whether an artist is *ever* really free of the political, cultural, or intellectual milieu in which he or she is active, or whether an artist can ever really be fully aware of the social, cultural, political pressures put upon them. These are broader musicological issues that are beyond the scope of this discussion.

<sup>146</sup> The main melodies of the zheng solo *Dongting Xingge* (The New Tune of Dongting Lake) and *Liuyang He* (Liuyang River) are from the previously composed vocal version by Bai Chengren and Tang Biguang respectively. *Xueshan Chunxiao* (Snow Capped Mountain in the Spring Morning) borrowed Tibetan melodies, and the main melodic theme of *Caoyuan Yingxiong Xiao Jiemei* (The Heroic Sisters From the Grassland) comes from the theme song composed by Wu Yingju for the same titled cartoon movie made in 1965.

techniques, adapting techniques from other instruments, or the development of new ones. When discussing the creation of *Battling the Typhoon*, Wang Changyuan said: “Most traditional zheng pieces emphasize feelings and nature. I wanted to write a modern piece and about people” (2011, personal communication). Thus to represent the powerful heroics of the longshoremen, and based on Zhejiang zheng techniques, Wang innovated several new techniques in the composition: 1) *diantan*, the first finger of both hands rapidly alternating plucking each string, which create speed and intensity to the melody; 2) combining the *diantan* with the right middle finger inward strumming (*sao*), which increased the dynamics from forte to fortissimo (see Figure 3.16);<sup>147</sup> 3) glissandi on the left side of the bridges—the untuned side—to suggest “the spirit of evil” inherent in the furious waves pounding against the dock (Wang 2011, personal communication);<sup>148</sup> and 4) right hand tremolo (*yao*) with the left hand pulling along the string to imitate the sound of the howling wind. It is not surprising that within the zheng world the importance of *Battling with Typhoon* was largely due to its innovative use of flamboyant new techniques.

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<sup>147</sup> *Sao* is a *pipa* technique where the player strums four strings simultaneously to create a loud sound with excitement. The technique of *sao* was often used in the traditional *wuqu* (martial) repertoire of the *pipa*, such as the famous *Shimian Maifu* (Ambush All Sides).

<sup>148</sup> In my interview with Wang Changyuan, she said that the traditional glissando (on the right side of the bridges) “sounds too nice,” which cannot represent “bad things.” This notion that a glissando on the tuned side (pentatonic) is “too nice” and that glissandi on the untuned side represent “evil” suggests a symbolic relationship of the order-disorder polarity between scales and randomness, and shows that the power of mode/tonality is used to convey ideas and aesthetics of group norming. “Unorderedness” as evil is an important theme in Chinese culture, which has also been shown in the resistance to the development of Western style new music in China in more recent decades.

**Zhan Taifeng**  
(*Battling the Typhoon*)

Wang Changyuan, 1965

♩=160

*f*

*ff*

*Sua Sua Sua Sua Sua Sua Sua Sua Sua Sua Sua*

cont'd

≡ = middle finger strum of multiple strings  
\ = index finger plucking inward

**Figure 3-16** An excerpt from *Battling the Typhoon*, showing the combined techniques of two fingers rapid plucking and inward strum.

What followed was a large number of compositions stressing new or adapted techniques, mostly written in the 1970s by other disciples of Wang Xunzhi of the Zhejiang style. Like Wang Changyuan, they extended traditional Zhejiang techniques, such as *sidian* (fast right hand plucking in group of four notes) and tremolo (*yao*), to create greater power, precision, and speed.

The most significant innovative zheng technique was adapted from the piano and harp. Before studying the zheng most of the composer/performers were trained pianists,

and it was therefore natural and intuitive for them to adapt piano techniques, especially using the left hand for arpeggios and chords while the right hand held the melody. A pianist and harpist, Zhang Yan's compositions *Honghu Shui, Lang da Lang* (The Waves of Lake Hong, 1974) and *Caoyuan Yingxiong Xiao Jiemei* (The Heroic Sisters From the Grassland, 1974) heightened the use of arpeggios and chords to a degree reminiscent of the Russian romantic style (see Figure 3.17 and 3.18). Zhang's compositions were the most challenging zheng works of the 1970s, elevating technique to a new level; as a result, her influence was widespread and these techniques have subsequently become standard, utilized in many other zheng compositions.<sup>149</sup>



Figure 3-17 An excerpt from *Waves of Lake Hong*.

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<sup>149</sup> As a young zheng player who had only studied with traditional musicians, I was struck by Wang Changyuan's use of modern techniques in *Battling the Typhoon* and realized I had to study with a teacher who had these techniques. Therefore, from 1977 to 1978 I studied with Zhang Yan while she was the zheng soloist and harpist with the Shandong Provincial Song and Dance Troupe orchestra. My intense study with Zhang has laid the technical foundation for my performances of contemporary zheng and *koto* works.

Caoyuan Yingxiong Xiao Jiemei  
(The Heroic Sisters From the Grassland)

Liu Qichao and Zhang Yan, 1974

The image shows a musical score for piano, consisting of three systems of music. The first system begins with a tempo marking of quarter note = 64 and the instruction 'expressivo'. The second system includes markings for 'rit.' (ritardando) and 'a tempo'. The third system includes 'rit.' and 'cont'd'. The score features complex chordal textures and rhythmic patterns, including triplets in the bass line of the second and third systems.

Figure 3-18 An excerpt from *The Heroic Sisters From the Grassland*.

Modernization and Westernization greatly influenced the development of the zheng’s performance techniques in contemporary Chinese history. Yet undermining the artistic movement was the drastic change to China’s social and political structure that yoked this traditional art form to political objectives. The new political function of music stimulated and propelled the evolution of zheng music. However, in order to represent the working classes in their compositions, composers abandoned the zheng’s traditional character of “nuance” and “subtlety” in pursuit of a direct, powerful sound. As a result, performance techniques were developed to accommodate more notes, increased speed, and forceful dynamics. These developments stimulated artistic achievements designed to propound government political ideology—what was created was “correct music” for the people.

### 3.5 “Serving the People”—New Performance Contexts

The concept of using “correct music” to guide people’s behaviour is deeply rooted in Chinese culture. The idea of using music “to unify the people’s hearts and put forth the way of Governance” was an integral part of Confucian ideology.<sup>150</sup> Throughout imperial history Chinese rulers adopted and adapted this principle for their governance, establishing a new and correct tonal centre—*huangzhong* (yellow bell)—for each new dynasty. As an aesthetic the notion that correct music can elevate people’s moral standards and create a harmonious society permeated all levels of society, and it became the guidance for individual’s music practice.

As discussed in Chapter Two, traditionally amateur musicians in various occupations—including merchants, intellectuals, and itinerant musicians—played the *zheng*. They believed that the music they performed was refined music (*yayue*), which embraced the essence of Confucian ideology: equilibrium (*zhong*) and harmony (*he*). By participating in music activities directly, they believed self-cultivation could be achieved. By creating and sharing music with each other within a community, individuals bonded and social harmony could be generated, as the music brought a sense of collective

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<sup>150</sup> Confucius states: “Music (*yue*) is that which arises from music (*yin*). Its root lied in the touching off of men’s hearts by [external] things. For this reason, for he whose heart is touched off to sorrow, his sound (*sheng*) is exhausted and decaying; for he whose heart is touched off to happiness, his sound is spacious and leisurely; for he whose heart is touched off to joy, his sound is expansive and far reaching; for he whose heart is touched off to anger, his sound is coarse and unyielding; for he whose heart is touched off to reverence, his sound is straightforward and upright; for he whose heart is touched off to love, his sound is harmonious and gentle. These six are not [inner] nature— they are set in motion only after being touched off by things. For this reason, the former kings were cautious in what was used to touch them off (the people). Thus Ritual (*li*) was used to direct their wills, Music (*yue*) was used to harmonized their voices (*sheng*), Administration (*zheng*) was used to unify their actions, and Punishment (*xing*) was used to prevent their violations. Ritual, Music, Punishment, and Administration—their ends are one: they are that which is used to unify the people’s hearts and put forth the Way of Governance” (Gongsun c. first century BC, translated by Cook 1995:27-28). Cook commented: “The last part of this section anticipates...the use of Music as a motivator of the populace...the emotions of the people could be channeled down the proper path” (ibid.: 29).



identity which reaffirmed a communal connection of place, language, and customs rooted in the centuries-old culture.

In the course of building a new society, the Communist Party implemented policies for the development of new art to replace the old. Instead of allowing common people to continue the communal approach of practicing music as generations of Chinese rulers had allowed, Mao worried that “A deep affection for specific musical works, such as folk and popular music and the social setting in which such music is typically performed, may be inimical to the new society” (Perris 1983:5). However, while taking a forceful position against tradition, the Confucian model of using music as a way to govern was paradoxically adopted to set the ideological foundation for the formulation of the new policies, taking control of making the right music and bringing it to the masses through the use of professionals. Within this new cultural and sociopolitical context, zheng performance was promptly “elevated” from the previous community based practice to a concert art form.

Following Mao’s instruction of “serving the working class,” musicians in China were brought to the frontlines to perform music for workers, peasants, and soldiers. I was one of these performers. Having joined a professional orchestra in the army towards the end of the Cultural Revolution (1975), I was sent to wherever soldiers were to perform for them and their civilian neighbours, which were most often common villagers. Although most of these performances occurred in rural or remote settings, I was usually elevated on a stage or a space was created separating me from the audience, who usually either stood or sat on the ground. Off stage the performers were treated as stars. Often soldiers would line up along the road to welcome us. Although we were supposedly

“comrades” and essentially equal under the Communist ideal, a social hierarchy existed. As performers our duty was to serve the audience, yet the performance staging, separation of audience and performer, and treatment by the audiences gave me and my performer colleagues a sense that we had privileges over our audience. Ironically, this was the time when the old generation of traditional zheng players was condemned as “elitist.” Their music and the old performance practices were considered part of *sijiu* (“the four olds”: old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits) of the exploiting classes, and were therefore thrown away.<sup>151</sup> Yet the Party placed me in what seemed to be the very position that the Party disdained. As the old generation of zheng musicians was pushed aside, the new performance practices “lifted” zheng performance from the traditional communal context to a form of high art. As the performer was elevated for being a special individual with a special skill, a new social and professional hierarchy was consequently created.

The shift from the previous community based music practice to that of the concert performance was a major paradigm shift for the zheng’s performance practice. In the self-entertainment based practice, the performer and audience were often one in the same, which allowed the participants to pick up an instrument and play or to sit and listen, a relationship lying between performer-participant and listener-participant. Usually everyone sat together so that there was no stage and clear separation between the performers and non-performers.

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<sup>151</sup> Beside Wang Xunzhi (mentioned earlier this chapter), many traditional zheng musicians, such as Cao Dongfu from Henan and Zhao Yuzhai from Shandong, were persecuted. Guo Ying from Chaozhou was sent to do manual labour. Zhao Yuzhai told me his only collection of *gongche* scores of the Shandong repertoire was burned by Red Guards (1978, personal communication).

The introduction of the concert performance model, on the other hand, changed the traditional role of participants, creating a hierarchical separation between performer and audience. In this new paradigm the two parties are distinct, fulfilling different roles. As the audience is no longer able to actively join in the performances, its role became more passive, that of listening and observing. The performer now is the only person to command the music, and is separated from the audience by a stage, a barrier, or a visible distance (see Figure 3.19).



**Figure 3-19** The author performing the zheng in Hebei province, 1981 (photo by permission of Han).

Zheng performer Liu Weishan (b. 1951)<sup>152</sup> expressed similar experiences to mine. She showed me a picture of her performance for a group of construction workers at *Qingtong Xia* (Bronze Gorge) hydro reservoir in the remote mountains of northwest

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<sup>152</sup> Graduating from the affiliated secondary school of Shenyang Conservatory of Music, Liu Weishan was the zheng soloist at the Central Song and Dance Ensemble (*Zhongyang Gewu Tuan*) in Beijing from 1975 to 1982. She immigrated to the United States in 1982 and formed the San Francisco Gu-Zheng Music Society.

China in 1978 (see Figure 3.20): “It was so windy and the water sounded so loud [when I was performing]. The workers were arranged to surround me and somebody led them to applaud after each piece. In fact, I don’t know if they understood the music at all, although the atmosphere was very touching” (2011, personal communication).



**Figure 3-20** Liu Weishan performing at *Qingtong Xia* Reservoir (photo by permission of Liu).

It is my observation and experience that when participants play both the roles of performer and audience, as was the practice with traditional zheng, it sends out a cultural

message that reaffirms and maintains a sense of community, forging relationships between themselves, their villages or diasporas, and the present to their past.<sup>153</sup> This strong social environment brings harmony to the society and helps to provide a deep sense of place, belonging, and identity. When the audience became passive listeners, and music was played by a person who was an “outsider” to their community, identity, and social environment, a primary social interaction that reaffirmed the community was removed.<sup>154</sup>

What is the true sense of “people’s music?” Is it the traditional model constructed on Confucian ideology, where a collective of individuals would choose music that spoke to their hearts and perform it in a community that had a unique cultural identity? Or does it lie in Mao’s idea of individuals adopting one single super cultural identity chosen for them and presented in a form—concert setting—that was new to millions of Chinese, especially those in the countryside? In retrospect, as a performer I did not feel much connection with the “correct” music I was sent to perform, because the music did not speak to or for me. Neither did I feel that it connected with the audience. I never pondered whether the masses understood the music I performed at that time. Perhaps like many musicians, I assumed the audience would embrace this music as it was about them and praised them. As Mittler points out, this was music that they should understand: “In

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<sup>153</sup> In 1999 when I was touring in Sarawak, Malaysia, I visited a social gathering held by a local Chinese Hakka community. This was an indoor event organized around a music performance by a group of male members from the community, all from different generations and occupations. As a female and a professional Han musician from China, I was an obvious outsider, reinforced by many avoiding eye contact with me. However, in the midst of their playing a Hakka piece, I picked up a *pipa* and joined them. I immediately felt the barriers disappear. The melodies we played reached back hundreds of years, passing through generations to bring us a sense of commonality—a shared cultural identity as musicians and as diasporic Chinese. The connection transcended time and boundaries; at that moment I felt like coming home—as an insider and as one of them. This perhaps is the joy and attraction that a folk musician feels.

<sup>154</sup> Although it is widely understood that there is a division between “art” music and “folk” music, to my knowledge the social impact on the change of zheng performance practice in the Chinese rural regions has not been examined by Chinese scholars. A parallel study is, however, found in Dr. Nathan Hesselink’s recent book *SamulNori*, a study of contemporary Korean drumming (see Hesselink 2012:66-9).

Maoist China, ‘correct’ music, named ‘music for the masses,’ did not demand that ‘ignorant masses’ would undergo a learning process. The idea was not to heavy up the audience to the high standard of elite arts but to ‘massify’ the arts and artists, and to make them appreciate the artistic value of the masses’ lives” (1997:48).

Regrettably, in spite of recent comprehensive Chinese literature on the zheng that discusses cultural issues of contemporary zheng development, little attention has been paid to the abandonment of traditional practice and the sociopolitical impact it has had on the zheng’s performance practice. Often such literature views the transformation from old to new as musical and cultural evolution,<sup>155</sup> without analyzing or evaluating the context, merits, and cultural ramifications of the change. From a traditional perspective one may argue that the traditional communal practice of music making is in essence people’s music—the music was of the people (the music content was deeply rooted in long standing tradition), by the people (created in communal music practice), and for the people (the audience/ participants were common people). Mao’s perspective, on the other hand, was to create a music that uses people’s daily life as content to enforce a singular political message, and to deliver it to the populace to create societal harmony.

Ironically, when traditional music was strictly prohibited and the populace was only allowed to listen to firmly controlled politicized music, privately Mao Zedong enjoyed listening to traditional music. As Terrill points out, Mao Zedong “liked to wallow at times in traditional waters, yet he ordered Chinese youth to the high dry land of modernity” (1980:430-1). In 1975, the year before his passing, Mao’s health began to

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<sup>155</sup> This evolutionary perspective is also found in English sources, as in Chen Yan-Zhi’s Ph.D. dissertation at Brown University (1991). Chen states that *gongche* notation “still has limitations” (1991:201), and “these [traditional] notations are all simple...” (ibid.:203). She also defines the period between 1950s-1970s as “the period of revival” of zheng music (ibid.:217).

deteriorate, especially his vision. In order to avoid using his eyes too much, Mao's doctor suggested that he should listen to music. Based on this suggestion, his wife Jiang Qing and the Minister of Cultural Affairs Yu Huiyong (1925-77) decided to have traditional Beijing opera tunes recorded on non-operatic instruments for Mao's personal enjoyment (Wu 1996:127-28). Conducted secretively, the project was only known to a small circle of people as the "audio and video recording unit" (*luyin luxiang xiaozu*), perhaps because it concerned Mao's health, or because this was totally opposite to the ideology of the Cultural Revolution—the disparagement of old culture. Xiang Sihua was chosen as the zheng performer for this project, together with several other top musicians who performed the *qin*, *erhu*, *pipa*, and *dizi*. In this context she interpreted *Wenji Guihan* (Madam *Wenji* Returning to the Han), a well-known piece of the traditional Beijing opera repertoire.<sup>156</sup> Her recording of this piece was played to Mao, and she performed it for Richard Nixon on his second visit to China in 1976 (2009, personal communication).

These special dispensations for the leader of the Communist Party and the dichotomy of what he would enjoy versus that of the common people is uncomfortably reminiscent of the imperial rulers and their subjects.

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<sup>156</sup> Xiang's experience of producing this Beijing opera piece on the zheng was very positive. She first learned to sing this piece in order to memorize it before recreating the melody on the zheng. This process is commonly known as *kaxi*, or mimicking operatic melody, a technique used in traditional folk instrumental music, but it is also how traditional zheng music was taught in oral tradition. Xiang also pointed out that the traditional left hand zheng techniques of *yin*, *rou*, *hua*, and *chan*, and her experiences of learning different traditional zheng styles, "set a good foundation to recreate on the zheng the detailed nuances of the vocal melisma of Beijing opera" (2009, personal communication).

## 4 THE MAKING OF THE ZHENG PHENOMENA:

### CREATING A MODERN IDENTITY

The traditional schools all came from vocal traditions. Frankly, I do not think that to realize vocal music styles is the highest state of development for a musical instrument, although vocalization has been credited to the development of traditional zheng music and the forming of the most important idiosyncratic characteristics the zheng. If the zheng continues to go this way, I believe this instrument is not far from extinction. (Li Meng 2009, personal communication)

In September 1976, with Mao Zedong's passing, the Cultural Revolution had come to an end. After a momentary political void combined with shock and mourning, the country was soon filled with hope and excitement by the Party's new policy: open the doors to the world and make China a modern and powerful country through developing the economy. This period saw a new cultural strategy designed to restore the prosperity of Chinese arts. The essence of this revised cultural agenda can be grasped in a monograph sent to UNESCO by the Chinese Art Research Institute China in 1983, which states:

Two points are worth noting when we consider the relationship between cultural policies and cultural prosperity. First, although the practice of cultural policy and literary and artistic creation are related ideologically, they are two different concepts. This is because cultural policies cannot be equated with the methods of literary and artistic creation. Cultural policies ... demonstrate their power by propelling and promoting prosperity and the development of literature and art, but they cannot and will never replace literary and artistic creations themselves. Cultural policies do not restrict the freedom of creative activities... organizations in charge of implementing cultural policies should not interfere in the freedom of creation, but should promote and support this freedom. Secondly, cultural policies are not aesthetic criteria for evaluating specific literary and artistic works; a work of art that conforms to the cultural policies in terms of ideology is not necessarily an excellent one. (Liu 1983:42-43)



The change in political and cultural policy in the post-Mao period was analogous to an opening of the floodgates of artistic creation. Western classical and traditional Chinese repertoires were performed openly again; conservatories restored open auditions for admission; and creative individuality began to emerge in compositions replacing the obligatory heroic images of workers, peasants, and soldiers. Many musicians and composers felt a kind of freedom that they had never felt before.

In this chapter I examine the transformation of zheng music in the post-Mao era of China, marked by the development of the zheng into a virtuosic instrument performed by a rapidly growing number of professional performers. The discussion concentrates on: 1) the development of innovative performance techniques and the discourse on the directions that these developments have taken; 2) the emergence of compositional styles that draw materials from diverse sources, use innovative tunings, and propel the further modernization of the instrument; and 3) the cultural impetus for virtuosity and visual spectacle in zheng performance.

## 4.1 Development of Performance Techniques

Parallel with social and cultural developments in China in the twentieth century, the musical identity of the zheng rapidly modernized. Its traditional identity embodying a single horizontal melodic line was no longer popular with the majority of zheng musicians and audiences. Instead, new styles of fully scored compositions that contain vertically based multiple voicings and feature various new performance techniques have dominated the main repertoire since the 1950s. In the chapter epigraph, Professor Li Meng (b. 1959), an eminent zheng performer and educator from the Central Conservatory of Music, defines this metamorphosis as the move from “vocalization” (*shengqiang hua*)—imitating vocal styles—to “instrumentalization” (*qiyue hua*), performing scores written specifically for the instrument.

In transforming the zheng from “vocalization” to “instrumentalization,” Chinese educators often compare the zheng with the piano.<sup>157</sup> As stated in the previous chapter, the adaptation of a pianistic approach to the zheng began as early as the 1950s. This approach became common in the 1970s. In post-Mao China, the scope and pace of adopting pianistic technical proficiency was further accelerated.

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<sup>157</sup> When comparing the development of technical proficiency of the piano and the zheng, a socioeconomic parallel can also be drawn between the two. According to Richard Kraus in *Pianos and Politics in China*, the rapid growth of virtuosic piano techniques was stimulated by the European industrial revolution between the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century. Kraus points out: “The evolution of the piano in the early nineteenth century is a progression of ever-stronger and louder instruments, with more and more keys. In part this was dictated by the need to keep up with increasingly demanding virtuosos” (1989:12). The modernization of the zheng shares a similar socioeconomic environment as that of the nineteenth century piano music, with the thriving economic growth of the post-Mao era spawning a similar demand for the zheng, and Chinese music in general. As a new national identity—a strong and modern China—was put forward, it motivated Chinese musicians to modernize their music.

#### 4.1.1 Invention of the Fast Fingering Sequence (*Kuaisu zhixu*)

The central theme in the development of the zheng has been the ongoing exploration of technical skills, most significantly exploring new fingerings that would allow performers to play faster. The most prominent example is the creation of *kuaisu zhixu*—new fingering patterns designed to perform fast passages—created by Zhao Manqin (b.1953), a performer from Henan province. As a working musician during the 1970s, Zhao felt frustrated by the restrictions of pentatonic tuning and traditional fingering methods that prevented him from performing fast passages as easily as many other instruments.<sup>158</sup> As discussed in Chapter Two, traditional right hand zheng picking patterns were based upon a symmetrical principle of the thumb picking outward with the middle finger striking inward on strings of the same pitch an octave apart, either in unison or alternating. With the addition of the first finger correspondingly plucking strings in the same octave, the basic patterns listed in Hakka musician He Yuzhai’s “eight methods” (*bafa* in 2.3) and demonstrated in the “four point” (*sidan*) fingering patterns of the Zhejiang style is achieved. Within these patterns, the right thumb often carries the “skeletal” notes of the main melody with the first and second fingers adding notes to create melodic variations (*jiahua*). However, the third and small fingers were hardly, if ever, used. Although this traditional symmetrical system works well for compositions with traditional structures, it is not effective for pieces written by modern composers who do not follow the traditional rules of fingering, nor when a melody contains fast passages

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<sup>158</sup> Zhao Manqin was with Henan *Xinye* county Song and Dance Troupe in the 1970s. As Zhao disclosed, he often had to sit on a “cold bench,” as the zheng was incapable of playing many of the melodic passages and was therefore only utilized as “colour” (e.g., playing glissandi). He recalled that in one piece the composer wrote a melody with a diatonic modulation for the zheng to play together in unison with the violin, the *erhu*, and *yangqin*. During the first rehearsal, he became totally lost and was teased by other musicians for “lacking chops” (2001:623–24).

(e.g., a group of four sixteenth notes played at the tempo of ♩= 150 and faster). In order to elevate the zheng to equal footing with other musical instruments,<sup>159</sup> Zhao Manqin spent over a decade creating *kuaisu zhixu*. Inspired by piano fingering and violin positions, his fingering system enables the thumb and fingers to perform a variety of complex sequences with relatively minimal movements, with every digit being equally capable of leading a group of notes (see Figure 4.1).



**Figure 4-1** Fingering combinations of *kuaisu zhixu*: 1) the thumb, 2) the first finger, 3) the middle finger, 4) the fourth finger, and 5) the small finger.

Employing a variety of fingering combinations, *kuaisu zhixu* enables different note configurations within a single octave to be played in fast tempi. Zhao believed that the richness of a melody is defined by the variety of note configurations contained within it, and to realize such configurations a player requires a large array of fingering patterns (2001:16). He also emphasized that his new fingering system was particularly created to perform fast passages, for “without speed, the system would lose its value and effect”

<sup>159</sup> Zhao Manqin expressed that his goal for inventing the fast fingering sequence was “to solve the zheng’s status in ensemble performances, bringing the zheng from being an instrument only used for ‘colours’ to a melodic instrument” (2001:629). Zheng performer Wang Zhongshan recalled: “[The fast fingering sequence] enabled the zheng to play fast, which helped the zheng to integrate with the rest of the plucked string instruments, therefore [the zheng] has the basic ability to compete with other instruments” (2009, personal communication).

(2001:21, translated from the Chinese). Zhao arranged several famous previously composed works for solo zheng incorporating this new fingering system, including *Jinggang Shanshang Taiyang Hong* (The Red Sun Shining on the *Jinggang* Mountain, arr. 1975); *Dahu Shangshan* (Climbing the Mountain, Beating the Tiger), an aria from the revolutionary Beijing opera model play *Zhiqu Weihu Shang* (Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy, arr. 1979, see Figure 4.2); and *horo*, a Romanian traditional dance melody (arr. 1980). Although Zhao Manqin presented his new techniques to many zheng performers and instructors through lectures in conservatories in the late 1970s, his innovations did not garner much attention until the 1986 National Guzheng Conference (*Zhongguo Yangzhou Guzheng Xueshu Jiaoliu Hui*),<sup>160</sup> when Zhao's student Wang Zhongshan<sup>161</sup> (b. 1968, now a zheng professor at the Chinese Conservatory of Music) performed a number of these pieces. Wang's dazzling speed caught the attention of the national zheng community, sparking a new nationwide trend of learning the new technique. Zhao's fast fingering sequence became the most sought-after technique for younger-generation performers, while Wang Zhongshan became their icon with the title of "the fastest in Asia."

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<sup>160</sup> The conference, held in Yangzhou, was the largest zheng meeting to date with over two hundred zheng performers, educators, and scholars attending. Over eighty papers and three concerts were presented during the conference.

<sup>161</sup> Wang Zhongshan enrolled in the Chinese Conservatory of Music in 1988, two years after the conference in Yangzhou. Although still a student, he had gained national fame and was considered one of the top zheng performers of all time. Available online are recordings of his performances of *Dahu Shangshan* ([http://v.youku.com/v\\_show/id\\_XMTg2MjIwNzIw.html](http://v.youku.com/v_show/id_XMTg2MjIwNzIw.html)) and *Horo Dance* ([http://www.56.com/u16/v\\_NDY5ODE3OTc.html](http://www.56.com/u16/v_NDY5ODE3OTc.html)).

**Dahu Shangshan**  
(Climbing the Mountain, Beating the Tiger)

Zhao Manqin, 1979

The image shows a musical score for the piece "Dahu Shangshan" in G major, 4/4 time, with a tempo of quarter note = 152. The score consists of four staves of music. Above the notes, various fingerings are indicated: 1 2 1 2 3, 2 1 2 3, 4 3 2 1, 2, 4 3 2 1, 2 1 2 3, 2 3 2 1, 3 2 1 2, 3 2 1, 1 2 3, 4 1 2 3, 4 1 2 3, 4 3 2 1, 4 3 2 1, 4 3 2 1, 4 3 2 1, 4 3 2 1. The piece ends with a double bar line and the text "cont'd".

Figure 4-2 An excerpt from *Dahu Shangshan* showing *kuaisu zhixu* fingering.

#### 4.1.2 Extended Techniques for Counterpoint and Unconventional Tones

Apart from the fast fingering sequence, new techniques were also created primarily to enable the zheng to play long sustained notes and multiple melodic lines on one hand. These include a trill played by rapidly alternating between the first finger and the thumb, similar to a piano trill; an augmentation of the traditional *yao* (tremolo) to enable simultaneous tremolo on multiple strings; a continuously repeating inward roll of three or four fingers called *lun*, which was inspired by a similar technique for *pipa*,<sup>162</sup> and two counterpoint techniques, *tanyao* (a synchronized pluck and tremolo) and *tanlun* (a synchronized pluck and roll; see Figure 4.3). A further adaptation was to transfer many of these right hand techniques onto the left hand, allowing for more melodic lines to be performed by a single musician.

<sup>162</sup> In *pipa* practice, *lun* is divided into *lun* (full roll), which involves the four fingers and the thumb rolling outward in circles, and *xiaolun* (small roll), which often excludes the thumb.



**Figure 4-3 A four-part melody played with two hands.**

One other category of innovation is found in the use of extended techniques resulting from a new generation of conservatory-trained composers writing compositions for Chinese instruments within a Western new music idiom (to be discussed later in this chapter). These compositions often contain untuned sounds that require zheng musicians to create innovative techniques involving: 1) using fingers, knuckles, the palm, or the whole hand to strike the body of the instrument, the strings, or the top of individual bridges to produce percussive sounds; 2) plucking the strings to the left of the movable bridges or the short ends of the strings outside of the fixed bridge on the right to generate unpitched tones; 3) simultaneous depression of multiple strings to create vibrato, as well as bending notes on harmonic intervals or chords; 4) simultaneous depression of multiple strings with fingers, the palm, or forearm to create enharmonic bends; and 5) bowing the zheng.

### 4.1.3 Discourse on the Development of the Techniques

As examined in Chapter Two, the aesthetics of the traditional zheng value a proper balance between generated sound (*sheng*) and cultivated sound (*yun*) achieved by less *sheng* and more *yun*. In contrast, technical innovations on the zheng have predominantly focused on more generated sound (*sheng*) by changing the role of the left hand from creating *yun* on the left side of the bridges to plucking on the right side of the bridges. This challenged the fundamentals of traditional aesthetics and generated a discourse with many diverse views in the zheng world. In this section I will examine a number of these perspectives spanning a variety of generations, performers, and scholars.

A large number of zheng performers, especially the younger generation born after the late 1970s, support developing the zheng into a more technically sophisticated instrument. Articles written by younger performers<sup>163</sup> often express their preference for new technical approaches over those of older tradition, and push for their wide adoption in pedagogy. Li Han (b. 1978), who graduated from the Central Conservatory of Music and is teaching the zheng at the People's University in Beijing, writes:

In recent decades, due to the increase of the number of zheng performers as well as the continued study of the instrument, the [zheng's] performance techniques have been greatly developed—from single hand (right hand) plucking to two hands plucking simultaneously; and from the appearance of *yao* to the fast fingering sequence, all increasing the charm of the traditional guzheng. [The new techniques] imparted to [the zheng] the characteristics of the time, and supplied the instrument with the requirements of the [new] era.

However, the development of the guzheng's performance techniques is still not balanced in three aspects. The first is in between digits, [as] contemporary players have not paid enough attention to the

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<sup>163</sup> Students must also write a thesis as a requirement to complete a master's degree in performance in Chinese conservatories. As a result, theses on a variety of subjects on the zheng have been flourishing in China in the last ten years or so.



small fingers. The second is in between the two hands: everybody knows that the piano is considered “the king of Western instruments.” There is almost no difference between the right hand and the left hand in piano performance. The two hands have basically the same difficulty level. However, Guzheng players began their early training with only the right hand practicing basic plucking, while the left hand only practices *yin* (vibrato), *rou* (portamento), *hua* (slide), and *zhan* (heavy vibrato). This caused an unbalanced development of technique between the two hands. Of course, the [traditional] left hand technique is indispensable, as traditional music depends on the left hand technique of *yiyun busheng* (using *yun* to enrich the sound). This is what makes the zheng charming. Even “the king of instruments—the piano” does not have this advantage. However, this advantage of the zheng also limited the technical development of the instrument. Therefore, to open up the left hand—to make the left hand play the same as the right hand, to be as flexible and comfortable in accomplishing the techniques of playing fast with a high level of difficulty—has become the current problem that needs to be solved.

The zheng strings are rather long, which is an advantage. However, when playing only the right side of the bridges can generate sound. The left side is untuned; therefore, zheng players can only play half of the instrument. It is a waste, isn't it? (2000:58-60, translated from the Chinese)

Wang Yun (b. 1977), another graduate of the Central Conservatory of Music who teaches at the Wuhan Conservatory of Music, continues in the same vein:

Development and innovation are helpful for overcoming the imbalance between the two hands in performance... The [new] left hand playing techniques have helped to change the traditional function of the left hand on the guzheng. In traditional guzheng music, the left hand mainly depresses strings on the left side of the bridges, which played a role to “decorate” the melody and to “fill” the sound. Since the founding of the People’s Republic of China, the left hand not only just plays a supporting role on the left side of the bridges, or on the right side playing the accompaniment, but also plays an equally important role in the ability to perform as independently as the right hand. This increased significance [of the left hand] has added the charm of the era to the guzheng. From a technical perspective, the left hand function has become more comprehensive, and its importance is even more prominent, which directly impacts three basic aspects: firstly, enhancing the ability to obtain sound; secondly, creating diverse and dynamic ways of obtaining sounds, and lately, creating a large number of combinations of left and right hand techniques. Over the past decade, through the left hand playing single and multiple *yao* (tremolo), as well as application of the fast fingering

sequence, both hands have the flexibility to complete difficult compositions. (2004:95, translated from the Chinese)

Giving equal importance to the independence of the left and right hands, zheng performers, especially those who are trained in conservatories, have developed a pianistic technical proficiency to craft music with wide dynamic changes, contrasting parts, and a variety of tone colours. It is worth mentioning that most of these young professional zheng performers came from urban middle-class families and began learning the piano at a preschool age,<sup>164</sup> thus adopting a pianistic approach on the zheng is perhaps natural to them.

Although the importance of the traditional left hand techniques are acknowledged by Li and Wang, their arguments that the two hands traditionally played an imbalanced role demonstrate a lack of understanding of each hand's function in the tradition. The descriptions such as “supporting role,” to “decorate,” or to “fill” the sound minimize the essential function of the left hand in traditional zheng practice, and “zheng players only play half of the instrument” further devalues its vital role. These kinds of statements, a byproduct of the fervour of transforming the idiom that gripped the country since the early twentieth century, are quite common in the modern Chinese zheng literature.

Some, however, challenge the argument presented above. Qiu Ji (b. 1976), a zheng performer and instructor at the Chinese Conservatory of Music in Beijing, states:

It is undeniable that Western music has many advantages and can offer a lot for us to learn. But [Mao Zedong's] “let the foreign things serve

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<sup>164</sup> In post-Mao China the piano has become the most popular instrument throughout urban China. Many families purchase a piano and encourage their single child to take piano lessons. “The spread of the piano throughout urban China represents a kind of embourgeoisement, a search for respectability, and celebration of family values that piano manufacturers in the West rode to fortune in the nineteenth century” (Kraus 1989:182).

China” does not mean we throw our own out and imitate others’. Piano is the king of the Western instruments, but it does not have the character of *yi yun busheng*. It cannot create vocal-like lines. Would [the] piano change itself to pursue the character of other instruments? If a zheng musician’s highest aesthetic goal is always to chase other instrument’s advantage, it will become a tragedy and that is not only catastrophic to zheng musicians. (2004:224, translated from the Chinese)

Ethnomusicologists Li Mei<sup>165</sup> (b. 1960) and Wang Yingrui (b. 1974), both professionally trained zheng performers have asked whether the influence of the pianistic instrumental approach would weaken traditional techniques or even devalue the essence of the zheng. Li points out:

If one doesn’t mold oneself under the prerequisite conditions of existing guzheng techniques and methods before going off to develop some new technique or method, I don’t see how it could be considered a positive contribution to the development of guzheng music itself. If three fingers are not enough, then [they increase to] four or five; if one hand is not enough, then [increase to] two hands. All of these [developments] are positive. However, positivity also has a limit. It is not that ‘more is better.’ When both hands are occupied [on the right side of the bridges], you are bound to lose the whole world of the left side. (2009, personal communication)

Wang further asserts:

Modern [zheng] techniques allow all ten digits to move independently and freely, opening a larger universe for the art of the zheng. However, the [zheng’s] foundation of “right hand initiating sound while the left hand creates *yun*” cannot be thrown away, as it is what the individual styles were built upon, maintained with, and are the foundation for the art form. Overemphasizing contemporary externals while ignoring the internal cultural characteristic is the same as abandoning the tradition. (2007:88, translated from the Chinese)

As more plucking techniques were transferred onto the left hand to match the volume, clarity, tone colour, and speed of the right hand, zheng performers began to wear

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<sup>165</sup>Li Mei studied the zheng in the Minority University of Northwest in China. She co-composed *Mukamu Sanxu yu Wuqu* (Muqum, Prelude and Dance, 1988), one of the most performed works in the contemporary zheng repertoire.

artificial nails on the thumb and first three fingers of left hand as well.<sup>166</sup> Although advantageous for mirroring the abilities of the right hand, Li Mei argues that wearing nails on the left hand restricts the amount of direct contact the fingertip can have with the string, thereby compromising the subtlety and variety of manipulating sound (2009, personal communication).<sup>167</sup> Xiang Sihua believes that performers trained in using nails on their left hand are at a disadvantage: “The artificial nails do not necessarily increase the strength of plucking with the left hand, and a performer used to wearing them would feel awkward in removing them, unable to achieve either depressing strings or substantive plucking effectively” (2009, personal communication). However, while some performers acknowledge that nails indeed put restraints on bending strings, many feel there is no negative impact on traditional left hand techniques. Wang Zhongshan revealed that most of his young students are not even aware that having artificial nails on the left hand was only a recent development.

Ji Wei (b. 1979), a rising star in the zheng world, feels caught between staying true to the traditional zheng perspective and moving forward:

The status of an instrument is decided by its inclusiveness and ability to express. There are many things that the guzheng cannot do... which have prevented composers from easily writing for the instrument. If there are too many changes [of technique], it is not the zheng any more, nonetheless, if it doesn't change, good [contemporary] compositions cannot be played. (2009, personal communication)

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<sup>166</sup> Records on wearing artificial nails to play the zheng were found in Chinese historical documents, however, many traditional musicians did not wear artificial nails for playing the steel-string zheng. It only became common among the first-generation conservatory-trained musicians to use nails on the right thumb and the three fingers (excluding the little finger).

<sup>167</sup> Older generations of performers deem that when bending a string subtlety and nuance are created by combinations of a variety of wrist movements, hand positions, and different points of contact of flesh on the string—from fingertip to finger pad. In my most recent visit to Guangzhou, China in July 2012, I witnessed Hakka zheng musician Rao Ningxin (b. 1941) bending strings with a variety of movements. Often, most microtonal and pitch changes were created by a slight change of his position of finger pad or bending the first joint of the fingers.

Wang Zhongshan admitted that innovation caused an inevitable clash between modern and traditional styles, and the older zheng musicians were very irritated with this new direction. “They questioned whether this was still zheng music and said [to me cynically] why not use your feet to play, too” (2009, personal communication). Wang, however, firmly believes it is necessary to progress:

I started my music lessons learning vocal folk music. My living environment and teacher made me very aware of traditional styles. I divide zheng techniques into three systems: plucking, tremolo, and bending. If plucking is like skin, tremolo is like bone structure, then bending (*rou, an, hua, dian, nao* and *yin* etc.) is like the heart and soul. In my heart, I treasure the third system most. This system was known as *qiang* (vocalization). I believe that variations on *qiang* are what provide vitality into Chinese music.

When comparing the zheng with the piano, I value the zheng more, because it is an instrument with more vitality... It has *yin* and *yang* two sides: the right hand is the *yang*, while the left hand is the *yin*. Many instruments don't have this. This is the Chinese voice. [However], If you say the zheng is an instrument with Oriental colour, you will be gradually deserted by history. Only when you have rich technique, can you avoid being abandoned... If you want to have dialogue with the world's music, you must have the necessary tools. Can you say because I play a Chinese instrument, I give up on this style of music [i.e., *horo*]? If you want to have an exchange with the world, you want to have a conversation with others, you'd better borrow other's language. (2009, personal communication)

Li Meng described such a move from “vocalization” to “instrumentalization” as “a double-edged sword”:

It is a huge step forward from “vocalization” to “instrumentalization.” Yet, there is a tendency in Chinese history that performers tend to pay more attention to technique over artistry. The emphasis on techniques among zheng performers sometimes can steer fascination with technique. [However], Chinese people are difficult to change. They stick to the old habits and love good melodies. “Vocalization” comes from imitation and Chinese are good at imitating. It is very difficult for me to promote New Music [as audiences want to hear melody]. However, if the zheng composition goes back to imitate vocal music, it has no sense and no future. Although “vocalization” in zheng music is now replaced by multiple instrumental styles, it will be eventually revived. [When that

happens], it won't be the mainstream, but elements. (2009, personal communication)

Clearly, the transition from performing vocalistic music to instrumental music influenced by a pianistic approach has not been easy for some top zheng musicians. As Kraus observed:

Although China's cosmopolitan and modernizing musical leadership has often been overwhelmed by the recurring political demand for cultural populism, there has nonetheless been a steady Westernization of Chinese music. Cosmopolitan musical leaders seek to minimize the impact of traditional Chinese musical practices, arguing that modern music, like modern science, must meet international standards. (1989:x)

With a wide range of different perspectives, the discussion of the issues surrounding traditional left hand technique, modern technical complexity, and the pursuit of speed at its core reflects the shifting values and aesthetics associated with the modernization of the zheng. For many zheng musicians the challenge is the perception of the zheng as an intransigent instrument with a strong individual musical characteristic inherited from the past that could well result in the instrument no longer being culturally viable, leading to its eventual abandonment. Hence, they feel the best way to avoid this is to increase the technical capabilities in order to be able to accommodate modern compositions.

## **4.2 New Directions in Composition**

The demise of government control over artistic development as a tool of political propaganda in the late 1970s opened the floodgates for composers to explore an almost unlimited world of possibilities. As a result, zheng compositions developed to have become increasingly diversified over the last several decades. I discuss the exploration and integration of traditional Chinese musical sources, the interest in music from outside of China, and important influences on Chinese composers in the decades after the Cultural Revolution. I will also analyze a number of works from different compositional styles, each represented the innovation and sophistication at a certain stage of the zheng music in the last several decades.

### **4.2.1 The Blossoming of a Variety of Compositions**

The new freedom for artistic creation granted by the post-Mao government reinvigorated Chinese composers' sense of exploration and self-expression. As discussed in Chapter Three, during Mao's reign contemporary zheng compositions were constrained by national politics to programmatic structures within Western classical forms, featuring simple melodies portraying images easily identifiable by the masses which carried political undertones. Decades of being restricted to traditional motifs for the purpose of propagating the government's political ideology ostensibly orphaned composers from their traditional past. Nostalgia for China's musical heritage prompted a renewed interest in an exploration of older musical traditions and reconnection with cultural roots. The impact of this movement saw a broader use of historic materials from

traditional operas, *qupai* tunes, ancient *qin* melodies, and minority music as source materials for the new compositions in many different compositional forms.

An example of using traditional operatic melodic material for a new composition is *Qinsang Qu* (Melody of Remembrance, 1979) by Zhou Yanjia. The main melody comes from *wanwan qiang*, a regional operatic genre in central Shaan’xi province, and its vocal style features the “bitter” or “crying” tone (*kuyin*)—*ti*↓ and *fa*↑— the two neutral tones identical to those found in Chaozhou zheng music (see Figure 4.4).<sup>168</sup> The composition is essentially created with the traditional approach to the zheng, in that a single vocal-like melodic line dominates the composition.

**Qinsang Qu**  
Melody of Remembrance Zhou Yanjia

♩ = 40

Figure 4-4 An Excerpt from the first section of *Qinsang Qu* (Melody of Remembrance) (C and G are neutral tones played as moving tones).

<sup>168</sup> I discussed “bitter or crying” tones in Chapter Two (2.3), as they are the key elements to form different modes in the Chaozhou style. It is believed that the Chaozhou zheng was historically connected with the music from Shann’xi.



*Xiangshan Shegu* (Drums Resound on Incense Mountain, 1980) by Qu Yun (b. 1947) is another piece developed upon traditional material. It is formed with three *qupai* tunes from *Xi'an guyue*, a traditional instrumental genre<sup>169</sup> that utilizes the *yanyue* scale from Tang banquet music—a diatonic scale with a flat seventh (see Figure 4.5 and 4.6).



Figure 4-5 The *yanyue* scale of banquet music of the Tang court.



Figure 4-6 An excerpt from the first section of *Drums Resound on Incense Mountain*, which is written in *D shang* (*re*) mode of the *yanyue* scale.<sup>170</sup>

<sup>169</sup> The *qupai* tunes are: *Liuqing Niang* (Madam Liuqing), *Yue'er Gao* (The High Moon), and *Xiangshan Shegu* (Drums Resound on Incense Mountain). They are inherited through *Xi'an guyue* (Xi'an drum music), a ritual ensemble that features wind and percussion. Preserved in Xi'an, the ancient capital city of the Tang dynasty, *Xi'an guyue* is believed to have retained the music tradition of the Tang.

<sup>170</sup> *Yanyue* or *qingshang* is considered a scale in Chinese music theory, which is equivalent to the tonal steps of the Western mixolydian mode.

Unlike most zheng compositions written in the 1970s, which largely stress the increased use of two-hand plucking techniques, both *Melody of Remembrance* and *Drums Resound on Incense Mountain* reinstate the traditional approach of “vocalization.” Compositions of this type were created in the context of the post-Cultural Revolution and a desire to reconnect to China’s musical heritage. The emphasis on moving tones and the sculpting of the melody with left hand techniques was a sharp contrast from compositions created during the Cultural Revolution.

In addition to melodic sources, both compositions draw from classical literature for their programmatic content and titles.<sup>171</sup> Such explorations of historical sources illustrate the composers’ desire of reconnecting to the zheng’s ancient past. They also demonstrate an aspiration, after many years of absence in zheng composition, to reconstruct the traditional aesthetics of *yijing*—to unify music with artistic intension through a poetic title and the programmatic content that supports the setting.<sup>172</sup>

It should be noted that up to this point most zheng compositions were written by zheng performers who were not professional composers and thus their compositions were somewhat restricted. Li Meng believes that these performer compositions “were mostly beneficial for learning a certain technique,” as “whatever technique a performer [composer] was good at, it would be thrown in,” but “compositionally, they were weak” (2009, personal communication). In the early 1980s, professional composers began to compose for the zheng. Their involvement (generally speaking) changed the direction of

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<sup>171</sup> *Melody of Remembrance* uses a poem by Li Bai, a renowned Tang bard, which expresses sentimental feelings of a wife longing for her husband who served in the army frontier. Its title *Qinsang* is also cited from the poem. The title of *Drums Resound on Incense Mountain* references a music science described in *Yufu Zalu* (Miscellaneous Notes on Music Affairs), a monograph from the Tang dynasty.

<sup>172</sup> Qu Yun’s initial performance of *Drums Resound on Incense Mountain* was in *Fan Tang Yuewu* (Recreation of the Tang Music and Dance), a large musical created by the Shaan’xi Provincial Song and Dance Troup in 1981, in which Qu Yun played the role of Xue Qionqiong, a prominent female zheng performer at the peak of the Tang.

zheng composition from a single path to diverse styles and directions. While their individual aesthetics and influence on compositions demonstrated different idiosyncratic artistic choices and expressions, most of these composers challenged the technical and physical limits of the performer and the instrument by creating unusual tunings, difficult fingerings, complex rhythms, and fast passages which further impelled the progression of the instrument and promoted modern virtuosity in zheng performance.

In 1980 the Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra commissioned the renowned Chinese composer Li Huanzhi (1919-2000) to compose *Miluo Jiang Huanxiang Qu* (Fantasia on the *Miluo* River), a twenty-minute, single-movement concerto for zheng and Chinese orchestra. The first of its kind in the zheng's history, this concerto is loosely structured upon a Western sonata form using the ancient *qin*<sup>173</sup> piece, *Lisao* (Sorrow of Departure), for its two main themes.<sup>174</sup>

In *Fantasia on the Miluo River*, Li had to confront a number of challenges in using classical Western compositional idioms in writing for the zheng, such as how to apply common Western compositional techniques including harmony and modulation. To allow for a simple modulation, he tuned the zheng to a G anhemitonic pentatonic scale, which allows the first theme to be played in the key of G and the second theme (in the

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<sup>173</sup> *Qin* music is a popular source for zheng compositions with many famous *qin* tunes being either transferred directly to zheng repertoire or used as melodic themes for new zheng compositions. Developed over many centuries, *qin* music is known for its close connection to literati as a vehicle for self-cultivation. The introspective nature of the *qin* set the instrument apart from other Chinese instruments. During the Cultural Revolution, the *qin* and its music, criticized as music for the elite class in feudal society, was completely rejected in China. The re-emergence of the *qin* brought attention back to the instrument and its music. However, the performance and popularization of *qin* music has transformed its traditional context from an instrument solely for self-cultivation to one with a broad reach that now also encompasses adaptations of *qin* music for orchestral works, *qin* pieces used in movie scores, and inclusion in TV dramas.

<sup>174</sup> *Lisao* was written by Chen Kangshi of the late Tang dynasty in honour of Qu Yuan, a patriot poet from the Warring States (476-221 BCE). The earliest edition of the score is in the *Shenqi Mipu* (Mysterious scores of the Qin) compiled in 1425. Qu Yuan is known for his lofty character. He was persecuted by the ruling class and suffered greatly in his life, but the hardship never diminished his love and passion for his country and people. As his kingdom fell into enemy's hands in its early years, he committed suicide at the *Miluo* river.

development section) in the key of D, leaving further modulations of motivic imitations to the orchestra. Tuned pentatonically, the zheng could only perform a few chords, so Li again left harmonic developments primarily to the orchestra.

The success of *Fantasia on the Miluo River* spawned numerous subsequent zheng concerti from the early 1980s onward. Some composers found innovative ways to overcome modulation and the limited harmonic choices available on the traditional 21-string zheng. *Haiqing Nahe* (Falco Catching A Swan, 1983) by Wang Shu (1926-1995), *Yue'e Gao* (The High Moon, 1983) by Ye Xiaogang (b.1955), and *Guangling San* (Guangling Verse, 1989) by Liu Zhuang (1932-2011) were all derived from traditional works written for a pair of zhengs performed by Zhang Yan (see Figure 4.7). The compositions utilize one 25- string pentatonic key-changeable pedal zheng combined with one diatonic 28- string zheng. He Zhanhao (b. 1933), the composer of the famous violin concerto *Butterfly Lovers* (1957), wrote the most popular zheng concerto to date, *Lin'an Yihen* (Lament at Lin'an, 1992) for the 21-string zheng. He also wrote *Kongque Dongnan Fei* (Peacock Flying to the Southwest, ca. 1989), a concerto for the chromatic butterfly zheng (discussed in 3.3). The emergence of the concerto form in zheng composition laid the foundation for the development of virtuosity as it provided a platform for professional zheng musicians to showcase the breadth of their artistic expression and technique. This further fuelled the desire of zheng performers for more intricate pieces with which to showcase their skills.



**Figure 4-7 Zhang Yan playing the double zheng in the early 1980s (photo by permission of Liu Qichao).**

Chinese composers of this period also found inspiration in Chinese minority music for its rich melodic materials, unusual scales or modes, and complex rhythms.<sup>175</sup> A pioneering work of the time was *Mukamu, Sanxue yu Wuqu* (Maqam, Scattered Prelude and Dance, 1988), which adapted both its melodic materials and form from music of the Uyghur living in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. Composed by Zhou Ji (1943-2008), Shao Guangchen ( -1998), and Li Mei, three Han Chinese who lived and worked in Xinjiang for decades, *Maqam, Scattered Prelude and Dance* utilizes *namu maqam*, one of the twelve suites of *maqam* common among the Uyghur. The piece follows the *maqam* structure, though shorter in each section, beginning with an unmetered prelude with central tones gradually introduced through a slow development. Following the prelude

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<sup>175</sup> *Xueshan Chunxiao* (Snow Capped Mountain in the Spring Morning, 1978) by Fan Shang'e utilizes a Tibetan melody; *Hezeren de Chuntian* (Spring at Heze, 1979) by Zhang Guisheng is derived from a "boat song" of Heze from the Northeast; and *Dongzu Wuqu* (Dance of the Dong People, 1983) by Jiao Jinhai is based upon music of the Dong minority in Southwest China.

are two dance sections contrasted by slow and fast tempi: *Ruanwu* (soft dance) and *Jianwu* (vigorous dance). This structure had a lasting impact on zheng composition in that it broke from the previously common ABA form; and while the music reflected contemporary minority music, it also illustrated the historical connection between the *maqam* form and that of the Tang court.<sup>176</sup>

In order to realize *namu maqam* on the zheng, composers created a pentatonic tuning that contains the five primary tones of the *maqam* (D-F<sup>#</sup>-G-A-C, see Figure 4.8).

Composer Li Mei explains:

The advantage of this tuning is to enliven the neutral tones in the *maqam*, which are similar to the bitter tones in the Chinese scale. The key is to form a frame and to leave space, much like traditional Chinese painting. With the space, the distance of the two strings is not two notes, but four or even possibly six or more notes. (2009, personal communication)

The inclusion of a semitone in the tuning of the open strings marked the beginning of an explosion of new tunings for the zheng.

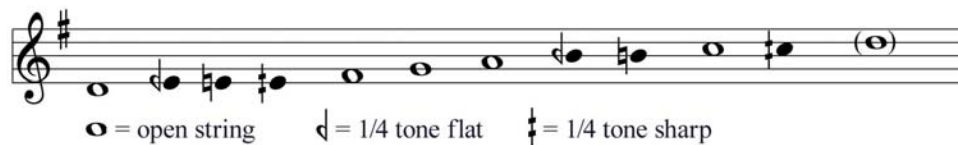


Figure 4-8 The tones used in *Maqam, Prelude and Dance*; there are four octaves of this particular scale on the 21-string zheng (D-d<sup>2</sup>).

*Maqam, Scattered Prelude and Dance* created an opportunity for zheng musicians to expand their experience and understanding of tonal and model systems outside the

<sup>176</sup> The *maqam* structure is identical to that of Chinese court music from the sixth to tenth centuries. Chinese historical sources documented that music from the “Western Regions” was popular in the Sui and Tang dynasties, and Chinese scholars generally believe that the compositional form of the “daqu” (great tunes) of court banquet music, which contains a “scattered prelude” (instrumental and unmetered), “prelude” (slow singing and metered), and “po” (fast dance), was rooted in the music from the “West.”

realm of Chinese Han and Western classical music. In producing quartertones through depressing strings, zheng musicians are challenged to listen to and identify these quartertones carefully, to produce them accurately, and to express the emotional content within these tones, mimicking the idiomatic articulation and sensitivity of Uyghur lutes.<sup>177</sup> In addition, the Uyghur dance meters adopted in the piece created excitement for both performers and listeners, such as 5/8 and 6/8 (see Figure 4.9), which are radically different from the common duple meter in Chinese Han music. The use of Uyghur music as source material for zheng compositions has since become popular in zheng compositions.<sup>178</sup>

**Mukamu, Sanxue yu Wuqu**  
Maqam, Scattered Prelude and Dance

Zhou Ji, Li Mei, Shao Guangchen

♩ = 160 *poco a poco cresc...*

The musical score is written for piano in G major. It consists of three systems of music. The first system is in 5/8 time and features a melody in the right hand with eighth-note patterns and a bass line with quarter notes. The second system transitions to 6/8 time, showing a more complex rhythmic pattern with eighth and sixteenth notes. The third system continues the 6/8 time signature with a melody that includes a repeat sign and a fermata. The score concludes with the text 'cont'd'.

**Figure 4-9** An excerpt from “vigorous dance,” the third section of *Maqam, Scattered Prelude and Dance*, demonstrating rhythmic patterns of a Uyghur dance.

<sup>177</sup> A performance of *Maqam, Scattered Prelude and Dance* by Zhou Wang is available at <http://www.tudou.com/programs/view/r1-H3kvp15A/>

<sup>178</sup> Uyghur scales and modes are used in many zheng compositions, most notably *Yili Hepan* (River Bank of Yili, 1994) by Cheng Gongliang, *Alamu Gulibala* (2002) by Gu Guanren and Gao Yang, and *Xibu Suixiang* (Thoughts on the West, 2004) by Wang Jianmin.

The compositions discussed in this section generally continue the line of development of twentieth-century Chinese music, which characteristically blends melodies that have a strong Chinese identity with compositional techniques influenced by Western classical music. Zheng composition had progressed substantially from the mid-twentieth century, yet Chinese composers were still searching for new methods and musical languages in their evolution towards contemporization.

#### 4.2.2 Influence of Minoru Miki's Works

In 1983 Minoru Miki (1930–2011), a distinguished Japanese composer, was invited to perform in China with his ensemble *Pro Musica Nipponia*.<sup>179</sup> His visit was marked by a concert program that included a variety of orchestral, chamber, and solo works featuring both traditional Japanese and Western instruments performed by the visiting Japanese musicians and their Chinese Central Symphony counterparts.<sup>180</sup> In *Pro Musica Nipponia*'s concerts, Japanese *koto* player Keiko Nosaka (b. 1938) performed Miki's *Greening (Hanayagi, 1976)*, a score the composer wrote for the modern 20-string *koto*.<sup>181</sup> Although *Greening* is only one of a large collection of Miki's compositions for the *koto*,<sup>182</sup> this piece is conceivably one of the most prominent and representative works

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<sup>179</sup> *Pro Musica Nipponia* is a music organization formed by over fifty Japanese composers and performers in 1964. Led by Miki for decades, the ensemble's mandate is to perform a wide range of Japanese music, both on traditional instruments and the combination of traditional and Western instruments.

<sup>180</sup> The new works performed on this program included *Autumn Fantasy* (1980) for *koto* and *shakuhachi*, *Ode to Forest* (1983) for *koto* and cello, and *Rainbow Prelude* (1983), an orchestral piece written for Japanese and Chinese instruments.

<sup>181</sup> An extension of the traditional thirteen-string *koto*, the 20-string *koto* in fact has twenty-one strings, and the lowest string is marked as string "0".

<sup>182</sup> Collectively these works are known as *Ballads for Solo Koto*, categorized under the name of each of the four seasons. Most of Miki's *koto* compositions were written for and premiered by Keiko Nosaka. The fruitful collaboration between Miki and Nosaka over the invention of 20- (21-) string *koto* and the creation of a repertoire for the new instrument is documented in Bonnie Wade's article "Keiko Nosaka and the 20-stringed Koto: Tradition and Modernization in Japanese Music" (1994).



for the contemporary *koto*.

*Greening* is approximately ten minutes long and written in a compound ternary form. It contains two main parts: *Greening*, and *Prelude* written in 1978, two years after *Greening* was premiered. What first drew the attention of Chinese composers was the tuning of the *koto*. Miki expressed that it was essential for him to organize an alternative scale that contained pitch content allowing “flexibility appropriate for contemporary music” (cited in Wade 1994: 245). As a result, each of Miki’s compositions contains a unique tuning that stems from a variety of combinations of traditional Japanese, Western diatonic, and semi-chromatic scales. The tuning of *Greening* combines *hirajoshi*, a standard tuning for traditional *koto* (see Figure 4.10), with diatonic D major. The *hirajoshi* tuning provides a tonal base for the piece, while the extra pitches allow the composer to take the material beyond its traditional framework to create harmony and other non-traditional gestures and colours. In addition to a pre-tuned scale, individual pitches can also be changed during the piece through moving bridges to create even more pitch resources.

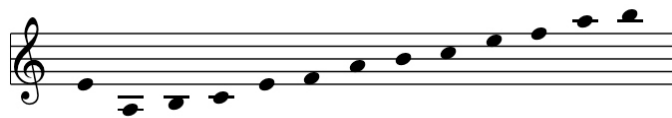


Figure 4-10 Traditional *hirajoshi* tuning for *koto*.

In *Greening*, at the end of *Prelude*, one C and two Fs in specified registers are moved a semitone higher to set the scale to D major (indicated by an arrow in the tuning chart) (see Figure 4.11). This tuning concept introduced a possible solution to the

quandary Chinese composers had faced with moving away from the traditional pentatonic scale and creating alternative tunings for the zheng.



Figure 4-11 The tuning for *Greening*.

Miki’s *koto* compositions are contemporized and Westernized in many ways, yet they often sound indisputably “Japanese.” In *Greening* metered and unmetered sections are juxtaposed with each other (see Figure 4.12). The performance of the unmetered sections, including the entire *Prelude*, stresses a speech-like inner rhythm and phrasing that is reminiscent of the recitation of traditional Japanese classical poetry and drama. In these sections many characteristic expressions and nuances of traditional *koto* music are utilized, signifying the composer’s deep connection to Japanese traditional culture.<sup>183</sup>

| Section | Prelude   | A                                 | B         | C                               | Cadenza | End              |
|---------|-----------|-----------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------|---------|------------------|
| Meter   | Unmetered | 4/4<br>5/4<br>4/4<br>3.5/4<br>3/4 | Unmetered | 6/4<br>5/4<br>4/4<br>5/4<br>4/4 |         | Unmetered<br>4/4 |

Figure 4-12 The compositional structure of *Greening*.

<sup>183</sup> Although professionally trained in Western classical music, Miki grew up in a multiple generation musical family practicing traditional instruments and he participated in the performance of traditional music.

In metered sections a variety of Western oriented gestures and shifting rhythmic patterns, built upon a relatively steady pulse, are utilized to emphasize a fast and constant drive—atypical of Japanese or Chinese traditional music in general. The outcome of incorporating and contrasting rhythmic sensibilities of both traditional East Asian and Western music is an unconstrained flow of the music, described by Miki as “the contrast of the static and dynamic, stillness and motion” (cited in Wade 1994:250).

Apart from the innovative tuning of *Greening*, most Chinese composers and zheng performers were intrigued by the melodic and rhythmic sophistication exhibited in Miki’s *koto* compositions such as melodies that alternated between ranges and the performer’s hands within complex shifting rhythmic patterns. As an example, Figure 4.13 shows a sixteen-measure section in 3.5/4, notated primarily in groups of two or four sixteenth notes. The main melodic line, formed by the first note of each of these groups, is carried by the left hand (marked with “+” in the score) in the middle range of the instrument, while the right hand plays arpeggiated adornments. In the next section the melody is first played in the highest octave and then moves to the lowest octave. In 3/4 each measure is divided into three sets of triplets, with the left thumb playing the accented leading note on the first and third beat (marked with “+”), then further adding the right thumb playing an accent on the second beat (marked with “>”; see Figure 4.13). The use of accented notes throughout the score to highlight certain tones in the melody is an important aspect of this work, as they clearly sit above the surrounding notes and in so doing reflect the traditional horizontal nature of East Asian zither music within a contemporary context.

**Greening**  
Minoru Miki

35

Figure 4-13 An excerpt from *Greening* (hand-written score by the composer given to the author as a private gift).

Further, the switch of the accented notes between the two hands adds another layer of complexity with contrasts in timbre produced by the right hand plucking closer to the fixed bridge (*yueshan*) with artificial nails generating bright, strong attacks, while the left hand without nails plucks close to the middle of the string resulting in a softer and more resonant sound. The demands of the speed of this section, the coordination between the two hands, and the rapid change of rhythmic patterns posed a substantial technical

challenge for zheng performers, as it was a radical departure from both the monophonic nature of traditional East Asian zither music and the melody dominated homophonic approach to zheng composition of the time. As a performer of Miki's *Greening* on the zheng, I feel what is most significant about this work is that the melodic and rhythmic content serve expression. The motives and gestures, as well as the constantly shifting dynamics, offer depth and breadth of emotional content that completely engages the performer (see Figure 4.14).



**Figure 4-14 The author with Minoru Miki in 2003.**

The synthesis of Eastern and Western music traditions in Miki's *koto* works presented a new vista. His cross-cultural approach interwoven with unusual tunings, complex rhythms, and innovative fingerings created a shock wave. As Li Meng, an undergraduate student at the Conservatory at the time, recalled attending the *Pro Musica Nipponia* concert in 1983: "I was shocked by Miki's work. We must admit that Miki and the music he brought to China has had a huge influence on our current state of composition [for the zheng]" (2009, personal communication). In my conversation with Miki, he recalled that over one hundred composers attended *Pro Musica Nipponia* concerts in Beijing and Shanghai. When he went to Beijing in 1989 as a judge for a

competition of Chinese instruments, he “was very surprised by performances of *Greening*. Two men played it very fast. Many zheng players also used new techniques, which we had invented in Japan and showed in our visit to China in 1983” (2009, personal communication).<sup>184</sup>

In the late 1990s Chinese conservatories embraced Miki’s *koto* compositions as part of their teaching materials for zheng performance,<sup>185</sup> and the People’s Music Publishing Company in Beijing published his collection of Ballads for Solo *Koto* in 2004. Considering the fact that thousands of zheng students are studying Miki’s compositions in Chinese conservatories, it is safe to say that they are performed more on the zheng than on the *koto*.

#### 4.2.3 Quest for Virtuosity in Zheng Composition

Miki’s visit to China in 1983 changed zheng composition. Solo compositions inspired by Miki’s work for the Japanese *koto* and Western new music began to rise, moving the contemporary zheng into new territories. Within this movement, two Chinese composers, Wang Jianmin (b. 1957)<sup>186</sup> and Xu Xiaolin (b. 1943), have played a key role

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<sup>184</sup> *Greening* was initially performed on the zheng by Wang Yong (b. 1964) at the Yangzhou National Guzheng Conference (*Zhongguo Guzheng Xueshu Jiaoliu Hui*) in 1986, coinciding with Wang Zhongshan’s performance of the works that featured the newly invented fast fingering sequence.

<sup>185</sup> Li Meng explained that the primary reason for Chinese conservatories to incorporate Miki’s *koto* compositions in zheng curriculum is to make up for the lack of technically difficult teaching material. Currently the Central Conservatory of Music has over one hundred zheng students, most of them accepted at grade four (around ten years old) in Conservatory-affiliated elementary schools, who go on to finish their studies at the master’s level. The total period of study at the Conservatory is sixteen years. Yet by the time they enter at the undergraduate level, they already have learned the entire contemporary zheng repertoire and are left with very few new pieces to learn. A similar situation is found at other major Chinese conservatories.

<sup>186</sup> Wang Jianmin is the director of the Composition Department of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. He is a prolific composer who has written many works for the zheng and other Chinese instruments. A collection of his works was published in 2006, which include *Huanxiang Qu* (Fantasia), *Chang Xiangsi* (Eternal Longing, 1991), *Xi Yun* (Charm of [Beijing] Opera, 1993), *Lianhua Yao* (Ballad of Lotus, 1995), and *Xiang Wu* (Dance of the Xiang, 1996).

in popularizing these new directions.

Wang Jianmin's *Huanxiang Qu* (Fantasia, 1989) is arguably the composer's most successful zheng composition. Like many works of the time, the melodic source materials were drawn from minority music in Yunnan, Southwestern China, which features both a major and minor third. The composer retuned the zheng to incorporate these intervals. Aside from enabling minority melodic characteristics, this tuning (see Figure 4.15) provided new possibilities for harmony, including parallel major and minor triads and a major seventh chord (see Figure 4.16).



Figure 4-15 The tuning of the zheng for *Fantasia*.

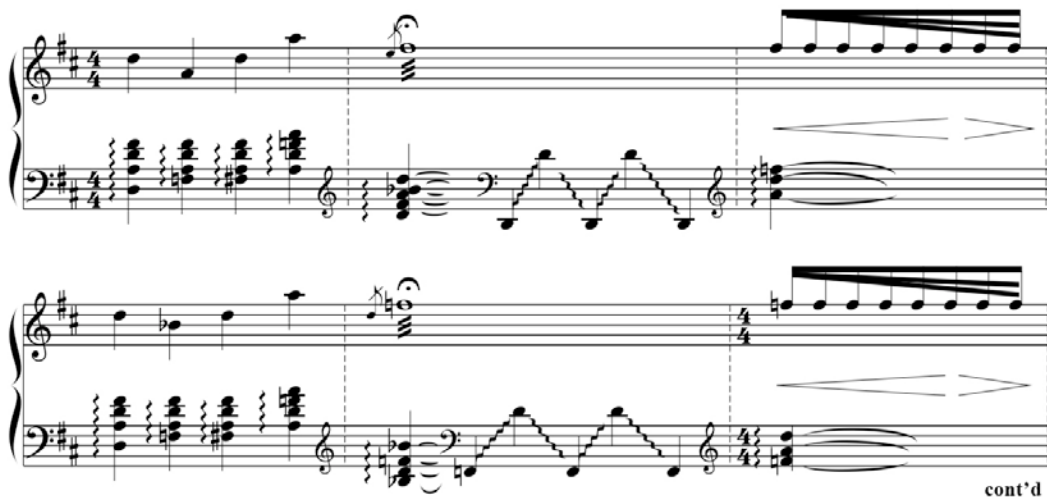



Figure 4-16 Introduction of *Fantasia* demonstrating changes of harmonic tone colour.

In addition, as the composer specified, the major and minor third allowed the piece to modulate from D major to d minor, and to B-flat major (see Figure 4.17).

|  |   |
|--|---|
|  <p>D gong</p> <p>d yu</p> <p>Bb gong</p> | <p><b>Fantasia Compositional Structure</b></p> <p><b>Intro:</b> D gong</p> <p><b>A (Theme):</b> D gong</p> <p><b>Development:</b> D gong - d yu - Bb gong - D gong - Bb gong</p> <p><b>A<sup>1</sup> (Recapitulation):</b> D gong</p> |
|--|---|

**Figure 4-17** Modulations in the compositional structure of the *Fantasia*.<sup>187</sup>

Although Wang’s approach to applying Western harmony and modulation was innovative, the melodic and structural aspects of *Fantasia* are rather conventional. The main melody and its variations throughout the piece are basically structured in a symmetric four-phrase form that corresponds to the traditional compositional principle of the four stages: *qi* (initiation), *cheng* (continuation), *zhuan* (deviation), and *he* (reunification) (see Figure 4.18).

<sup>187</sup> In Chinese music theory *gong* is the first degree of a scale, the equivalent to the Western tonic note. Yet *gong* also refers to a modal centre. In this case, D is the modal centre for D *gong* and B-flat is the modal centre for B-flat *gong*. *Yü* is the sixth degree of a scale, and “d *yü*” indicates that “d”—the sixth degree of the key of F— is the modal centre.



**Fantasia** Wang Jianmin

cont'd

**Figure 4-18** The main theme of *Fantasia*, demonstrating its symmetrical form.

Wang Jianmin's *Fantasia* is a meeting of Western compositional idioms and aesthetics with Chinese elements and motifs. The composer's objective was to create music that could be appreciated by all social strata. Wang believed that "A composition should have artistic (*ya*) quality in its form and language and, [at the same time], have euphonic quality (*su*)." He adds: "the 'degree of innovation' contains a measure of the public standard...innovation should be based on the tradition, [it should be] new but not strange" (2003:2). The appeal of this work lay in its short captivating theme inspired by minority music which echoes throughout the composition, coloured by the expanded use of harmony that was new to Chinese ears. Wang overlaid traditional with modern zheng techniques to sculpt large dynamic changes, shifting note densities, new textures, and complex tempo variations while building the piece toward a climax. Zheng performer Deng Haiqiong wrote: "The unprecedented complexity of techniques, the non-pentatonic

tuning, and the irregular, dynamic rhythm for the first time instilled in me a strong desire for self-expression and flamboyant stage performance” (2006:58).

Xu Xiaolin<sup>188</sup> (see Figure 4. 19) has created a substantial body of solo works comparable to Wang Jianmin’s in that traditional and minority music are the main sources, though they differ radically in compositional approaches. Xu’s *Shan Mei* (Mountain Goddess, 1986) is an early composition for solo zheng and is perhaps the most representative work demonstrating the composer’s ambition to create her own voice on the instrument, and to challenge the conventional concept of zheng composition on many fronts. In *Mountain Goddess* Xu explores mythical, spiritual, and esoteric themes seldom a part of zheng composition. The piece was inspired by the “*Shan Gui*” (Mountain Ghost), the ninth verse of the *Nine Songs (Jiu Ge)* epic poem by Qu Yuan of the Chu State in the Warring States era (see footnote 174 in 4.2.1). The poem portrays a goddess who was devastated by losing her love and who drifted to a remote mountain.



**Figure 4-19 Composer Xu Xiaolin (photo by permission of Xu).**

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<sup>188</sup> Xu Xiaolin is professor emeritus from at the Chinese Conservatory of Music in Beijing. Xu studied composition at the Sichuan Conservatory and graduated in 1966. Afterwards she was sent to work in a farm for two years before becoming a conductor, composer, teacher, and eventually a composition professor. In the early 1980s she began to compose for solo zheng for her late husband and zheng professor Qiu Dacheng (1945-19) and his students. Two separate collections of Xu’s compositions for zheng have been published in 1994 and 2001 and recorded and included in numerous CDs.

The impetus for *Mountain Goddess* was the complex emotional territory of ancient *Chu* culture, well known for its prevalent practice of shamanism wherein spirits and deities are both worshiped as gods, thus their roles (images) are sometimes interchangeable. In order to capture the ethereal spirit, mystery, and intensity portrayed in the poem, the composer chose to use sound colors to “paint” the music. Xu Xiaolin’s use of colour in her compositions is inspired by the Chinese folk music of the Southwest where she grew up, combined with her interpretation of French impressionist paintings (2009, personal communication). She asserts that the colour of sound is a powerful music language that can influence human emotion. In *Mountain Goddess*, rather than telling the story directly through a melody, the composer creates a sound poem in which she sculpts moods to create emotional landscapes, from an explosive cry to a hidden whimper, and from a moment of ecstasy to quiet solitude. Such sound gestures are created using both tuned and untuned sounds to generate a collage of thoughts and statements.

According to Xu Xiaolin, the entire composition is structured to contrast the augmented and pure fourths to respectively portray the two worlds of the ghost and goddess. She created a tuning for the 21-string zheng with each of the four registers containing a different pentatonic collection that accentuates both the augmented and pure fourth (see Figure 4.20). Each register begins with F and leads to a different five-tone scale, except for the higher octave where the scale starts at E. Xu states:

I found the traditional pentatonic tuning was restrictive...I didn’t want to create modal music, I wanted clusters of sound and I wanted colour...*Mountain Goddess* extended the traditional tuning, and this was inspired by Japanese *koto*. After hearing Miki’s works in Beijing, I asked myself, if the Japanese *koto* can [retune], why cannot I try it on the zheng? I consciously departed from the traditional model of the tuning. I wanted to first push [the tuning] far away, and then [if it is too much] gradually

bring it back. I wanted to see how far I could go. (2009, personal communication)

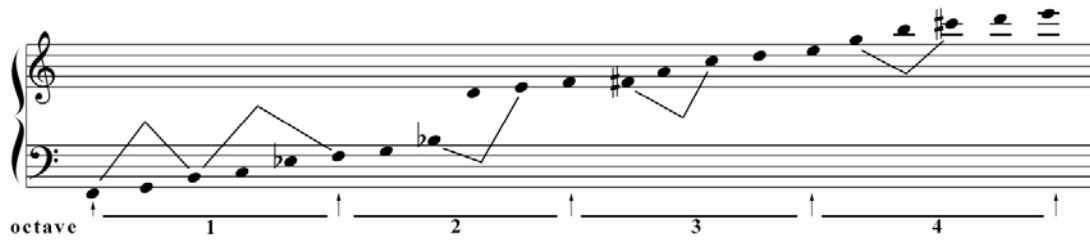


Figure 4-20 The zheng tuning for *Mountain Goddess*, with tritones indicated.

It is worth noting that although these new tunings provided more sonic possibilities on the zheng, making it more suitable for modern compositions, they presented a substantial cognitive challenge for zheng musicians. As with Miki's *koto* tuning, the change in pitch of the open strings and the non-repetitive octaves eradicate the reference point for the standard hand position—an octave between the thumb and the middle finger (usually marked by green coloured strings on pitch A in all four octaves)—which forms the foundation for many traditional techniques. Composers such as Li Mei became concerned that substantial changes to tuning would have a negative impact on conventional zheng techniques:

If the five-note tuning structure is changed, the techniques that were built upon this will not be able to function. Then, the zheng will be reduced to tone colour in the hands of composers. They will only be able to assign the instrument single notes or certain intervals. The reality and uniqueness of the instrument have a direct relationship to its fingering technique. Without understanding this point, it won't be a real meaningful innovation for the zheng. Therefore, I'd say that the pentatonic structure of the tuning should not be changed. (2009, personal communication)

However, the challenges posed by this new tuning, as with Miki's compositions, met with very little resistance by zheng performers, as this was an expected aspect of modernization.

Xu Xiaolin created a palette of colours by rapidly shifting between low and high tones, utilizing harmonics, changing the plucking position on a string, alternating the methods of striking the strings from plucking to tapping, and knocking the body of the instrument (see Figure 4.21). She absorbed what Minoru Miki brought to Chinese composition and took it further.<sup>189</sup> The use and arrangement of these techniques, in comparison to Wang Jianmin's *Fantasia*, are at once more integrated and dispersed. It is a great challenge for zheng performers to navigate rapid shifts of motifs, emotive dynamics, and expressive textures sensitively.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> One similarity can be seen in the use of intricate rhythmic patterns between the two hands (in the opening section of Xu's piece, shown in Figure 4.21, and a part of *Greening* shown in Figure 4.12).

<sup>190</sup> Xu Xiaoling's piece often create a Chinese sense of pensiveness, space, and timelessness, which demands performers identify with and interpret the inner emotions of the music. An example of performing *Goddess of Mountain* by Qiu Ji (Xu Xiaolin's niece) is available at: [http://v.youku.com/v\\_show/id\\_XODE4Nzk3NDQ=.html?f=3135253ODE4Nzk3NDQ](http://v.youku.com/v_show/id_XODE4Nzk3NDQ=.html?f=3135253ODE4Nzk3NDQ). Qiu is a zheng professor at the Chinese Conservatory of Music and a leading performer of Xu's compositions. She recorded Xu's compositions for Hugo Productions, a Hong Kong-based recording company, in 1997.

**Shan Mei**  
Mountain Goddess

Xu Xiaolin

slow and free

repeat freely accel.

*p*

*f*

*ff*

allegro mysterious

*p*

*ff*

Figure 4-21 The opening section of *Mountain Goddess*. The four symbols at the end of the score indicate: 1) strum downward, 2) strum upward, 3) both hands play glissando on the untuned left side of the bridges in opposite directions, and 4) hit the bottom of the sound box with the left hand.

#### 4.2.4 Exploring Western New Music on the Zheng

In the 1980s Chinese composers commenced writing works in a Western new music idiom for chamber ensembles comprised of Chinese traditional instruments. Considered a radical movement towards Westernization, the trend was led by a group of young composers who were colleagues in the 1977 composition class at the Central

Conservatory.<sup>191</sup> The group, which included Zhou Long (b. 1953), Tan Dun (b. 1957), Chen Yi (b. 1953), and Qu Xiaosong (b. 1953), has since become a major force in composition both nationally and internationally. British composer Alexander Goehr, who was considered part of the Manchester school along with Peter Maxwell Davies and Harrison Birtwistle, was a guest instructor at the conservatory at that time. His influence along with Miki's are evident in these young Chinese composer's later works.

The first of these works that involved the zheng was Zhou Long's *Konggu Liushui* (Valley Stream), a chamber work for *di* (flute), *guan* (double reed pipe), zheng, and percussion written in 1982.<sup>192</sup> According to the composer, "the piece combined a variety of traditional musical sources, and was based on the traditional pentatonic scale, I used pan-tonality and polytonality. I wanted to explore new techniques and tone colours." The composer chose to use the zheng because of its range of performance techniques and ability to produce a range of dynamics and colors. "The only limit was the tuning. I had to start to make non-traditional tuning [for the zheng] in the very early years" (2012, personal communication).

In *Valley Stream*, the composer went beyond the Western classical music approach that had been commonly used. The piece starts with a lyrical melody, which

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<sup>191</sup> In 1977 Chinese conservatories restored their administration and began to enroll students through public examinations, a system that was heavily damaged by the Cultural Revolution. This encouraged many young students to pursue their music career through professional training. The Central Conservatory of Music enrolled its first composition class in 1977. The curriculum for composition was broadened from teaching theories heavily based upon nineteenth-century Western classical music, to include teaching contemporary Western music. Because of the government's "open-door" (*gaige kaifang*) policy, Western lecturers were invited to teach twentieth-century new music. According to many Chinese sources, Cambridge composition professor Alexander Goehr, who taught at the Central Conservatory in 1981, was the first Western composer to introduce Western avant-garde music to China. Minoru Miki's music, especially his approach to writing for traditional Japanese instruments, also had a significant influence on these composers. Chinese musicologist Li Xi'an (b.1937) wrote: "The music [of Miki] made a huge impact on Chinese composers such as Tan Dun and others, who were still studying. They told me many times that they did not, nor could not imagine that traditional instruments could also perform music with a modern flavour. This was the most direct stimulation and persuasion" (2002:69).

<sup>192</sup> A performance of *Valley Stream* is available at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=lb1\\_P5Saw8E](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lb1_P5Saw8E).

gradually develops while moving between the four instruments. Zhou elucidates that his conception of music often came from ancient Chinese poetry, therefore, “there are musical traits directly reminiscent of ancient China: sensitive melodies, expressive glissandi in various statements, and, in particular, a peculiarly Chinese undercurrent of tranquility and meditation” (2012, personal communication). At the same time, he challenged the status quo by creating a cross-fertilization of [Chinese and Western] color, material, and technique. “Musicologist Qiao Jianzhong (the Director of the Music Research Institute of the Chinese National Academy of Arts) praised the work as ‘an initial sally against the mindset of the composition for Chinese instruments in the last thirty years’” (2012, personal communication).

In 1984 Tan Dun composed *Nan Xiang Zi*,<sup>193</sup> a duet for zheng and *xiao* (end-blown bamboo flute) which featured the zheng more prominently than in Zhou’s piece, while introducing a new tuning and challenging techniques. Catalyzed by these two compositions, the twentieth-century Western new music idiom continues to develop today; however, new music is still considered “academic” music in China, and new music compositions are mostly performed within the conservatory milieu.

One of the most recent new music compositions is *Hongshuihe Kuangxiang* (Rhapsody of Red River, 2007) for *duosheng* zheng, cello, and contrabass, composed and performed by Li Meng. The *duosheng* zheng, designed by Li in 2007 (see Figure 4.22), was created to extend the pitch range of the instrument with two sets of strings on the same soundboard: twenty-one on the right and thirteen on the left, each tuned to its own

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<sup>193</sup> *Nan Xiang Zi* was a *qupai* title that, according to historical texts, initially become popular in court banquet music during the Tang period. Musically, Tan Dun’s composition has no direct relation to the original *qupai*. A performance of *Nan Xiang Zi* by Zhu Lei (zheng) and Li Chen (*xiao*) is available at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=qT9PXwEtnzo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qT9PXwEtnzo).



scale subject to individual compositions. The tunings of the *Rhapsody of Red River* is illustrated in Figure 4.23 (see Figure 4.23).

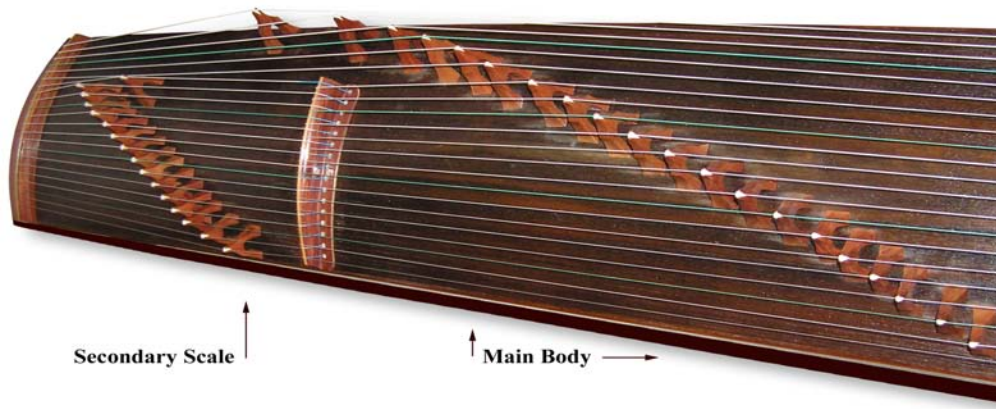


Figure 4-22 The multiple-tuning zheng.



Figure 4-23 The tuning for *Rhapsody of Red River*.

This twenty-first-century composition further embraces unconventional tones, blending tuned and untuned sounds, including knocking and tapping the wood of the top, bottom, and sides of the instrument to create a variety of percussive sounds, as well as striking and sweeping various regions of the strings to generate tone clusters (see Figure 4.24). Although the use of untuned sounds, especially drumming on the instrument body, has been increasingly popular, Li was able to enlarge the palette of extended techniques.

According to the composer, she was inspired by percussion instruments and especially Indian tabla, signalling the onset of broader musical and cultural influences.

### Hongshuihe Kuangxiang

Rhapsody of Red River

Li Meng

The musical score is arranged in two systems. The first system includes parts for Zheng, Cello, and Contrabass. The second system includes parts for Zheng, Cello, and Contrabass. The score features various performance instructions and dynamic markings.

- ✱ - play on the left side of the bridges.
- ↑↑↑ - glissando on short strings on the right of the nut.
- ≡ - strum multiple strings.
- ☞ - hit the strings or the body of the instrument.
- W - hit the wood on the audience side of the body.
- D - hit the bottom of the instrument.
- S - hit the wood on the top of the instrument.
- φ - mute the string(s) immediately after plucking.
- ←φ→ - mute then slide along the string(s).

Figure 4-24 Excerpt from *Rhapsody of Red River*.

### **4.3 Striving for Virtuosity and Creating a New Legacy**

In the zheng's transformation from traditional instrument mainly for private edification to concert instrument to entertain the public, its performance aesthetics and ethics have been modified. Traditional performance aesthetics were based upon Confucian philosophy, stressing the cultivation of the performer's virtue, whereas the contemporary professional performance model emphasizes the performer as a virtuoso often encompassing an extravagant stage presentation. These changes sparked the sociocultural phenomenon of the zheng's transformation into the most popular traditional instrument in China.

#### **4.3.1 Technical Virtuosity in Zheng Performance and Teaching**

The new performance standard in Chinese music is not that different from what is expected of a virtuoso in the West. In her book *Virtue or Virtuosity*, Jane O'Dea describes a virtuoso as a highly accomplished musician/singer “with extraordinary feats of technical endeavour—with dazzling displays of speed, incomparable spectacles of vocal or dexterous agility...overwrought, grandiose portrayals of emotion, with mannered, affected manifestations of supposedly artistic sensibility” (2000:40). O'Dea also points out that there are two separate but correlated sets of skills in performance—technique and craft. While technical skills are essentially synonymous with virtuosity, craft skills suggest a performer's ability to interpret with artful execution and keen awareness of tonal subtleties (discussed in the next chapter).

Although modern usage of the term “virtuoso” in English dates to the Romantic era of Western classical music, a similar concept is also found in traditional Chinese culture in the expression of *xuanji* (*xuan*: to show off; *ji*: skill), used to describe the showcasing of technical skills in various art forms and entertainment. The Western perspective of virtuosity combined with the Chinese notion of *xuanji* has become the foundation of a new performance aesthetic for professional Chinese musicians.

The application of a virtuosic standard in zheng performance was initially advocated in the 1950s. Zhao Yuzhai’s *Celebrating the Harvest* in the 1950s, and later Wang Changyuan’s *Battling the Typhoon* in the 1960s and Zhang Yan’s *Little Sister’s from the Grassland* in the 1970s (discussed in Chapter Three) are prime examples of compositions that advocate virtuosity. In the last few decades virtuosity has gradually become a single set of standards, in which performers choose very challenging works to perform, such as those of Wang Jianmin, Xu Xiaolin, and Miki Minoru. Increasingly the pieces are overinterpreted with extremely fast tempo and exaggerated dynamics superseding what the composers intended. Driven by the axiom “technical complexity + speed = superior,” zheng performers are in pursuit of progressively faster, more technically complex works.

This trend has caught the attention of many zheng scholars and musicians, especially those of the older generations. A number of articles in Chinese on the zheng have analyzed this movement and overtly criticized the emphasis on speed and technique.

Qiu Ji writes:

Many zheng performers put technique, or more accurately *speed*, on the highest level, and often they lack mastery of tone colours, styles, and have insufficient understanding of the depth of music... This is regrettable in the development of the art of the zheng. It is important for us to foster zheng

performers who are well-rounded, cultured, and have sophisticated aesthetics rather than music laborer[s] who do not have the ability to identify sound but only play fast. (2004:224, translated from the Chinese)

Wang Yingrui wrote:

There are many unhealthy tendencies in contemporary zheng composition and performance ... for instance, [some] compositions were created to specifically accommodate fast fingering sequences, [others] were stuffed with modern techniques for playing fast. [Some performers] only pursue showing off techniques. (2007:78, translated from the Chinese)

Minoru Miki also commented on two young players' performance of *Greening*:

I think that not only [did they play] too fast, they also needed time to approach the piece with the natural energy and magnanimous manner that the piece required. (2002:28, translated from the Chinese)

In my personal communications, most Chinese zheng artists, composers, and scholars raise related concerns. Lü Jin (b. 1960), a zheng and *kayagum* performer from Beijing,<sup>194</sup> described most zheng performances as “shallow, exaggerated, and unnatural.” She observes that:

It is exhausting to listen to the music, as it is not beautiful but intense. Some players play so fast, deeming that the faster and louder, the better. Performers consider very little about sound from the musical point of view but only a technical point of view. (2009, personal communication)

When I asked Wang Zhongshan why zheng players wanted to play so fast, his answer was: “[The music] was too slow before.” He further elaborated: “The rhythm of life is so fast in this modern time, and people express their feelings explicitly. Thus, we need to have a direct way to respond and communicate [with the audience]” (2009, personal communication). Wang's view here is commonly held by younger generations

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<sup>194</sup> Lü Jin graduated from the Central Conservatory of Music. In the 1980s she was sent to North Korea by the Chinese government to study *kayagum* at the top conservatory in Pyongyang for five years.

of Chinese zheng musicians, who believe that the direction that the contemporary zheng has taken is a natural choice for change as the society and people have moved forward.

The development of virtuosity has been strongly affected by the change of the zheng's performance function. Wang Zhongshan addressed how he changed his own conception of performance in an interview by Deng Haiqiong in 2005:

I was very frustrated at [the] beginning of my conservatory study. I realized that my old way of performing (more traditional way) did not match the conservatory style. It did not focus on the stage performance with fast speed playing. I did not know how to use my breath to control my performance... Elder folk musicians just play it, not like us; we add many physical gestures in order to enrich a stage performance... [L]ike many pianists, they can reveal their feeling through an effective performance. We are not elder folk musicians and do not play for self-entertainment... Fairly speaking, the music conservatory is for nurturing musicians who will entertain others—a professional place to train musicians to make a living. Getting into professional performing orchestras or holding concerts to make a harmony with audiences—that is all. (cited in Deng 2006:55)

In her thesis Deng notes: “Professor Wang unfolds the practical surrounding circumstances for students who are pursuing a professional career. He raises a dichotomy between performing for others and playing for oneself” (2006:55). The “practical surrounding circumstances” that Deng described can be observed in the current Chinese conservatory educational system. In response to the challenge of modernization, the conservatories have continuously elevated their standards for excellence and fostered numerous great musicians. Many conservatory trained zheng artists, such as Li Meng and Wang Zhongshan, have both impeccable technical skills and a solid foundation in traditional music. Wang's performance of *Climbing the Mountain, Beating the Tiger* (see footnote 6 in this chapter), for example, clearly demonstrates that his dazzling speed is supported by passion, bestowing a genuine interpretation of the heroic spirit called for in

the music. Their performances inspired many youth to learn the zheng.

However, the success of the leading musicians was often disproportionately credited to their high technical skills over other aspects of their artistry, and their performances became the primary models for promoting virtuosity. For those who want to become professional musicians, a conservatory education is the best, if not the *only*, path to realize their dreams. As such, conservatory standards set the performance parameters that young musicians, their parents, and teachers strive for. The pool of applicants from such a large population has created an extremely fierce competition for acceptance in conservatories, especially for those on the national level, resulting in students developing substantial technical prowess in a plethora of fingering techniques at an increasingly young age. Numerous national and local contests and systems of certificate examinations<sup>195</sup> that award credits for enrolment in high school and universities have further contributed to advancing technical skills among young students. My observation is that instead of taking time to develop a proper music foundation, many young players prioritize learning difficult pieces and endeavour to play them faster than

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<sup>195</sup> Contests for instrumental music are popular nationwide in China. National and regional competitions are held year round for children through to adults ranging from the amateur to professional levels. The top national competitions are the *Jinzhong Jiang* (Golden Bell Award), *Wenhua Jiang* (Cultural Achievement Award) presented by the Ministry of Culture, and the Chinese Instrument Competition organized by the State Television Station (CCTV). Several national examination systems, similar to the Canadian Royal Conservatory Examinations, have been exercised in China in the last two decades. The largest and most influential exam system—The Grade Examination—operated by the Central Conservatory of Music was established in 1989. Each year there are approximately 100,000 students taking the exam. This system has also been introduced to many countries including Canada where there are an increasing number of Chinese immigrants. The B.C. Chinese Music Association implemented the exam system in British Columbia in 2006. The certificate is also recognized by the B.C. Ministry of Education as part of its External Credential Program Courses for students to receive extra credits.

the established tempi; as a consequence, essential elements, such as timing and tone quality, are often noticeably underdeveloped.<sup>196</sup>

Both Li Meng and Wang Zhongshan stated that techniques should ultimately serve the purpose of music. “However,” said Li Meng, “technique is too important to be ignored. Without technique, [music] is not perfect, not scientific, and not grand” (2009, personal communication). They also argue that what is happening to the zheng is necessary and unavoidable as part of the course in the zheng’s transformation. Li Meng predicts that the disproportionate emphasis on speed will eventually change, “when everybody plays crazily fast to the extreme and there is no way out, they will stop and consider other ways. But you have to let them go through this period. You cannot prevent it” (2009, personal communication).

It should be pointed out that musicians striving for virtuosity are also motivated by the appeal of many non-musical benefits—recognition, social standing, and substantial financial success—in what O’Dea refers to as “external goods,” a term borrowed from Aristotle (2000:26). Musicians who create compositions that feature new and more challenging techniques often rise to prominence; and government recognition of their achievement can then further raise their social standing. Wang Zhongshan acknowledges that “the reason I became famous was because [of] teacher Zhao [Manqin]’s two pieces (one being *Climbing the Mountain, Beating the Tiger*), and both of them are fast and revolutionary. Guzheng could not play fast before because there was no such technique” (2009, personal communication). In recent years the increasing commoditization of the arts in China has led to the view that the success of an artist is directly related to financial

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<sup>196</sup> A performance of *Jinggang Shanshang Taiyang Hong* (The Red Sun Shining on the *Jinggang* Mountain) by 10-year-old Zhao Chun is available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q7LJj7pFKAM>. The performance highlights this young performer’s ability to play fast, while revealing an unstable pulse.



success. As a result of a booming economy in China, a middle class has rapidly formed, and learning a musical instrument, especially among youth, has become extremely popular in urban homes. Teaching the instrument has therefore become very profitable, especially for top performers. According to Li Meng, there was an estimated fifteen million people in China playing the zheng in 2009. With such a large population base, many zheng teachers in China are now multi-millionaires.

Are performance aesthetics in traditional music incongruous with those of professional entertainment? My belief is that if techniques are at the service of the music, it is important that they do not supersede the music as then the performer takes precedence over it. Technique should serve the music, but the music should always be the priority. Traditional zheng musician Cao Dongfu once said: “Musicians should express the zheng, not the zheng show off musicians” (cited in Feng 2004:241, translated from Chinese). The use of the zheng in self-cultivation is the refinement of the instrument, culture, and the interrelationship between an artist and instrument. Where expression of music becomes an expression of oneself, every nuance is an aspect of a musician’s personality. Nuance achieved through self-cultivation can inform, enhance, and augment musical performance meant for others.

#### **4.3.2 Visuality in the Zheng’s Performance<sup>197</sup>**

The stress on technical virtuosity has propagated a drive to broaden the impact of the instrument. Yet the enhancement of musical elements has not proven enough, as

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<sup>197</sup> I borrowed the term “visuality” from Hilary Finchum-Sung’s study on the visual aspect of Korean traditional music performance (Finchum-Sung 2012).

witnessed by the rise of visual aspects of performance, ranging from exaggerated body movements to the creation of spectacles with hundreds of zheng performing in unison.

Musicians often move when performing as a natural embodiment of expression, however, there are performers who intentionally augment the amount of physical movement. Piano virtuoso Liszt was well known for what O’Dea refers to as his “exaggerated hand gestures...[and] facial expressions deliberately designed to move his audience...” (2000:43).

German composer/zither player Robert Zollitsch,<sup>198</sup> who has worked with many zheng performers in China, believes that the trend of purposely adding extra physical gestures to performance results from misunderstanding interpretive movements observed in performances of Western classical music such as Liszt’s.<sup>199</sup> However, Zollitsch says:

*Qi* [energy] and *yun* in Western music are totally different. Movements in Western music are more natural. In Chinese music, it looks pretty much made-up. It’s not really connected with the content of the music. It’s more a theatrical effect, which, I think, is from a Western concept re-interpreted in China. (Zollitsch 2010, personal communication)

Wang Zhongshan became well known for his use of physical gestures and expression as he rose to national fame as a zheng virtuoso in China in the mid 1990s. Now, as a seasoned musician, he is critically reflective of his leading role in this movement:

The zheng since its invention has had two functions—self-cultivation (*yuji*) and entertainment (*yuren*). Our conservatory educational system has insistently emphasized that of the entertainment, therefore, farther and

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<sup>198</sup> Robert Zollitsch (b. 1966) grew up in Munich and plays the Bavarian zither. In 1993 he was awarded a scholarship to study the *qin* in Shanghai. Since then he has become closely involved in the Chinese Art Music scene, and established himself as one of the most influential composers and producers. He has collaborated with numerous Chinese musicians, including zheng performers Qiu Ji and Chang Jing, as well as *San Chuan*, a zheng trio based in Beijing.

<sup>199</sup> Chinese pianist Lang Lang is also known for his flamboyant stage presentation. His success, especially his international recognition, has made flamboyant performance style a model for many Chinese musicians as an international standard.

farther away from self-cultivation, forgetting its purposes of nurturing the soul.

I am also constantly adjusting my own view, especially because I contributed more in a certain aspect [of the trend] before. When I saw these children [young players] follow the same path, I needed to reflect and to review my teaching and performance. I told them that it was only at one stage [in the zheng's development] when we did a lot of reform... Musical performance is to interpret (*yanshi*), which accentuates the heart, not performing staged gestures (*biaoyan*). It is wrong to use physical gestures to replace emotional interpretation. In my heart, I pay very much attention to the side of the zheng that expresses the true feelings, and that touches people. (2009, personal communication)

Despite Wang's feelings, stylized and exaggerated gestures have become commonplace (see Figure 4.25). These gestures are becoming standardized, passed from teacher to student, as the art of performing music (*yanzou*) becomes blurred with the art of acting (*biaoyan*). Recent zheng literature in China contains articles advocating body movement and facial expression as essential components of demonstrating a performer's emotion and interpretation of the music, as well as a necessity for intensifying the beauty and visual effects of a performance. One article discussing the performance of Xu Xiaolin's composition *Qianzhong Fu* (Odes to Guizhou) correlates movements to gestures:

When coordinating body movements with emotional expression, [the performer] needs to pay attention to the pivotal role of the waist and neck. In general, when playing arpeggio, straighten the waist, shake the head and close the eyes. The movement needs to be abrupt, and the facial expression needs to be serious and mysterious. When sliding a note, nod then shake head with eyes semi-closed. (Yin 2008:113, translated from the Chinese)



**Figure 4-25 Zheng performances at the First Beijing International Guzheng Festival (photo by permission of Beijing International Guzheng Festival Committee).**

Influenced by this type of commentary, many zheng performers, especially female performers, add even more hand gestures and body movements to the point of choreographing the performance of an entire ensemble.<sup>200</sup> As these visual elements have been integrated into teaching and further reinforced by television broadcasts, visual enhancement has become standard for both mainstream contemporary zheng professionals within China, and its influence has reached to Chinese diasporas worldwide.

Many express concern and frustration with the overemphasis on visual enhancement. Qiu Ji believes that this situation is a manifestation of the growing superficiality of the increasingly fast-paced life in modern China. She elaborates: “People seem not able to calm down to listen. Many performers’ ears are closed, but eyes are wide open. They watch and copy” (2009, personal communication). Consequently,

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<sup>200</sup> The performance of a visiting Chinese zheng group performing in Tampere, Finland in this video (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGySSjWATA8>) is an example of choreographed performance.

individual interpretation is curtailed in favour of a single national standard, and a “stereotyped model of melodic and tone treatment” is generated (2004:224, translated from Chinese), creating a phenomenon of “[music-making] like an industrial manufacturing line. All [performances] are produced by *one* single mold” (2009, personal communication.). Or, as Liu Weishan puts it: “A thousand people having one sound” (2011, personal communication).

The image of the zheng as a feminine instrument,<sup>201</sup> combined with the opinion that the instrument has a “sweet” sound and is easier for beginners to learn than other instruments, has led to the creation of the motto for the zheng—“easy on the eyes, easy on the ears, and easy to learn” (*haokan, haoting, haoxue*). Consequently, many parents of girls enrolling their children in zheng classes and the number of people playing it has reached an estimated twenty million worldwide.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Although traditional zheng musicians in the nineteenth and early twentieth century were almost exclusively male, romanticized images of women zheng players are predominant in modern Chinese culture. Depictions of female courtesans playing the zheng are not new, but found in poetry and iconography from the Tang and Song dynasties, as well as in the Dunhuang cave murals. Popularized by Taiwanese and Hong Kong soap operas set in historic China, idealized female images are found in pop music, on MTV, and on internet video sites such as *youku*, the Chinese version of YouTube. The social ramifications of the visual phenomenon of the zheng and related gender issues are beyond the scope of this dissertation (but undoubtedly call for further academic study and examination). However, issues related to Orientalism (Kabbani 1986) and the idea of “multiplicity of equally available women” or “infinitely replicable quality of femaleness” (Hunter 1998:69-70) have been explored in Western musicology and gender theories.

<sup>202</sup> This number is given by Li Meng, based on the numbers of the enrollment of different schools and the registrations of the various certificate exams.



**Figure 4-26 An event claiming a new Guinness World Record for having the most zheng players on stage, 2007 (photo by permission of Xie Jiangbo).**

The exponential increase in the number of zheng students has spawned another visual phenomenon: large-scale events with dozens or even hundreds of female zheng performers participating, all wearing colour coordinated costumes and similar hairstyles. In Guangxi province in 2006 a gathering of one thousand and eight performers created the first Guinness record of most people playing the zheng together. This record was quickly broken when in 2007 a performance by two thousand three hundred and forty eight female zheng players in Hulu Island, Liaoning province, set a new Guinness record (see Figure 4.26). The opening of First Beijing International Guzheng Music Festival in 2009 featured one thousand performers (see Figure 4.27). These large events certainly demonstrate the interest in and popularity of the zheng in modern China.



**Figure 4-27 Dress rehearsal of the opening performing at the First Beijing International Guzheng Festival, 2010 (photo by permission of Deng Ying).**

These grand events of “thousand people playing the zheng,” which are often pronounced as a symbol of strong national unity and a revival of traditional culture, can perhaps be regarded as a present-day manifestation of the Confucian idea of “music harmonizes the people’s voices.” Whereas the intention of these events might well be to embrace tradition, such grandeur to create a unified voice is at odds with the tradition’s wellspring of individualism. Many Chinese desire to play the zheng to express their growing cultural sophistication, yet the overemphasis on visual aspects diverges from what is traditionally regarded as sophistication—awareness of subtlety in sound, self-expression, and spiritual cultivation. As Li Mei alleges:

If organizing these [big events] is to promulgate the instrument, one versus one thousand, which would make a bigger impression? Of course a superb and artful performance would leave a holistic impression. We see the instrument, and also hear the sound of it. When a thousand people play together, there is no music to appreciate any more. If [you] cannot appreciate its music, the only thing left is to look at its shell. So, the result [of these events] is not necessarily a positive way for us to introduce such a beautiful instrument that has borne the weight of the history of over two thousand years. (2009, personal communication)



## **5 DISCOVERING INDIVIDUAL VOICES WHILE CREATING A GLOBAL MARKET FOR THE ZHENG**

I find beauty in the zheng, but beauty is not pretty. It can be, but beauty is in the power of truth. Beauty is to fully review the intentions of the players. It can be the voice of the player. Beauty can be violent, and can be mournful. It is a huge range of emotion. But the instrument does not do it by itself. It is up to the player. It is the player that creates the sound of the instrument. Not the other way around. (John Sharpley 2011, personal communication)

In 1996 I emigrated from China to Canada seeking new opportunities to continue my career as a scholar and performer. In the last fifteen years I have performed with the zheng in a variety of Western chamber, new music, free improvisation, electro-acoustic, and world music genres through a wide range of collaboration with musicians and composers from different cultural backgrounds. These experiences provided me with fresh insights into Western, Chinese, and World musics, and many new ways of making music.

Time and geography have coloured my relationship with the zheng community in my home country. While I am excited by many aspects of the fast growth of the zheng in China, I am also concerned and even troubled by certain new developments. With this perspective, in this chapter I bring to the fore many subjective experiences and observations as a performer of contemporary music. I discuss several issues emerging from these challenges, particularly improvisation and the use of craft skills in the development of a creative, individual voice. I argue that while many approaches borrowed from other cultures and musical forms are applied to the zheng to create



innovative music, the fundamentals of these seemingly “new” approaches are not unknown to Chinese music. In fact, they often share the same guiding principles and aesthetics found within traditional Chinese culture. Therefore, as Chinese zheng musicians discover and assimilate “new” influences, it is important for them to re-examine their own patrimony and re-integrate the essence of the traditional zheng into zheng music of the future.

## **5.1 Improvisation as a Tool for Zheng Performance and Composition**

As discussed in Chapter Two, the traditional zheng embodies a set of fundamental aesthetics constructed upon Daoism (Taoism). While these ancient Chinese philosophical principles delineated ideal standards of sound, meaning, and performance, they also fostered spontaneity and extemporization. Musicians often acted as composers to various degrees because music making entailed adding new material to the compositional framework. As a result, new pieces were developed over time, embracing both regional styles as well as personal interpretations. In the process of establishing music institutions in the 1950s (addressed in Chapter Three), however, a small number of traditional zheng musicians from around the country were chosen to teach at the conservatories, where their individual and regional interpretations of the “bone tunes” became codified and extemporization was curtailed in favour of a single national performance standard. As notation became the sole vehicle of transmission,<sup>203</sup> spontaneity declined and was

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<sup>203</sup> In recent years an element of improvisation has been introduced into mainstream Chinese music, primarily in competitions or auditions. Often contestants are given an image, either a painting or photo, and are asked to create a short improvised tune based on what they saw.

replaced by unified performance techniques, repertoires, and even stage presentation, thus creating a national convergence.

Over the last two decades, many professional zheng musicians have emigrated from China to the West. The professional training these zheng musicians received in their home country provided a set of highly developed instrumental skills with the capability of performing demanding scores by international composers. However, the cultural environment in the West is very different, and the range of music making that zheng musicians encounter is much broader than in China, spanning fully scored compositions to free improvisation. In the West there are opportunities to collaborate with musicians and composers with diverse cultural backgrounds and influences from around the world. These encounters have challenged some zheng musicians' conception of music and how it is made, including my own.

In 1998, after I graduated from my master's degree program at UBC, I decided to stay in Vancouver to seek a music career in Canada. This coincided with meeting the musician Randy Raine-Reusch, a multi-instrumentalist who also plays the zheng. Randy played me a CD entitled *Gudira* (1998, Nuscope Recordings), which he had recorded with Barry Guy on double bass and Robert Dick on the flute. I could identify the sound of the zheng, but nothing in the music itself—neither the tuning nor any aspect of the structure—was remotely familiar to what I knew. My initial reaction was to feel unsettled. Each individual pluck of the string was so focused and intense that the music was like an earthquake, almost too powerful to take in. Yet, at the same time, this power was so irresistible that it hit me right in my heart—a feeling that I never had experienced with

any zheng music before. Randy stopped the CD and asked me what I thought. The only thing I could utter was: “Wow, I like it!”

Randy then showed me his zheng in a distinctive tuning he invented, and suggested that we improvise a bit together. I replied: “Improv? But I don’t know how.”

“Just play,” he said, “Play.”

“Play what?” I asked, “Give me music.”

“Can you play the music that’s in your heart?” Randy asked.

“No,” I said, “I only read music. Everything has to be on a piece of paper, has to be scored for me.”

Randy paused for a moment, then asked further: “Do you remember the fingering of a traditional piece? Can you imagine you are playing that piece by using the same fingering on this zheng, and not worry that the notes are not the same?” So, I sat down and played. It sounded very different to what I was used to because of the unusual tuning. I don’t remember how long I played, but what I do remember is that as I was playing, I felt something was changing in me—a sense that a burden was being lifted and a kind of freedom started to grow in my heart and move down to my hands. As I finished, Randy asked me how I felt. I lifted my head and said, “I feel free!”

### **5.1.1 Discovering an Individual Voice through Free Improvisation**

After working and studying improvisation with Randy, I learned that the style of music on *Gudira* is free jazz or free improvisation. Free jazz is known for not being restricted to predetermined forms, such as the chord progressions and rhythmic structures of traditional jazz. The emphasis in free jazz is on the expression of an individual’s voice

through spontaneous creation while being free to explore any and all sounds or sonic gestures. Although almost every form of music requires self-expression by individual performers to bring the music to life, the degree to which this is done varies from genre to genre and from culture to culture. Free improvisation is perhaps the most liberated form of self-expression.

On the surface, modern Chinese music and free improvisation can be seen as opposite approaches to making music—order versus chaos. Chinese music in the last century was fundamentally changed by the marriage of the political system to conservatory pedagogy. Most professional Chinese musicians focus on perfecting performance techniques while following scores closely to realize the composer’s ideas, thus transforming the musician’s traditional role of performer/composer into that of an interpreter. Free improvisation has an expansive, almost imperceptible structure that allows unlimited possibilities. Liu Weishan, one of the first generation of conservatory-trained zheng performers now living in San Francisco, asserted:

There is a huge space in making music in the West, as the level of acceptance and tolerance is very high. This environment opens your horizon. You can free yourself. As long as you want to move forward, you can go anywhere you want. This is a huge difference between making music in the West and that in China. (2011, personal communication)

Liu Weishan once almost quit in the middle of a recording session as her producer asked her not to follow the score but to improvise. As she wrote later in the liner notes of the album *Great Ocean* (2007, self released), Fred Kurz (the producer and recording engineer) said to her: “You need to let go in your performance, don’t box yourself in any structure, don’t place any limits, don’t perform pieces you already know, don’t rest, don’t stop, you need to forget self, forget everything” (2007).

Initially, randomly playing something new and different every time was immensely challenging for Chinese musicians trained to follow a clear structure. Zheng musician He Beibei,<sup>204</sup> who studied jazz both privately and at Fullerton College in California, recalled the panic of her initial experience of learning jazz. She observed:

The first obstacle is the fear—fear to say that I don't know how to improvise. How should I do it and how should I approach it? The first time I improvised, my head went blank! What should I do?! I thought too much about “what should I do.” It's like a box there to put me in...Being a classical musician, you have a critical mind, thinking that you should be perfect—the notes [and] the technique. You are afraid of making mistakes. (2011, personal communication)

Letting go and feeling free was also the most demanding aspect of free improvisation for me. Musically, free improvisation requires an artist to fully commit to creating music in the moment without predetermining what to play or judging what has just been played. This broke all the rules I knew and took me away out of my musical comfort zone. I felt that I was learning to become a musician all over again.

Free improvisation gradually helped me to break the cultural and psychological barriers that prevented me from expressing my own voice. Born and raised in a military family and working as a military musician, I was conditioned to accept order. The communist ideology that dominated my upbringing deeply influenced my way of perceiving the world. For me everything was “black” and “white,” or “right” and “wrong,” and the right to judge was not mine but predetermined by authorities. Free improvisation directly confronted and disassembled this perception by presenting unlimited choice. It provided the vehicle, power, and permission to perceive and express

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<sup>204</sup> He Beibei (b. 1982) is a Los Angeles-based zheng performer/composer who studied the zheng at the Central University of Ethnic Minorities (Beijing), and at the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts (she moved to the U.S. in 2003). Her debut album of improvised music *Into the Wind* was released in 2010 (Ubiquity Records, San Francisco) in which she collaborated with American multi-instrumentalist Shawn Lee.

my experience of the world in my own individual manner. Through free improvisation I not only discovered innumerable shades of gray, but the world exploded in a riot of vivid colours, sounds, and sensations. For me, to be able to see the world in my way and to reflect it in my own music is the ultimate liberation.

Improvisation, like any other zheng technique, is a trained skill that takes time to develop. To improvise a musician must create a large palette of techniques, gestures, and motifs and be able to recall, combine, and build upon them spontaneously. However, the most significant challenge that improvisation presents to zheng musicians is not technique, as that can be learned. Improvisation is first and foremost a call for us to be aware that there are multiple ways of making music, which require us to change our accustomed ways of listening and our relationship to an instrument. I remember Randy often said to me that improvisation is not an intellectual process: it is about sensing and listening. It requires trusting one's inner self and playing what is inside of you, while trusting in your fellow musicians to respond and support you. According to him there is no wrong note, rather you must learn to sense the moments that are the most effective to use the energy of the note. A highly developed set of improvisation skills empowers a musician to listen for and recognize deep and expansive structures while inclusively listening to all sounds—loud or quiet, melodic or rhythmic, noisy or silent, inside or outside—as musical, without judgment or delineation. Once this depth of listening is attained, it is then only a matter of selectively placing notes within this sound world. This expansive and all-inclusive approach to listening is reminiscent of elements of Daoist philosophy.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> “Great music has less sound” (*dayin xisheng*) is an aphorism by the Daoist philosopher Laozi (Lao-tzu) in his renowned *Daode Jing* (*Tao Te Ching*).

The freedom of seeking individuality in creating music is a powerful stimulus for zheng performers to cultivate new personalized approaches to their music and the instrument. As zheng musicians increasingly live in diverse communities, their careers and distinct styles often reflect the influences of musicians that they first encountered in the West. For instance, Liu Weishan worked closely with American pianist George Winston (b. 1949), whose music is known for being tranquil and introspective. Liu's improvisation is primarily a meditative and atmospheric style, which suggests the influence of Winston. Wu Fei (b.1977),<sup>206</sup> a zheng performer/composer/vocalist who studied with the two prominent improvisers Fred Frith (b. 1949) and Joëlle Léandre (b. 1951) at Mills College in California, took a free-jazz and avant-garde approach as her initial approach to improvisation. He Beibei worked with a percussionist, to whom she is now married, and has an interest in jazz, funk, Hip-Hop, alternative music, and electronica, among many other genres.

In 2001 Randy and I recorded *Distant Wind*, an album of improvised zheng duets, as well as zheng with other Asian instruments (Za Discs).<sup>207</sup> This was my first serious effort at improvisation and I explored a variety of tunings, melodies, and motifs. In some pieces, to avoid the conventional sound of the zheng, I borrowed the strong plucking technique created by Randy, as well bowing the strings, combining unique timbres, harmonics, and chordal clusters to create more colours. These and subsequent improvisations led me to collaborate with many jazz musicians, including recording the

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<sup>206</sup> Wu Fei began to learn the zheng in Beijing at the age of five. In 1990 she enrolled in a composition class at the affiliated high school of the Chinese Conservatory of Music. From 2000 to 2002 she was in an undergraduate program of composition at the University of Texas. In 2002 she began her master's degree in composition at Mills College; while there she began to experiment with improvisation and various forms of New Music. Her debut album *A Distant Youth* (2007, Forrest Hill) was a collaboration with guitarist Fred Frith and violinist Carla Kihlstedt.

<sup>207</sup> Some tracks also include double bass, performed by Vancouver bassist Laurence Mollerup. The album was nominated for a Canadian Juno music award.

album *Ume* (2006, Za Discs) with Canadian jazz pianist Paul Plimley (b. 1953). Free improv has since become a strong voice of mine as an artist and as an individual.

### **5.1.2 Bluegrass to Redgrass: Reclaiming the Role of the Performer/Composer**

Further study of improvisation quickly revealed that having learned free improvisation did not train me in other forms of improvisation over a more rigid structure, as was found in traditional Chinese music. Fundamental to many music traditions, improvisation is often called for when performing with other musicians in the World Music circuit. In some Asian classical cultures, such as Indian, Persian, and Arabic repertoires, improvisation over a compositional framework and designated scale is the preeminent form for compositions. Developing detailed melodic and/or rhythmic material through improvisation is fundamental to *raga*, *dastgah*, or *maqam* forms. Similarly, in West Balkan *hora*, Jewish *klezmer*, and American *bluegrass* extemporaneous solos that follow the chord changes and bass line of a main melody are integral to the performance of a piece.

In 2006 I formed a Chinese plucked string band called Red Chamber, comprised of four Chinese instrumentalists playing the *pipa* (a four-string pear shaped lute), *sanxian* (a three-string fretless lute), *ruan* (both medium and large size four-string moon-shaped lute), *liuqin* (a mandolin-like small lute), and the *zheng* (see Figure 5.1). The model for this lineup is *xiansuo*, a traditional small instrumental ensemble of string instruments that performs the *baban* repertoire. One of my initial goals was to recreate the sounds from the historical score *Thirteen Suites of String Music (Xiansuo Shisantao)*, an 1814 collection, and through its exploration further study and understand the relationship



between the *baban* mother tune and the fully developed ensemble parts for individual instruments.



**Figure 5-1 Red Chamber at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, 2008 (photo by permission of Frank Kouwenhoven).**

All highly skilled Chinese conservatory trained musicians, the members of Red Chamber are capable of performing very challenging notated scores and are in demand to perform new compositions. However, as our training emphasized exactness and precision, the members had little exposure to improvisation. I introduced string band music from other world cultures, such as bluegrass, Balkan music, and Gypsy Jazz to the group to foster their interest in improvisation and to develop each member's artistry.

In 2008 Red Chamber collaborated with Vancouver-based mandolinist John Reischman (b.1955) and his bluegrass band the Jaybirds on a concert performance and

recording project named Redgrass (see Figure 5.2).<sup>208</sup> Bluegrass and Red Chamber shared a number of commonalities in instrumentation: the configuration of a small set of plucked instruments covering a spectrum of pitch ranges, and the *sanxian* and *liuqin* morphologically exhibiting marked parallels to the fretless banjo and mandolin respectively. Both bluegrass and traditional Chinese music also embody the duality of immediacy and a continuum: they are both disseminated through a combination of notation and oral transmission; both feature a melody that is also used as structure for improvisation; both allow various degrees of spontaneous creation from slight variation to extemporization; and both are vehicles for personal expression through community practice. It was my desire that the experience of other traditional music projects could benefit Red Chamber learning structured improvisation so that we would gain confidence using this skill to create our own music, as well as stimulate ourselves to revisit our traditional music practices.



**Figure 5-2 Red Chamber and the Jaybirds, Vancouver 2008 (photo by permission of Katie Yu).**

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<sup>208</sup> Red Chamber learned *Katy Hill* and *Little Rabbit*, two Old-Time tunes from the American Appalachian mountains, as well as *North Shore* (1997) and *Ponies in the Forest* (1999), compositions by Reischman. Some of these bluegrass works are included on the Red Chamber album *Redgrass* (2008, Za Discs), and a video of the two bands performing *Katy Hill* has gone viral on YouTube, reaching over 400,000 views. In 2009 Red Chamber shared a workshop stage with the Jaybirds, as well as Béla Fleck, Abigail Washburn, and their band Sparrow Quartet at the Vancouver International Folk Festival.

While working with the Jaybirds I observed the difference between the two bands in rehearsal and on stage. Even though members of Red Chamber displayed their virtuosity, there was rigidity in our performance. Conversely, the Jaybirds musicians seemed more relaxed and constantly explored new material to create variation in their solos. Even when playing fixed melodies, they sometimes threw in a new “lick” as ornamentation just for fun. This is what Canadian musicologist Ajay Heble describes as “real-time creative decision making [and] risk taking” (2012:5).

Although the other members of Red Chamber struggled with improvisation and tended to memorize their solos, bluegrass became my platform to explore improvisation on the zheng over a structured accompaniment. The freedom to move in and around a melody to embellish or interpret as I desired again provided a sense of liberation. The immediacy of bluegrass mirrors the spontaneity of traditional Chinese music, when musicians “...express their sentiments by serenading the moon and chanting to the breeze” (Luo cited in Ju 1995:193, translated from the Chinese). Principles of structured improvisation by bluegrass musicians resemble “adding flowers” (*jiahua*), the technique used to vary the mother tune in Chinese music (as discussed in Chapter Two).

Red Chamber’s musicians eventually came to understand the value and immediacy of feelings interpreted through improvisation. Although gradually adding limited variations on pieces we performed,<sup>209</sup> it was not until the band was on tour in November 2012 that one of the musicians performed an improvised solo with radically new material. She was highly complimented by the group manager that night for taking

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<sup>209</sup> Red Chamber repertoire includes a substantial number of structured improvisations drawn from both traditional Chinese repertoire and newly composed Canadian works.

the chance and succeeding. The following night, each member completely improvised her solo, generating a tremendous amount of energy on stage and in the audience.

After Red Chamber's concert performance at the Chinese Cultural Centre of Greater Toronto, the music director and conductor of the Toronto Chinese Orchestra, Karl Pang, wrote that he "rediscovered improvisation, [which] gave [the performers] much more freedom, much more communication among themselves, so that they expressed themselves at the highest potential" (Pang 2012, personal communication), a remark with perhaps some significance considering Pang's strictly Western classically oriented training and entrenched perspective.

The journey from bluegrass to "redgrass" has created a new connection between Red Chamber's traditional past and present. Exploring the practice of these living traditions rekindled my interest in the spontaneity of traditional zheng and *qin*<sup>210</sup> practice. Reclaiming self-expression is a meaningful direction for the future of Chinese music making, as no matter how good an interpreter a musician might be, real-time creation is a medium for self-expression unlike any other.

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<sup>210</sup> Individual interpretation of written notation, or *dapu* (to reconstruct), is a key element in the *qin* tradition. Although a notational system has always been an integral part of *qin* teaching over its two thousand years of history, transforming a *qin* score to sound requires a player's individual artistic creativity in that a player not only needs to interpret what is written on the score, but, more importantly, to create what is not written.

## **5.2 Developing Craft Skills through Exploring New Music**

Powerful performances result from a musician's engagement with the music on many levels—embodying the sound and personalizing it to interpret compositions as if they are one's own, and to express emotion. Musicians need a highly developed skill of listening, an awareness of tone, and the ability to control, manipulate, and shape intricately gestures and colours. O'Dea defines these techniques as “craft skills” (2000:16). The current emphasis on technical skills in zheng performance in China seldom includes discussion or instruction of craft skills, and only exceptional performers discover them on their own. I believe that craft skills should be reintroduced and cultivated in modern zheng practice as an essential part of the musical culture and art form.

### **5.2.1 Revitalization of Traditional Techniques in a New Music Context**

When collaborating with Western composers, I find they often approach the zheng as a new sound source to suit their individual voices, exploring details in timbre and texture unique to the zheng while avoiding the common use of idiosyncratic techniques familiar to modern Chinese. When I asked composers what attracted them to write for the zheng, their answers often included “bending,” “portamento,” “inflection,” or “timbre,” effects primarily achieved with nuanced use of left-hand bending techniques and right-hand plucking techniques. These techniques would fall within the craft skills, which “have to do with discerning and utilizing the interpretive potential of subtle tonal colours” (2000:16).

The core of the left-hand craft skill is moving tone—pitch movement on a single string (as discussed in Chapter Two). Moving tones create relationships between individual notes and inner connections between motifs and phrases. Nuances and subtleties are produced through crafting moving tones with designated directions of slide, measured distance between pitches, calculated density of vibrato, and anticipated timing of the decay of a sound. Moving tones are not fixed and should not be codified, as they are sounds reflecting inner life at the moment of performance. From mimicking speech inflections to demonstrating emotional release (e.g., sigh), there is ample room for interpretation and individual expression.

American composer Henry Cowell (1897–1965), who is known for his exploration of tonality and non-Western modes, had a “lifelong fascination with the ‘sliding tone’ prevailing in Chinese operatic traditions,” which “he considered to be an important marker of Chinese music” (Rao in Everett and Lau 2004:122). Lou Harrison (1917–2003), another prominent cross-cultural composer, was so enthused by the sound of the zheng that he wrote several solo pieces for the instrument, most notably *The Garden at One and a Quarter Moons* (1964, revised in 1966) and the *Wesak Sonata* (1964), in which so many bending notes idiosyncratic to the traditional zheng are utilized that the pieces sound “Chinese.”<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> Harrison met Liang Tsai-Ping at the East-West Music Encounter Conference in Tokyo in 1961. The next year Harrison visited Taiwan and took zheng lessons with Liang and soon began to compose for the zheng. According to Miller and Lieberman, Harrison was also familiar with other East Asian zithers. Harrison often used “psalter” as a generic term in his compositions without specifying which zither it should be played on. His first composition that involves the zheng is *Psalter Sonata* (1961, revised in 1962), which was dedicated to Liang. In this piece Harrison used “the idiosyncratic instrumental techniques of the cheng [zheng]... The freely spun melody is basically Chinese in character, with a few stylistic irregularities, but shows touches of Lou’s personality...” (Miller and Lieberman 2004:148).

German composer and zither player Robert Zollitsch,<sup>212</sup> who has worked with many zheng performers in China, said:

I think that bending technique is absolutely essential for zheng music, one of the key features that makes the music so interesting. Bending and vibrato, most young zheng players are not aware of how to use them. It's like singers who only have one kind of vibrato, which they use all the time. They can't control it. Similarly with zheng players—very often they use vibrato, but always the same style and speed.

[Zheng players in China] do not have enough consciousness [of vibrato]. You have to know how the speed and the depth of the vibrato work. You can go with slow movement at the beginning and fast in the end. Or you can choose different ways as you go along. There are good zheng players who do it intuitively. But I never met anybody who was teaching it, who was talking about it as an important matter. This is a key factor in making zheng music more sophisticated and exciting. (2010, personal communication)

In *Purple Lotus Bud* (2003) for zheng and string quartet (premiered and recorded by the Borealis String Quartet and myself), Canadian composer John Oliver (b. 1959) borrowed a theme from *Pink Lotus in Many Modes* (Fenhonglian Zhugongdiao)—a traditional piece from the Chaozhou zheng style—as his point of departure to explore the relationship between the melodic character of the zheng and harmony of Western classical music. Oliver asserted that he considered moving tones as the zheng's DNA:

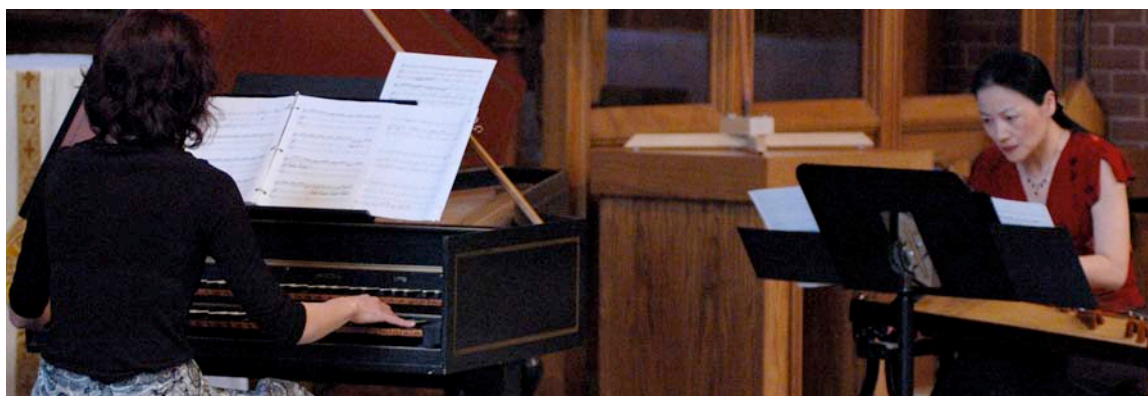
The fact is that the main characteristic of the sound of the zheng is the moving of the sound with the left-hand. The expressive quality of the zheng, for me, always comes from the colouration of the melody... There is a kind of shimmering from the instrument that appears when the overtones of the other open strings resonate in relation to the moving tones in the melodic movement... One of the things that the string quartet allows me to do is to compose within the sound of the zheng. In the opening section I wanted the moving sound [of the zheng] to rest on chords [of the strings]. Basing the work on a classical Chinese piece allowed me to really get right into the sound of the zheng in an intimate way, and because of

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<sup>212</sup> Robert Zollitsch (b. 1966) grew up in Munich, Germany and played the Bavarian zither. In 1993 he was awarded a scholarship to study the *qin* in Shanghai. Since then he has become closely involved in the new Chinese Art Music scene, and established himself as one of the most influential composers and producers. He has collaborated with numerous Chinese musicians, including zheng performers Qiu Ji and Chang Jing, as well as *Sanchuan*, a zheng trio based in Beijing.

the way I extended the sound of the zheng with string quartet, it allowed me to really get into the DNA of the actual sounds of the instrument. (2012, personal communication)

In *Enchanted Glass* (2005) for zheng and harpsichord (premiered by Cynthia Hiebert and myself, see Figure 5.3), composer Janet Danielson (b. 1950) created a conversation between the two instruments by juxtaposing the well-tempered tuning of the harpsichord with the zheng's just intonation. Danielson describes the outcome when the decay of the chords of the harpsichord combines with the bending tones of the zheng as "a sardonic march, which spirals into increasingly odd tunings..." (2009, personal communication).



**Figure 5-3 Cynthia Hiebert and Mei Han performing Janet Danielson's *Enchanted Glass* for zheng and harpsichord.**

In 2002 American composer Dr. John Sharpley (b. 1955) wrote a four-movement zheng concerto *When Cranes Fly Home* for me.<sup>213</sup> Working on this piece, I was challenged on all fronts (technically and in performance practice). Sharpley said:

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<sup>213</sup> *When Cranes Fly Home* is the first multi-movement zheng concerto written by a non-Chinese composer, which was premiered in Beijing in 2003 by the China Philharmonic Orchestra and myself as the soloist.



I am a pianist of fifty years. I find piano is restricted. You can't connect with the strings directly. Being able to touch the strings, the immediacy, is wonderful and important. In that sense, [bending] is the secret of your instrument.

When I see you play, you bend pitch. The reality is that pitch is a continuum. There is no A flat out there in space, there is no double F out there in space. It is a continuum. Sound is a continuum. It is up to our minds to create the individuality of pitch. (2011, personal communication)

The recognition by Western composers of moving tones as essential musical characteristics of the zheng provides a fresh perspective on the prominence of the zheng's traditional left-hand techniques, which in turn ought to provoke Chinese zheng artists to reflect on what constitutes being a zheng virtuoso, how to strive for a balance of technical and craft skills in contemporary zheng performance, and how to creatively use traditional techniques.

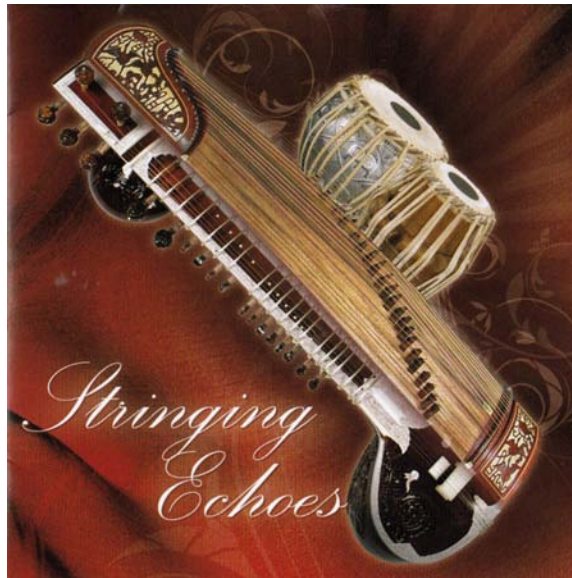
Zheng performer Deng Haiqiong (b.1975),<sup>214</sup> a younger, conservatory-trained musician who emigrated to and now resides in the United States, is known for performing challenging new works. While taking her instrument beyond its cultural boundaries, she feels a strong desire to rediscover the zheng's traditional techniques and repertoire: "It is important for me to perform American compositions, which provided many opportunities, but I feel I know very little about traditional culture. The more I am moving forward, the less I feel that I know about traditional music. My passion now is on traditional music, this is my destiny" (Deng 2011, personal communication). Deng spent five years studying and collaborating with Indian sitarist Nalini Vinayak to explore "the embellishments of various modes and the delicacy of stylistic nuances through left-hand

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<sup>214</sup> Deng Haiqiong received a Bachelor of Music degree in zheng performance from the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, and a Master of Arts in Arts Administration and Ethnomusicology from The Florida State University College of Music. She is currently Director of the Chinese Music Ensemble at The Florida State University.

bending” (2012, personal communication). With their album *Stringing Echoes* (2011, Tribles Records, see Figure 5.4), Deng stated:

I learned to see the similarities and distinctions in the use of bending notes to enrich the musical expression and to reflect the stylistic flavors in these two ancient musical cultures. Working with Nalini, and listening to Indian music, broadened my awareness of the diverse languages used in various musical cultures, and made me appreciate more the uniqueness, richness, and delicacy of the stylistic left-hand bending in traditional Chinese zheng music. (2012, personal communication)



**Figure 5-4** The album cover of *Stringing Echoes* (photo by permission of Deng).

Contemporary works constantly open new horizons and prospects for performers. Just as a performer sculpts a piece of music, performing such a wide range of music also sculpts the performer. The attention to detail that many contemporary composers in the West bring to their scores, as well as what they demand of performers, requires zheng artists in the West to reexamine the paradigm of traditional techniques, especially those of the left hand. What emerges is that the expression, nuance, and depth advocated in contemporary compositions parallel those of traditional zheng and *qin*. Left-hand

techniques do not “limit the technical development of the instrument,” nor restrict zheng players to “only play half of the instrument,” as argued by Li Han (4.1.3). Quite the contrary, combinations of traditional techniques with contemporary aesthetics are taking the zheng to the international stage, and the zheng’s traditional left-hand techniques seem more relevant than ever.

### **5.2.2 Assimilating Performance Aesthetics of East Asian Zithers**

Deng Haiqiong’s re-examination of traditional zheng music through learning Indian music suggests that an exploration of the aesthetics and techniques found in musical cultures worldwide could be beneficial to cultivating craft skills for Chinese musicians. This is particularly evident in regards to the other East Asian long zither traditions. Although the Japanese *koto*, Korean *kayagŭm*, and Vietnamese *dan tranh* are descendants of the zheng and still maintain aesthetic principles stemming from ancient Chinese philosophical thought, these zithers have developed idiosyncratic performance techniques, styles, and cultural identities. As with the zheng, these traditions have been facing the challenges of contemporization, Westernization, and pop culture, yet the core philosophical values of their traditions are still manifest through craft skills in performance and teaching. These zither traditions are little known in China because of the political and cultural challenges of the twentieth century, and except for the late emergence of Miki’s *koto* works have had little impact or influence on the zheng.

In 2005 I studied the Vietnamese *dan tranh* with master performer Phuong B o (see Figure 5.5) in Ho Chi Minh City. With sixteen metal strings the *dan tranh* is almost identical to the traditional Chaozhou zheng from Southern China and is the closest Asian

zither to the zheng in its approach and performance techniques. What I found remarkable about the *dan tranh* was its fluidity. Phương Bảo's left-hand moved constantly to manipulate notes, creating ornate melodies with the combination of pitch shifting, bending, and vibrato. Seldom was there a pitch that was not in motion, and every gesture contained myriad shifts of expression and nuance. The fluidity of the instrument also extends to how Phương Bảo interpreted each piece differently every time. On occasion she would play a piece I was familiar with in a substantially different mode making it almost unrecognizable. The fluidity of Phương Bảo's performance is a characteristic of her generation and does not continue to the more codified performances of the next generation of *dan tranh* players.



**Figure 5-5 Phương Bảo playing the Vietnamese *dan tranh* (photo by permission of Phương).**

Phương Bảo's way of playing the *dan tranh* is similar to that of traditional zheng performers like my first teacher Gao Zicheng. The ethereal quality and the state of constant change within her performances strongly resonate with Daoist aesthetics, yet are also a powerful example of a sophisticated use of left-hand craft skills. This kind of

constant motion I found to be very useful in performing with interactive computer artists who often use similar sweeping constantly moving gestures (to be discussed in more detail below).

The twelve-string Korean *kayagŭm* demands a highly developed use of both left and right hand craft skills. In the traditional *kayagŭm* performance of *sanjo*, an instrumental form of Korean music, the extent to which an individual note is crafted is a measure of virtuosity and the musician's emotional engagement is essential. Zheng performer Lü Jin recounted her experience of learning the *kayagŭm* in North Korea, where her teacher focused her training on engaging every single note by going through a meticulous process of consolidating “touch,” “feel,” and “breath” before finally plucking a note. The training for the left-hand technique was even more demanding in order to execute the wide variety of vibrato from microtonal shifts to a deep vibrato encompassing wide intervals, each note correlating to a specified mix of emotions. Korean music educator and innovator Hwang Byung-ki states:

Korean music is founded on a principle called *him*, meaning universal vitality. First, each musical sound must carry a powerful, vibrant tone colour, rather than a tone color that is clear, sweet, or voluminous. Second, each musical sound must be dynamic, varying delicately in tone color, volume, and pitch. What gives such variation to one sound or one voice is called *sigimsae*—the term indicates something that “ferments” a sound in order to make it flavorful. The major melodic instruments of Korea are all constructed so as to give *sigimsae* free expression. (2002:815)

Hwang's statement encapsulates the essence of *kayagŭm* performance, stressing the vitality of the *kayagŭm* over “sweetness,” which has been a popular characteristic of the modern zheng. Some may argue that the differences in the quality of the sound between the two instruments is due to the nature of the strings (silk strings for the *kayagŭm* and metal wound with nylon for the zheng), however, Lü points out that the

various methods of plucking the *kayagŭm* and its distinctive technique of dampening the strings after plucking (to sharpen the sound) could add complexity and a greater dimension to the lightness of the zheng sound (2009, personal communication).

Hwang also states that Koreans “thought of folk music as a voice unreservedly expressing human emotions such as joy or anger” and that in speaking of music they refer to something “so inexplicably subtle that it can only be felt deep in the heart” (Hwang 2002:815). This synthesis of the performer and music through a deep emotional connection addressed by the Korean scholar is echoed in the Chinese philosophy inherent in *qin* music, about which the Ming dynasty Daoist philosopher Li Zhi (1527-1602) wrote: the *qin* is played from the heart, and the *qin* is a voice, so the *qin* is the voice of the heart.

As discussed in Chapter Four, Miki Minoru’s works for Japanese *koto* had a marked influence on the zheng in the last two decades. However, the most prominent contemporary *koto* innovator known for her powerful performances—with bridges flying everywhere—is Sawai Kazue (b. 1941), with whom I studied in Tokyo in 2001. Sawai performs on both the traditional thirteen-string and contemporary seventeen-string bass *koto* and is well known for a wide repertoire, ranging from traditional Japanese to avant-garde works including arrangements of John Cage’s works for prepared piano. My initial intention was to study her approach to contemporizing the *koto* and adapt some of her techniques for the zheng. What struck me most, however, was the level of emotional and physical commitment that Sawai engages and how she transforms all her energy into a grounded, forceful, elegant sound. The *koto* was historically used in both court and folk genres primarily played by men (like the zheng), yet it also is associated with an idealized

image of a female performer. Perhaps for this reason, Sawai's unconventional repertoire, powerful performance style, and contemporary stage attire are considered “controversial.”<sup>215</sup>

My first lesson was spent learning *Rokudan* (Six Sections), the most representative piece of the classic *koto* repertoire. Technically this was not difficult for me, but I felt the sound I made on the *koto* was rather shallow. I asked Sawai how I could make the sound like hers, to which she replied: “Japanese like to make things hard. The *koto* does not give away its sound easily. You have to dig deep and grab the sound out” (2001, personal communication; see Figure 5.6).



**Figure 5-6 The author taking a *koto* lesson with Sawai Kazue in 2001.**

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<sup>215</sup> Kazue often wears sunglasses and, according to her American student Elisabeth Falconer, “black leather pants and tall boots” while performing (quoted in Lande 2007:264). “Over the years, Sawai Kazue has had to encounter countless criticisms from her own traditional *koto* music world for her experimental musical adventures and for her dramatic performing styles” (ibid.).

“Grabbing the sound out,” as Sawai vividly put it, requires a performer to be grounded or anchored to the floor while using its resistance to power each physical plucking of the string; this is in stark contrast to the ostentatious stage presentation prevalent in current zheng performances. Sawai’s approach to her instrument reflects the important principle of Japanese culture known as *hara*—the energy centre of a human body, the equivalent to the Chinese concept of *qi* (configured energy)—and performing music is related to this seemingly theoretical concept of energy. The depth of and extent which a performer’s movements are grounded and centred around *hara* directly affects the sound quality. Japanese composer and pianist Yuji Takahashi (b. 1938) believes:

In all these principles of movement there is always a centre and an extreme, and energy flows from one to the other. A musician has a body, and this body produces sound through this energy flow from the centre of the body to an arm, hand or finger, or to the breath. (cited in Raine-Reusch 1997:36)

Randy Raine-Reusch had a similar experience while studying the *ichigenkin*, a one-string Japanese zither. His teacher Yamada *sensei* emphasized that every single note had to come from the *hara*, and she would instantly know if his focus was off and whether it was too low, high, forward, or backward. In my conversation with Randy, he recalled:

The *ichigenkin* is played from the *hara* or centre of the player’s body. It is from this point that the *ichigenkin* has volume. The *ichigenkin* uses the energy of the *hara* to produce sound. Without this energy there is only a frail sound... A skillful movement uses the energy wisely to release the sound. If the movement is done without skill, and uses too much energy, then there is no energy left for the sound. (2012, personal communication)

In my studies and observations of other Asian zither traditions and performances, Vietnam gave me a new appreciation of the intricacies of the left hand, and Korea taught



me the emotional connection as well as freedom to express the nuances and subtleties of both hands. Japan gave me a connection to a deep personal power that drives my right hand but also informs my left. The groundedness I observed from Japanese music brought my performance into a new realm. It provided me with a new strength and power for both right and left hand techniques. This power manifests even in the lightest of touches and is not a matter of plucking harder. It is a matter, as Sawai described, of “digging deep,” and little did I know how much it would affect my growth as an artist. Being grounded became a physical and psychological foundation for my performance, allowing me to completely engage with music and performing challenging works.

Over a thousand years ago the Chinese Tang dynasty created cultural prosperity by embracing musics from the Silk Road. Today valuable perspectives are still maintained in other East Asian zither traditions that can benefit the zheng. By informing modern zheng performers with values rooted in historical China and cultivated in other East Asian cultures, the Chinese zheng can learn to appreciate craft skills anew and balance them with technical skills. A worldview shaped by other world cultures can inform and enrich the zheng’s future development.

### 5.3 Macrocosm through Microcosm

In Chapter Two I cited the *Record of Music (Yue Ji)*, an ancient Confucian text that states: “All music (*yin*) rises from the human heart. Emotion stirs, taking shape as sound (*sheng*). Sound refined in patterns is music (*yin*)” (Gongsun c. 1<sup>st</sup> cent. BC). Today this assertion of the relationship between sound and music can still be applied in the development of craft skills, which O’Dea describes as the skills of “sounding artistry” (2000:16).

The idea of creating artful sound in Chinese music was established in the *qin* tradition throughout the centuries. Classical discourses on timbre in *qin* literature inculcated twenty-four aesthetic principles on timbres (discussed in Chapter 2.5), each applied to specific sound elements and gestures. Exploring sound and striving for quality tones was vital for Chinese zithers, as DeWoskin writes in his study of the *qin*: “The aesthetic virtue of ‘artful appeal’ demands diversity; in the case of the *ch’in (qin)*, that diversity is realized in timbre, not pitch” (1982:122). The essence of *qin* performance is to regard what to some is a small movement (microcosm) as a large palette of potential expressions (macrocosm; e.g., changing the pitch of a string by only altering the pulse in the fingers depressing the string).

In my experience many contemporary performers, while physically capable of executing techniques, have often lost touch with (or never developed) the proper awareness and attitude that allows them to convey, through sound, the fullest dimensions of the music. And as I write about contemporary performance directions, use of

adjectives like “subtle” and “nuanced” would diminish the power of the ideas I want to bring across. So I often avoid them. But they are there, in my thinking.

### 5.3.1 Heightening Awareness of Sound in Zheng Performance

The development of an awareness of sound is the foundation for craft skills. American composer/musician Pauline Oliveros<sup>216</sup> has observed that many musicians have good hand-eye coordination in reading music, but were not listening to what they were performing. She states: “The musician was of course hearing, but listening all over or attention to the space/time continuum was not happening” (Oliveros 2005:xvii). As many others before her noted (but is worth reiterating in the present context), Oliveros differentiates *hearing* from *listening*: “To hear is the physical means that enables perception” she says, but “to listen is to give attention to what is perceived both acoustically and psychologically” (ibid.:xxii).

What Oliveros describes as “to hear” but not “to listen” has become common in Chinese zheng performance. The quest for sound artistry carried in traditional Chinese aesthetics has been overshadowed by the accentuation of technical skills, as pointed out by Qiu Ji and others. The change of pedagogy from oral teaching (*kouchang xinshou*) to notation-based learning has shifted the performer’s focus from listening to reading. While notation provides detailed information on pitch and rhythm, awareness of sound is the key to infusing life into the music (referred to as “taking the music off the page” by Western musicians), such that both are given equal value.

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<sup>216</sup> Pauline Oliveros (b. 1932) is an American accordionist and composer who is well known for her practice and advocacy of “deep listening”—new ways to listen to sounds of music and the environment.

From a microcosmic perspective, each plucked note on the zheng contains three distinct but contiguous sonic components: the “head” (attack), “body,” and “tail” (decay). While the richness of *yun* (discussed in Chapter 2.3) in the body and tail of a single note is a paramount aesthetic of the traditional zheng, the ability to command each of these elements is at the heart of craft skills, with listening at the core of a fully realized performance.

In modern Chinese virtuosic performance, prominence tends to be given to the volume and precision of plucking a note, which places emphasis on the “head” of the note. Although this can produce clarity in tone colour, much more expression and alternative tones can be explored during the body and tail. With slight shifts of pick (nail) placement on the strings and minute changes of pressure, a variety of tones can be produced. With the number of open strings on a zheng, when a note (or a chord) is plucked many harmonic overtones are produced by both the plucked string and the sympathetic resonance of the other strings. In addition, by pressing a string on the left side of the bridge, subtle pitch inflections (moving tones) of the plucked string form complex harmonic relationships with the resonant overtones that sometimes also create interference tones. This is a sound complex that comprises emerging and decaying overtones, harmonies, and resonances as well as ghost tones (an additional tone created by the clashing of two frequencies), which can be utilized and manipulated by the performer through pitch maneuvering, timbre variation, texture change, and time modification.

A performer who is able to grasp the breadth of this sound complex is often described as having “big ears”<sup>217</sup>. In my experience working with free improvisation and New Music performers, such musicians pay close attention to the details of each component of a sound and magnify small sound gestures, expanding them into a macrocosm through their instruments. What was being explored in raising the awareness of listening in the West took the concept of sound and music full circle back to the Chinese concept found in the *Yue Ji*, elucidated by American composer Chou Wen-chung: “One must investigate sound to know tones and investigate tones to know music” (1971:216). If this level of awareness of sound can be brought to and nurtured in Chinese zheng performance, the natural sound of the instrument can offer ample possibilities for performers to explore rich tone diversity.

### 5.3.2 Embracing a Broader Sound Realm

Music is not, however, limited to the realm of audible sound. In East Asian zither traditions particular musical sounds can be very subtle or even perceived as silent, as Chinese *qin* and zheng performer/scholar Cheng Gongliang wrote:

In manifesting sound on the *qin*, *yun* was created after sound (*sheng*) was generated. The sound then quickly becomes quiet to the point that it is covered by the rubbing sound of fingers sliding on the board. The difference of the volume between the initial plucking and the end of the *yun* is immense. At this point, the melody that ought to be unbroken, or the *yun* that ought to be continuous, often becomes inaudible and only exists in the player’s mind, a state similar to the “white space” in Chinese calligraphy. Thus, the sound becomes “silent music.” (2007, translated from the Chinese)

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<sup>217</sup> Interestingly, ancient Chinese sages were also described as having big ears. DeWoskin reviewed the relationship between sound (*sheng*) and the sage (*sheng*) documented in the first Chinese lexicon *Shuowen Jiuzi* as well as several other historical texts (1982:32-35).

Crossing the boundary between the realm of sound and realm of silence is significant. As a note decays, the performer continues to sculpt the sound through interaction and interference with the lingering resonance of the harmonics and the changing of timbre right into silence. At this point music is unceasing in time and space, as the player sculpts silence just as sound was sculpted. The silence that follows a slowly decaying sound is referred to as *ma*—an empty space that is full—in Japanese culture. An experienced performer can hold *ma* for an extended time to prolong the release of tension and suspend the memory of the sound in the air long past the length of a performed note.

Silence and sound are *yin* and *yang*, and though seemingly opposite, each is also found within the other. Silence frames sound, and sound frames silence. Only together do they form a balance. While it seems that the Chinese are leaving this philosophy behind in their modern culture, this ancient notion of “sound and silence” and “sound in silence” found its own place in twentieth-century Western new music.

Asian aesthetics have had a substantial influence on those Western composers who search for new materials, approaches, and directions for their own music. Composers such as John Cage (1912-92) “transform[ed] Asian musical systems and sonic characteristics into a distinctive Western idiom” (Everett and Lau 2004:19). Through his relationship with Zen, Cage challenged musical preconceptions that had dominated traditional Western composition. His work *Two*<sup>3</sup> (1991) for *sho* (the Japanese bamboo mouth organ) and conch shells, for instance, calls for the conch players to partially fill their instruments with water and produce gurgling and air bubbles by shifting the position of the instrument. This score not only challenges the performer’s awareness of sound and silence as well as the permeable barrier between the two, but also illuminates Cage’s

intent to break the boundary between the established conception of musical sound and noise. This stance is exemplified by Cage's 1952 composition *4'33''*, in which no musical sound was produced by the performer(s)—the intent of the performance, rather, focused on the listeners' ear to realize the musicality of the world around them. In conversation with Randy Raine-Reusch, he elaborates:

The intent of the performer is paramount to defining the barrier between music and random sound. Music is present as a performer intends it to be, actual sound production is not required. It is a concept that I encountered in *ichigenkin* study. If the string broke, no matter. As long as the instrument was present and the performer was present, then the music was also present, and no action was required. (2012, personal communication)

Intent in *ichigenkin* performance is known as *yi* in Chinese, which is entrenched in Daoist thinking<sup>218</sup> and reflected in Chinese performance philosophy as defined in the first Chinese lexicon: “*Yi* is intent; it comes from ‘tone’ and ‘mind’” (Xu c. 121, translated by DeWoskin, p. 34). A performer defines the boundaries of music through his/her intent, even though the types of sounds used in a piece may vary or even sometimes be virtually inaudible.

Where the acoustic character of the *zheng* is commonly identified as being “sweet,” I believe that beauty is also in an acoustic complex that can include dissonance, silence, and noise. Beyond the “sweet” sound of the *zheng* there is a much wider sound realm to explore, as stated by John Shapley in the chapter epigraph. While the exploration of sonic diversity through thoughtful listening is not yet an issue being discussed in Chinese *zheng* teaching and performance, many Western composers who are familiar

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<sup>218</sup> The famous Chinese poet Tao Yuanming (365-427) was said to play a *qin* without strings. This action of his is believed to represent the ultimate practice of the Daoist notion that great music contains no sound; as long as the intent is present, music is created.

with the instrument are critical of or challenge the narrow sonic approach to the zheng through their compositions. Robert Zollitsch states:

There is lots of zheng music like this.... I can listen to it a maximum of ten seconds. It is too sweet for me and that is fake sweet. But there is also a kind beauty in zheng music. The zheng has potential. It has this airy sweetness and I love that. But the zheng is not at all limited to that. Zheng can play very strong and aggressive sounds. Actually, there are lots of colours you can produce on the zheng.<sup>219</sup> (2010, personal communication)

Cage's reframing of sound was one of the stimuli for a confluence of genres in the West that create music from "non-musical" sounds acoustically, through recordings, synthesis, or through digital sampling. Although the use of so-called non-musical sound in contemporary zheng compositions was being explored with pieces such as Wang Changyuan's *Struggling with Typhoon* (discussed in Chapter 3.4) and in Li Meng's *Rhapsody of Red River* (discussed in Chapter 4.2), the intent of using noise in the West has a much broader meaning—to embrace and integrate noise with tuned pitches, and to treat all sound as musical sound. Cage stated: "Wherever we are, what we hear is mostly noise. When we ignore it, it disturbs us. When we listen to it, we find it fascinating" (1961:3). His view is essentially influenced by the Japanese Zen approach to sound. Toru Takemitsu (1930-96) explained: "As one sound is a complex entity that resembles noise, to perform one sound means to desire unity within various sounds in nature" (2004:202).

Canadian composer Barry Truax (b. 1947) is a pioneer who combines computer technology with acoustic natural sound.<sup>220</sup> Truax's integration of the soundscape with his

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<sup>219</sup> In his composition *Hei Ma* (Black Horse, 2004) for solo zheng, Zollitsch only utilized plucking on the open strings (without bending and vibrato). He intended to explore different textures through constant change of accent, altering angle of nails, and dynamics. This piece was performed and recorded by Qiu Ji on her album *Qiu Shuo* (*Autumn Says*, China Record Corp., Guangzhou, 2005).

<sup>220</sup> Truax oversees the World Soundscape Project at Simon Fraser University, a project to document acoustic environments and to increase public awareness of the importance of the soundscape, particularly through individual listening sensitivity (Truax 2009, personal communication).



exploration of contrasting micro and macro sound worlds is fully exhibited in *Bamboo, Silk and Stone*, an electro-acoustic work for zheng and tape (1987, co-composed with Randy Raine-Reusch). In creating the piece Truax recorded a number of gongs, flutes, and gestures played on the zheng by Raine-Reusch. He then treated them through Granular Synthesis, a computer process that divides a sampled sound into short overlapping “grains.” Through repeating such grains the sound is stretched through time without changing its original pitch. Truax explained that “these ‘grains’ can be repeated, or magnified, instantly or slowly, which allows me to compose within and through the sound, trying to find what is inside of it, as opposed to using the sound and imposing things on it” (2009, personal communication). By using this method small increments of change become large, so that the inner world of a minute action appears in the outer world of perception, creating a feeling of being inside the music or, at times, even inside a single note. These previously unavailable ways of listening have opened new sonic territory.

I included *Bamboo, Silk and Stone* on my solo album *Outside the Wall* (Za Discs, 2004). The experience of performing and recording this piece greatly challenged my ability to listen to and engage with sound, as the zheng part is improvised following the form of the electronic backtrack. This offers many ways for the performer to incorporate the backtrack and interact with it in live performance (listening is essential to the synchronization with the tape). The soundscape at the opening and ending sections allows the performer, if he or she so chooses, to craft spacious and slow-shifting gestures. In contrast the centre section calls for rapid and staccato passages that are highly

aggressive.<sup>221</sup> This unavoidably requires the zheng performer to be out of her/his comfort zone of performing “pretty” music. When coaching me, Randy described his approach to the zheng for the centre section:

I felt the emotional spectrum for the zheng was too narrow, mostly emphasizing the sweet feminine character of the instrument. I knew it had more in it and I spent a few years developing new approaches and techniques to produce an aggressive male approach. I wanted the zheng to reflect the dynamic emotional spectrum that is found in life, from the fragility of a small flower to the magnificence of a lightening storm. I studied martial arts and found in the zheng the capability for the soft fluidity of *Tai Chi (tai ji)* that could instantly strike with the full power and force of a punch. (2004, personal communication)

While technical virtuosity is a primary asset, a great musical performance requires a performer’s listening skills, focused intent, and deep engagement. No matter whether it is traditional, a new composition, experimental jazz, or new age, the intent can be different but the level of commitment is the same, as stated by traditional Chinese musicians: 1) unify the strings with the fingers; 2) then unify the fingers with the music; and 3) finally unify the music with intent. As a Chinese musician performing in the West, I find it remarkable that many aesthetic concepts used by Western artists either came from or share values similar to those of ancient East Asian philosophies. Many elements of Chinese musical philosophy that I learned as a Chinese ethnomusicologist are in fact exemplified in music making in the West. As I am challenged in the West by new genres, aesthetics, and sounds, I am also receiving affirmation of what I learned about my tradition and how valuable it is. In moving forward to expand my horizons and embrace new music for the zheng, I feel ever closer to home, walking the path of “East meets West” and “old is new.”

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<sup>221</sup> My performance of *Bamboo*, *Silk*, and *Stone* is available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p6Eaj1F2jCc&feature=share&list=PL55100235842930A6>.

## 5.4 Identity and Aesthetics of The Zheng in The Age of Globalization

Cultural interactions and mass communication through multiple media have propelled the zheng into an age of globalization. Its performance outside of China in numerous new genres including twenty-first century classical, experimental, free improvisation, jazz, electro-acoustic, new age, and world music creates a new developmental stage of zheng music and a cultural identity that features local divergence.

Chinese musicians living in the diaspora have opened a door to expanded performance opportunities for the zheng on the international stage. Mainland Chinese artists now have access to the world through recordings, the internet, and an increasing number of opportunities to collaborate with foreign artists both at home and abroad. Both diaspora and Mainland artists are commissioning and attracting new zheng compositions by composers from diverse cultural backgrounds. The result is a wealth of new compositional forms, techniques, and approaches to the instrument. These innovations herald a substantial change: rather than the politically driven or mono-cultural national expression of the last century, modern zheng music is becoming cross-cultural, trans-cultural, and multi-cultural. The zheng is becoming an international instrument with an increasingly diverse voice.

As non-Chinese musical idioms and materials—including tunings, gestures, and the use of extended techniques—are becoming increasingly common in new zheng compositions, the challenge for zheng musicians and composers is to embrace diversity while not sacrificing the uniqueness of the instrument, and to move forward without divorcing the past. In the process of creating new music for the zheng, techniques, gestures, and influences taken from a variety of cultural resources and directly transferred

onto the zheng from other instruments have not been as successful as those that are translated into, integrated with, or expand upon existing zheng idioms. Thus it is imperative to understand the instrument, its heritage, and its artistic strengths. This leads to the question: What is the zheng's identity?

The morphology of the zheng is an embodiment of the Confucian aesthetics of *sheng* and *yin*—to generate sound (*sheng*) on the right side of the bridges, and to refine it into music (*yin*) on the left. The creation of *sheng* is the finite physical action of plucking a string, while the transformation of the sound into music (*yin*) is a process, based in aesthetics, that is ethereal, in constant motion, and with no clear boundaries. As such dualities are common throughout Chinese philosophy (e.g., *yin* and *yang*), the sense of the duality of *sheng* and *yin* can thenceforward be broadened to apply to other aspects of the traditional practice of the zheng: 1) the relationship of the static compositional structure (*sheng*) notated as bone tunes versus individual creation through *jiahua* or adding flowers (*yin*); 2) the dissemination through notation (*sheng*) versus its relationship with oral transmission (*yin*); and 3) the tangible performance (*sheng*) versus the intangible artistic conception (*yin*). Together these dualities form the governing aesthetics that are at the core of the identity of the traditional zheng—*yi yun busheng* (using *yun* to enrich sound), and *yundo shengshao* (more *yun* and less sound)—nurturing a palette of techniques for sculpting sound and supporting nuance, spontaneity, personal expression.

This set of aesthetics began to be challenged in the mid-twentieth century. The process was instigated by Chinese political forces of the time seeking to shift the zheng from its position as an instrument for personal expression within a rural community-based environment to a state-supported professional art form for the national stage. The

“elevation” of the zheng to suit the new society drove the movement to rapidly reform the instrument, to codify a select number of traditional pieces, and, most significantly, to move zheng instruction to music institutions. This resulted in a coalescing, in the last fifty years, of diverse zheng practices into a single national model with the standardization of its repertoire, notation, teaching methodology, and performance techniques and styles. This national model contributed to the formation of the zheng’s modern identity—a technically virtuosic instrument for professional performance. In this process the traditional “vocalistic” compositional approach was replaced by a Western influenced pianistic “instrumentalization,” with a resulting profusion of new plucking techniques. The traditional sense of the refinement of sound has been overshadowed by the emphasis on playing more notes at faster speeds, and the balance between *sheng* (sound) and *yun* (music) has shifted from “more *yun* and less sound” to “more sound and less *yun*.”

Although in the last fifty years there have been many attempts to substantially change the physical structure of the zheng to accommodate more notes (*sheng*), the form of the instrument has essentially remained unchanged, which means that it physically retains the balanced duality of *sheng* and *yun*. This suggests that the zheng is a versatile musical instrument capable of a wide range of musical expressions from the depth of ancient treasures to the complexities of modern music.

As professionally trained Chinese zheng musicians moved overseas they have been exposed to, and have engaged in, a wide variety of new musical cultures, approaches, aesthetics, techniques, and technologies from around the world. Exploring these new forms, their resulting creative use of the zheng in a variety of non-Chinese genres has generated a divergence in the zheng’s repertoire, performance style, technical

approach, and aesthetics. Yet, through different paths, many have come to realize the artistic and cultural value inherited from the traditional zheng and traditional Chinese philosophies—such as the balance between *sheng* and *yin*—and have utilized this in their works.

The three developmental stages of the living tradition of the zheng—traditional heritage, nationalistic movements in contemporary China, and diasporic development under global influence—have each contributed to form a wealth and range of performance techniques, repertoires, and aesthetics. I propose that the future of the zheng lies in the integration of all these approaches, and that such integration will form the foundation for future development in the context of globalization and its diverse cultural and musical milieus.

Integration will temper the mainland Chinese emphasis on virtuosic technique with an awareness of the importance of craft skills found in both the tradition and the diaspora. Whereas technical skills are the foundation for engaging new compositions, extended techniques, and the possibilities for musical expression, contemporary craft skills reach beyond technique to include the awareness of sound and subtleties in time and space, the ability to sculpt sound, and the ability to express individual artistic intention through sound. These craft skills have been developed from a combination of traditional zheng techniques married to Asian influenced Western new music approaches. The integration of technical skills with contemporary craft skills will provide performers with an abundance of options to create their own individual voices.

Integration will open the door to a world of influences, genres, styles, musical approaches, and technologies that will expand the pianistic Western classical approach to

zheng composition. As Chinese composers and performers gain a broader musical worldview, the traditions and innovations of other cultures and instruments, such as other East Asian long zithers, can inform and stimulate contemporary innovation. These instruments carry valuable evidence of the zheng's past and its ancient Chinese aesthetics, and can enrich its performance techniques and compositions. As zheng artists investigate influences from other cultures they will rediscover the richness of their own traditional culture as a resource for their creativity.

The integration of zheng aesthetics will bring the emphasis on individual creativity, the spirit of spontaneity, and the commitment to self-cultivation of traditional ideals together with Western contemporary music and the standards of virtuosity, performance, and professionalism developed in modern China. The zheng stands poised to embark on a new era of dynamic growth during which it will become truly international—not just a part of Chinese culture, but of world culture.

Music changes, within itself and in interaction with internal and external forces. Thus the identity of a genre or an instrument is constantly reconstructed and redefined. The zheng's new paradigm encompasses unprecedented popularity nationally and internationally, and an abundance of opportunities to bring its past and current development together to create a broader and richer future. This is the essence of the realms of *sheng* and *yin*. What we have brought from the past is *sheng*, and what we can create in the future is boundless *yin*.

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## APPENDIX A: LIST OF THE MOST INFLUENTIAL AND PROLIFIC TRADITIONAL ZHENG MUSICIANS RECRUITED BY THE CONSERVATORIES

**Cao Dongfu** 曹東扶 (1898-1970), from Henan, began teaching the zheng at several schools in Henan before becoming the zheng instructor at the Central Conservatory of Music in 1956, and later at the Sichuan Conservatory of Music in 1960 (Feng 2004:238). Cao was credited with arranging a large number of pieces for solo zheng from the *bantou qu* repertoire—the traditional ensemble genre from Henan—thus singlehandedly bringing this regional style to the national music scene.

**Cao Zheng** 曹正 (1920-98), from Liaoning, was a leading zheng performer and scholar. He created the first zheng performance course in the new system at the Music Department of *Dongbei Luxun Yishu Xueyuan* (Northeastern Luxun Arts Academy), the predecessor of the Shenyang Conservatory of Music in the Northeast in the early 1950s. From 1957 to 1960 he was invited to lecture at the conservatories in Shanghai, Nanjing, and Xi'an in the Northwest. In 1964 Cao was transferred to teach at the newly formed Chinese Music Conservatory in Beijing (Zhou and Zhu 1994:3). Cao was the leading figure and driving force behind the conservatory recruitment of traditional musicians.

**Gao Zicheng** 高自成 (1918-2010), from Shandong, began his career as the zheng soloist of the Song and Dance Troup of the People's Liberation Army in 1955. Shortly after he left the ensemble in 1957 he was hired by the Xi'an Conservatory of Music. Gao arranged a large number of solo pieces from the traditional *peng baban* ensemble repertoire as well as that of the Shandong *qinshu* narrative song.

**Guo Ying 郭鷹** (1914-2002), from Chaozhou, joined the Shanghai National Orchestra in 1953 as a zheng soloist. He was invited to teach at the Nanjing Art Institute in 1960, and began teaching at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music the same year.

**Luo Jiuxiang 羅九香** (1902-78), a Hakka musician, was invited to teach at the Tianjin Conservatory of Music for one year in 1959 before joining the teaching staff of the Guangzhou Music Conservatory (Wu 2009:44). Luo is notable for developing new teaching material and his deep understanding of the aesthetic cultural value in traditional music.

**Su Wenxian 蘇文賢** (1907-71), from Chaozhou, taught at the Shenyang Conservatory of Music in 1956, bringing the style to the North. He was recruited by the Guangzhou (now Xinghai) Music Conservatory in 1958. Throughout these periods he taught the zheng as well as other Chaozhou instruments (Su 1996:4-5).

**Wang Xunzhi 王巽之** (1899-1972), the only known Zhejiang zheng musician at the time, began to teach at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music in 1956. As the Zhejiang repertoire and performance techniques borrowed substantially from *sizhu* silk bamboo and *pipa* music, Wang's performance of the zheng was considered unique. Wang arranged and created new pieces through using traditional compositional material and techniques, which have been categorized as part of the traditional Zhejiang zheng repertoire (Guo 1993:40-41).

**Zhao Yuzhai 趙玉齋** (1923-99), from Shandong, was recommended by Cao Zheng to teach at the Shenyang Conservatory of Music in 1953. As a musician Zhao had extensive performance experience with his teacher and group, traveling around the country. Zhao arranged and scored over 200 traditional zheng and *leiqin* (a type of fiddle) pieces from Shandong (Yan and Xu 1997:2). His composition *Qing Feng Nian* (Celebrating the Harvest, 1955) is considered the most significant composition for the zheng written in the 1950s.