

**MEDIA, MARKET ECONOMY, AND CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION: QIN MUSIC  
IN CONTEMPORARY CHINA**

by

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The qin, historically recognized as an instrument of Chinese literati, has been presented in various forms of mass media for over fifty years. After the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949, the government promoted public performances in a propaganda/persuasion media system; consequently, mass media started to play significant roles in reshaping aesthetic standards, performance practices, musical features, and meanings of the qin tradition. The mass media in China, however, went through a commercialization reform after the late 1970s and has shaped the current propaganda/persuasion model. This new media structure has hastened the emergence of new musical features and meanings of the qin in the commercial logic as opposed to the Party logic. Such interactions with technology have arguably constituted contemporary performance practices that have departed from traditional aesthetic standards held by literati practitioners who played the qin for self-satisfaction.

This paper analyzes qin music as it has been produced and disseminated in different forms of mass media after 1950s, reveals the dynamic multiplicity of meanings of qin music, and unfolds a transformation through which qin music lost its aura that was handed down from antiquity, but is gradually conditioned in its new environment characterized by the tension between the political and market forces. This thesis focuses on one of the most active qin musicians, Li Xiangting, and his activities in the past decade, to show how a prominent qin

player, by exploiting mass media technology, mediates his music and ideological theories to promote new perceptions of musical features, aesthetical forms, and social values of the qin. It is through collaboration with the development of mass media in China that many contemporary qin musicians carry on their practices via social conflicts, accommodations, and changing conditions of Chinese economy, society, and culture.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>PREFACE.....</b>	<b>X</b>
<b>1.0 INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.1 QIN MUSIC IN MASS MEDIA—A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE OF QIN MUSIC IN SOCIETY .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1.2 MASS MEDIA IN CHINA.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1.3 SCOPE AND FRAMEWORK .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>2.0 RECONFIGURATION OF QIN MUSIC IN CENTRALIZED MASS MEDIA .</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>2.1 RECORDINGS OF QIN MUSIC.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>2.2 ALIENATION OF QIN MUSICIANS THROUGH RECORDINGS .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>2.3 QIN MUSIC ON RADIO .....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>3.0 QIN MUSIC IN THE MARKET: ETHOS AND COMMERCIALIZATION.....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>3.1 CHALLENGES TO THE YOUNGER GENERATION OF QIN PLAYERS</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>3.2 CASSETTES AND THE POPULAR MUSIC MARKET .....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>3.2.1 The advent of cassettes .....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>3.2.2 Qin music as a musical art .....</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>4.0 NEW SOUNDS OF QIN MUSIC .....</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>4.1 THE ARTISTIC QIN THEORY.....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>4.1.1 Mass musical culture vs. popular musical culture.....</b>	<b>65</b>

4.2	IMPROVISATION IN CONTEMPORARY QIN MUSIC .....	70
5.0	QIN MUSIC IN AUDIO-VIDEO MEDIA.....	81
5.1	A PROVOCATIVE COLLABORATION: QIN MUSIC IN <i>THE FIRST EMPEROR'S SHADOW</i> .....	81
5.2	TOWARD COMMERCIAL COLLABORATIONS WITH THE AV MEDIA INDUSTRY.....	89
5.3	STRUGGLES FOR MEANINGS: OFFICIAL MEDIA VS. COMMERCIAL MEDIA.....	93
	5.3.1 Qin music in official media .....	94
	5.3.2 Qin music in commercial media .....	96
6.0	CONCLUSION.....	100
	APPENDIX A .....	103
	APPENDIX B .....	106
	BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	110

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Survey on the mode of music appreciation in Beijing 1988.....	43
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## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. A comparison between the spectrograms of the climax sections of <i>Flowing Water</i> by Guan Pinghu and by Li Xiangting .....	58
Figure 2. The Cover of Li Xiangting’s Extemporization Album <i>Tangren shiyi</i> .....	67
Figure 3. Li Xiangting’s Calligraphy in the liner note of <i>Tangren shiyi</i> .....	68
Figure 4. Li Xiangting’s painting in the liner note of the album <i>Songren ciyi</i> .....	68
Figure 5. Li Xiangting’s <i>Extemporizing No. 2</i> , in 1989.....	77
Figure 6. Poster of Zhao Jiazhen’s Audio-Visual Qin Concert “Qinyun shuimo” .....	97
Figure 7. The Stage Effect of Zhao Jiazhen’s Audio-Visual Qin Performance.....	98

## PREFACE

The Romanized forms of personal names in Mandarin pronunciation use the *pinyin* system, presented in the Chinese tradition with the family name first, followed by the given name. For the benefit of readers who know Chinese, the Chinese characters are provided in the glossary.

All the translations from the sources in Chinese are by the author unless otherwise indicated.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

On August 8, 2008, a Chinese string instrument, the qin, initiated the first section of the show in the Opening Ceremony of the 29th Olympic Games hosted by Beijing. The live qin performance, together with many symbolic images shown on a huge LED screen in the shape of a scroll including the calligraphy, pottery, rice paper, etc., represented the “glorious” Chinese civilization that China is proud of and would like to show to the world. What is particularly interesting about this performance is that in this global broadcast show, the qin player, Chen Leiji, dressed in a Han robe and sitting in the middle of the national stadium “Bird’s Nest,” vividly reconstructed a literati qin player’s performance whose qin tradition actually concentrated on privacy and self-enlightenment. Historically the qin has been widely known for its close association with Chinese literati who used to be the primary sponsors of qin music in Imperial China. But literati qin players have their own tradition of playing the qin for themselves or a very limited number of qin friends, mainly for the purpose of self-enlightenment and self-purification. The commonly used medium of sharing their music is elegant gathering *yaji* during which the elite qin amateurs would meet each other, enjoy tea, play the qin, paint or write poems, and are served by their servants. It is through this exclusive communication that Chinese literati successfully kept their qin tradition for centuries. Therefore, a mass-disseminated performance of qin music in the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games suggest a change of meaning of this music in a modern context. What is the new message about this instrument having a long history? How does this change come about? Why is qin music presented on a national stage? What is qin music’s important for Chinese government, and the Chinese people nowadays?

This thesis examines the ways in which meanings of qin music have been produced and negotiated as mass media products after 1950s, and seeks to explain the social forces that shaped the multiplicity of meanings of qin music mass-mediated in People's Republic of China. The materials in this thesis were largely based on the findings of my fieldwork, library research, and Internet research. These findings can be generally divided into documentary research, media contents, and interviews with a qin player in my fieldwork. The documentary research involves articles from academic journals, newspaper reports, and Internet web pages. Media contents include audio and Audio/Video materials from television programs, and media products, like CDs. The Internet became an ideal tool for me to access TV programs that have been broadcasted but are currently available from some video-sharing websites, such as YouTube.

Using these materials, I analyze the shifting meanings and functions of qin music in different forms of media products. It is through collaboration with the development of mass media in China that the qin musicians carry on their practices via social conflicts, accommodations, and changing conditions of Chinese culture, society, and economy.

## **1.1 QIN MUSIC IN MASS MEDIA—A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE OF QIN MUSIC IN SOCIETY**

The primary concern in this thesis is how musical features and meanings of Chinese qin music have been mass-mediated by media products, technology, and other social factors of contemporary Chinese society. Qin music had never become a mass-disseminated genre in Imperial China, and as I mentioned above, the dissemination and transmission of qin music had been generally kept within the elite class. Due to the socio-economic privileges, these elite qin

players who were consumers at the same time, were able to keep their qin practices in a profit-free mode, namely self-enlightenment. This tradition resulted in an exclusive circulation of qin music and a relatively coherent body of qin ideologies and meanings that lasted for centuries. Its contemporary development, particularly after the 1950s, ended its exclusive circulation within a small group of practitioners/sponsors. Since qin music was recorded and broadcast on radio, this instrument has been incorporated in various forms of mass media that connected qin players to the larger social world. As a result, the contemporary development of qin music has been through an unprecedented dynamic transition, departing from a relatively private musical practice that influenced individual qin player or sponsor's life based on personal pursuit, toward a multidimensional media product that has exerted substantial impact on China's society in the context of social forces such as the politics, economy, and technological development.

This transition directly leads to the change of research approaches. The traditional approach in the study of qin music that concentrate on qin traditions documented in print media, such as qin notational handbooks, essays, and historical biographies of qin players, has become increasingly inadequate for analyzing the recent dissemination of qin music in other media forms. This is not only caused by the rise of new technological carriers of qin music, but also triggered by the change of social relationships between sponsors, practitioners, and consumers of the qin in the past several decades. Since qin music was mass disseminated in People's Republic of China, the qin has experienced a tortuous process in which it has been exploited in various ways to advance the interests of different social institutions, for example as a political propaganda tool, or a commercial product in music industry. There have formed three levels of social relationships: the relationships between the government and the media industry, between

individual qin players and media industry, and between media products and audiences.<sup>1</sup> One way to decode the dizzying array of the contemporary developments of qin music in mass media is to study the impact of media and technology on these relationships in a sociological approach which concentrates on the relationships between qin music in mass media and the social world. This approach provides a set of tools to analyze mass media and technology as structures maintained, perpetuated and altered by agency. Regarding the notion of structure and agency, I use the broadest sense, as defined by Croteau and Hoynes, that social structures are recurring pattern of social behaviors and characterized by constraint features (Croteau and Hoynes 2003, 20-21); agency means intentional and undetermined human action that produces social structure and is simultaneously constrained by structure (ibid., 21-22). It is this tension between structure and agency that unfolds the shared characteristic of the three social relations mentioned above, and reveals the struggles for meanings of qin music through the processes of social relations.

## 1.2 MASS MEDIA IN CHINA

Media sociologists David Croteau and William Hoynes pointed out that “The sociological significance of media extends beyond the content of media messages. Media also affect how we learn about our world and interact with one another” (ibid., 15). This statement cautiously attributes agency to the technological processes of mass media to some degree, with an attempt to avoid a pole of technological determinism which argues that the technological medium can shape and control the scale and form of human association and action, like McLuhan’s well-

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<sup>1</sup> The three levels of social relationships in my study of qin music are based on three types of social relations in general sociological studies: relationships between institutions, relationships within an institution, and relationships between institutions and individuals, as summarized in Croteau and Hoynes’ book *Media and Society*.

known statement (McLuhan 1964, 9). This state shares similarity with Timothy Taylor's practical theory of technology. As he argues: "While adopting a notion of technology as a peculiar kind of structure, and structure as something that entails agency, is a way of moving beyond the poles of technological determinism and voluntarism, it is nonetheless the case that some sociotechnical systems provide for greater and varying degrees of agency compared to others" (Taylor 2001, 37). In other words, although the technology can entail its own agency by acting on its users, the eventual impact is also partially determined by the socio factors such as social class, gender, ethnicity of users, which would make users modify their uses at the same time. That's why Taylor adds that "the positionality of any individual agent matters" (ibid.) in the notion of technology as a structure. Hence, it is essential to define what mass media mean in the current study of contemporary development of qin music in China, and how mass media mediate the three levels of social relationships in the context of China's society through qin music.

The notion of mass media is part of the general territory of communication media that are "the different technological processes that facilitate communication between (and are in the 'middle' of) the sender of a message and the receiver of that message" (Croteau and Hoynes 2003, 6-7). Along with the rise of new communication technologies, however, the content this concept embodies has been increased so much that the difference between mass media and other forms of communication have become more and more blurred. Therefore it is necessary to clarify what mass media products of qin music mean in the current study. First, mass media products of qin music are produced for a relatively large audience of usually anonymous consumers, which is a common feature shared by all mass media products (ibid.). This feature fundamentally conflicts with literati qin musicians' tradition, because they carefully select their

audiences if they have to play the qin for others. Therefore the live performances taking place in traditional contexts, such as elegant gatherings, are not included in my scope. Second, all though the variety of media products has become incredibly wide, I will only emphasize the generally recognized mass media of sound recording, radio, film, television, and the Internet, the media forms in which qin music has been disseminated.

Apart from general sociological theories regarding mass media, there are specific issues in the study of mass media in China. The mass media in People's Republic of China have experienced a series of changes of frameworks underling three fundamental types of social relations I mentioned earlier. The frameworks can be roughly divided into two stages, dissemination and interpretation, before and after the economic reform in the late 1970s. In the first stage, the mass media were tightly controlled by the Chinese government, because the media industry, or network, was exclusively funded by the government as national institutes, rather than operated in the form of corporations in market. The main function of mass media<sup>2</sup> was the Party's mouthpiece, namely "to propagate the Party's goals and promote changes in the attitudes and behavior of the people" (Zhao 1998, 4). Correspondingly, individual agency of media personnel had a low level of autonomy in doing their work, due to the explicit and static sets of doctrines they were supposed to promote. As some sociologists have reported, audiences in this media industry were guaranteed, particularly from the early 1950s and the early 1960s, mostly because their consumptions were required in a variety of manners (Jan 1967; Howse 1960). The result of these social relationships was, in the words of media sociologists, a mass propaganda and persuasion model (Zhao 1998, 4; Chang, Chen, and Zhang 1993, 175).

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<sup>2</sup> The major forms of mass media during this period were the radio and the press. Other forms of media, such as television, were not popularized in China until the 1980s.



Since the early 1980s, however, mass media in China have been moving beyond this model. Economic reforms of the media were initiated as a result of the introduction of free market economy and the Chinese government's increasingly inadequate financial support for the general mass media industry. In fact, the official financing from the central government was so limited that government funds could provide only 50 to 70 percent of what was needed to maintain the regular operation of existing broadcast channels throughout the 1980s (Zhao 1998, 53). Therefore, the government adopted a policy of gradually cutting subsidies and encouraging commercialized financing (ibid.), and this policy pushed the overall mass media industry onto a trajectory of commercialization. An inevitable consequence of using market forces to develop the commercialized media industry is that by cutting the official financing, the government also lost monopolistic, arbitrary control over media contents. Although the media were still viewed as instruments of the Party, the main objective and focus of media was changed from class struggles and political indoctrination to the promotion of economic modernization and cultural construction in the new area of Reform and Openness<sup>3</sup> (gaige kaifang 改革开放) (Lee 1990, 3-32; Zhao 1998, 4-5, 34-35). This change in objectives mainly manifests itself in a higher degree of autonomy most provincial media stations acquired, and the rise of independent ownership of media institutions. This new framework shaped through the economic reforms of media, however, is not thoroughly departing from the Party control, because the Party authorities still maintains political control of media institutions, particularly the news media, to varying degrees. In fact, the tension between Party control and market forces has become the main feature of the current development of mass media in China. With the rapid development of market-oriented

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<sup>3</sup> The policy of Reform and Openness was firstly brought up by Deng Xiaoping in the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Chinese Communist Party Central Committee in 1978, in order to gradually activate agricultural, economic, and social liberalization. Although the policy process took a couple of years to be approved and implemented, the era after 1978 has been widely known as the Open Era.

popular media organizations that are on the margins of the existing Party-controlled system, the mass media nowadays is moving toward, as what media sociologist Zhao Yuezhi called, a propagandist/commercial model (Zhao 1998, 151-164).

These two stages of the development of mass media in China constitute the social dissemination background of the contemporary development of qin music.

### **1.3 SCOPE AND FRAMEWORK**

The contemporary development of qin music in China has been in a state of flux, shaped by the unsettling cultural policies, and the rapid transformation of the mass media system. It is my purpose to present the changes of qin music through the process of mass mediations, from a highly centralized mass media system toward a propagandist/commercial media. Facing the overwhelming changes of the qin in all aspects of media presentation and dissemination in the past several decades, I have been selective in citing examples, focusing on what I regard as the most significant and representative qin practices and media forms. For example, in Chapter 3 and 4, I particularly focus on one qin musician, Li Xiangting as a case study, because I consider him as a representative qin musician who experienced the transition from the political propaganda period to the commercialization era. With the biographical study and analyses on his musical theories and performance practices, I intend to reveal how qin professionals develop strategies for navigating through the political and socio-economic forces. In terms of the media forms, I have to limit my scope, too. This is mainly because not each form of mass media has exerted strong influence to the development of qin music; in fact, this instrument can more easily accommodate to some media forms than others. For instance, film, particularly historical drama,

has contextualized qin musicians and their music in audio-visual reconstructions of historical settings so well that the physical appearances of qin performances seem quite normal. However, there is a media form that qin musicians have never successfully conquered that I pay close attention to, which is cassette. Although the cassette market in China was primarily occupied by Hong Kong romantic popular music, Western rock, etc., the introduction of the cassette technology restructured the general music industry in China, and correspondingly affected the norms and rules of the music market in which many qin musicians tried to take a share.

In *Power Plays: Wayang Golek Puppet Theater of West Java*, ethnomusicologist Andrew Weintraub illustrates the dynamic multiplicity of meanings of wayang golek. Mass media production and distribution of wayang golek played an important role in struggles over the meaning of wayang golek in West Java, because they “constrain the kinds of cultural texts produced, the ways in which they are received, and the meanings that are available to audiences” (Weintraub 2004, 9). This function of mass media also shape performance of wayang golek into “a tool of propaganda for local and national government interests or, conversely, as a vehicle for criticizing the hegemonic sociopolitical order,” and “a crucial site for activating these multiple contradictory interests” (ibid.). This angle of showing the struggles for meanings of the same musical genre has been extremely useful in the current research on the dynamic multiplicity of interpretations and exploitations of the qin in the contemporary socio- and economic context and mass mediations in China.

I begin my analysis of the mediations of the current development of qin music via mass media with an overview of the reconfiguration of qin music and musicians in the socialist environment from 1950s to pre-Cultural Revolution. In Chapter 2, I describe the general cultural polices made by Mao Zedong in his famous *Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art in*

1942, and the Party's media strategy of popularizing some traditional musical genres including qin music mainly in two media forms, sound recordings and radio broadcast. The use of mass media was accompanied and perpetuated by institutional qin musicians' tailored repertory and musical practices to conform to Mao's cultural policies of constructing a socialist mass musical culture. Since qin music was generally banned particularly in after the mid-1960s, the complete decade of the Cultural Revolution has provided the current research scarce data on the practice of qin music. Therefore my analysis on activities of qin performances from 1949 to the late 1970s skips that political upheaval spanning from 1966 to 1967. However, I try to provide as much contextual detail as possible in terms of the radical political control over qin music right before the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, in order to shed light on the harsh circumstance for most qin musicians during that decade.

In Chapter 3 I analyze the situations since the early 1980s: the bewilderment of a younger generation of institutional qin musicians in the cultural diplomatic activities, and the rapid commercialization of music market. Their bewilderment can be mainly unfolded in two aspects: first, the qin was recognized as an valuable object which contributed to the promotion the notion of Chinese national music mainly due to its long history, but its music failed to draw public attention in practice; second, the high cultural value of qin music did not correspondingly lead to monetary benefit. In this chapter, I give a general discussion of the cassette technology which greatly accelerated the rate of commercialization of music market in China. The impact of this new media form made many qin musicians realize the power of market forces of the newly-formed free music market and brought the fact to their attention that the Western popular culture were turning a young generation of Chinese away from their tradition. In particular, I focus on one qin musician, Li Xiangting, who experienced both the highly-centralized mass media era

from 1960s and 1970s, and the beginning of commercialization of music market in the 1980s, in order to delineate the period of transition and the difficulties qin practitioners had to encounter.

Chapter 4 offers a detailed analysis of Li Xiangting's so-called "Artistic Qin theory" and the practice of extemporizing qin music that not only challenged the existing prevailing theories to some degree, but also produced some new sounds of the qin. I provide a critical assessment of the impact of Li's theories in facilitating his idea of materializing cultural and social values of qin music in the form of commercial and tangible media products; in addition, I examine the significance of his extemporizing practices in adjusting him to the rapidly emerging consumerism and commercialism that pervaded the Chinese society after the early 1980s, and preparing him for further commercial collaboration with a variety of mass media.

In Chapter 5 I discuss the impact of audio-video media on the musical features and meanings of qin music disseminated in the propagandistic/commercial media system. Through four case studies of AV products in which qin music plays important roles, I explore the diversification of mass-mediated qin music and performances in the accommodations and tensions between Party control and market forces in China. In addition, I intend to reveal how qin professionals, including Li Xiangting and his successors, develop strategies for navigating through the political and socio-economic forces.

In the concluding chapter, I intend to look beyond the current intertwining of the political control and the commercial driving force. I deem that the decentralization and diversification of the meanings of qin music in mass media may reflect as well as shed light on the general transition of Chinese mass communication from a centralized "organic society" whose development does not involve individual choices, toward a democratic-participant model in which each individual agent matters.

## 2.0 RECONFIGURATION OF QIN MUSIC IN CENTRALIZED MASS MEDIA

The collapse of the Chinese literati group after the foundation of People's Republic of China in 1949 had a profound influence on qin music. As the once primary sponsors of qin music in Imperial China, their social and musical position in communist China brought about drastic changes in qin construction, repertory, performance practices. The fundamental ideology relating to the qin was forced into the parameters of the socialist ideology, meaning qin players were no longer considered elite but rather constructors of the socialist musical culture. As this chapter aims to show, the change of the social and ideological milieu recontextualized this instrument in a new environment of mass culture through a series of reforms whose primary purpose was to convert the elite culture of qin music to a mass culture that could please a large public audience (Yung 1998, 5).

The contemporary development of the qin after 1949 presents a paradox which is disclosed in the ambiguous values of qin music in the socialist framework of literature and art. The qin tradition is closely tied to the culture of the social elite and the feudal hierarchy; therefore it did not conform to socialist ideologies. Nevertheless, it was promoted as a form of national music via the state-owned radio stations as early as 1950s and attracted some audiences who barely knew the socio-political background of this instrument. This paradox has generated the transformation of qin music as self-enlightenment to a mass media content of public entertainment, which I will also analyze in this chapter.

## 2.1 RECORDINGS OF QIN MUSIC

To understand the paradox, it is important to consider the fundamental cultural policy Mao Zedong formulated before Communist Party of China's accession to power in 1949. Ethnomusicologist Bell Yung has pointed out that as early as 1942, Mao Zedong's *Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art* articulated the ideological framework within which Chinese music, and specifically qin music, has operated in recent decades (Yung, 1998:4). In this talk Mao particularly emphasizes the social function of literature and art in socialist China is to serve the masses including "the workers, peasants, soldiers and the urban petty bourgeoisie," and defines the scope of "literature and art" as a broad territory which embodies not only the literature and art works created for and during socialist revolutionaries, but also those handed down from the past. He says:

We should take over the rich legacy and the good traditions in literature and art that have been handed down from past ages in China and foreign countries, but the aim must still be to serve the masses of the people. Nor do we refuse to utilize the literary and artistic forms of the past, but in our hands these old forms, remoulded and infused with new content, also become something revolutionary in the service of the people. (Mao 1967, 11-12)

This cultural directive is Mao's appropriation of the preexistent socialist cultural theories within the Marxist framework, rather than his own invention: in 1880s, Engels described "the task of the artist as portraying the revolutionary struggle of the working class",<sup>4</sup> and Lenin formulated a program in 1905 in which art became "part of the common cause of the proletariat ... a component of organized, planned and integrated Social-Democratic party work" (Kagan 1963, 419).

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<sup>4</sup> F. Engels' Letter to Margaret Harkness, quoted in Chou Yang, *The Path of Socialist Literature and Art in China* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1960), 15, 42-43.

The implication is that even some cultural heritages that did not represent the cultural achievement of the working class could fulfill the requirement of serving the masses after being adapted properly. These old literature and artistic works are potentially revisable to revolution. Given this cultural policy, even the music of the qin, an instrument that was removed from the “masses” probably further than any other musical instruments (Yung 1998, 5), could be included in the category of adaptable artistic forms. But how? The method was loosely mentioned in Mao’s earlier document in 1936: “discarding the dross and selecting the essential, eliminating the false and retaining the true” (Mao, 1936). His poetic expression camouflaged the irreconcilable conflict, and added a high degree of flexibility to how the adaptation should be carried out.

While the operability of Mao’s cultural policy suffers from its great ambiguity, his proposition reveals a consistent characteristic of the formation of Chinese traditional music repertoire, including both some elite musical genres like qin music, and some grassroots genres such as folk songs. As ethnomusicologist Helen Rees summarizes, “China’s folk music traditions have seldom existed in immutable isolation. The country has a long history of the literatus collection of folksongs and of the creative adaptation of traditional music materials” (Rees 2009, 44). In the early 1950s, when this newly founded regime needed to formulate its own tradition, traditional music materials handed down from the past became a convenient resource, waiting for appropriate creative adaptations underpinned by a socialist ideology that “favored production of catchy propaganda ditties, and tended to view folk music as raw material” (ibid., 45).

The creative adaptations of qin music were carried out in the 1950s by the Music Research Institute of Beijing, including the compilation of lists of information after surveying the activities of qin musicians and old instruments, the collection and reprinting of old qin handbooks with musical scores, and the recording of performances by distinguished musicians of



the time (Yung 2009, 147). The music recording technology was certainly known and was applied to mass media before the 1950s, since some Western companies, such as the Victor Talking Machine Company had created a small record industry in China as early as the 1920s (Gornow 1981, 259). Yet most qin musicians had never had their music recorded, and the most common means of sharing their music and communicating musical ideas was the most traditional medium—Elegant Gatherings, the gathering among qin players and qin friends. This is mainly because most of these qin players were amateurs who played for self-refinement rather than monetary benefit, and consequently there was no need for them to dabble in the music industry, the primary function of which was to provide entertainment.

In the first decade after the foundation of People's Republic of China, a recording survey program convinced many qin players of the intrinsic value and necessity of recording their music. In the early 1950s, the Chinese government launched a project of collecting and rearranging appropriate materials for a national wide music textbook, which successively gave rise to the discourse of collecting and compiling a comprehensive repertoire of “national music (guo yue 国乐).” As Lü Ji outlined in his report, “Most of the music textbooks in use were translated from Soviet textbooks. In consideration of the future of our national music, a preservation project should be initiated. However due to the lack of materials, a data-collection project should be executed before that, which would necessarily require a collection of recordings. Since qin music is the only available type of national music for collecting and recording,<sup>5</sup> I am urged to carry out this project”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> In this article, Lü did not elaborate on the reason why qin music should be considered as the most representative genre of national music at that time.

<sup>6</sup> Zha Fuxi, “So Bo Ji” (mimeograph printout, The Academy of Music of China, 1961), quoted in Chen Lin, “Unprecedented or Distinguish: Interview of Qin Zither Performers in 1956,” *Musicology in China*, 3 (2008): 43.

The concept of “national music” is a complex concept that has been used in different contexts and time periods, coexisting with some other terms, “Chinese music (*zhong yue*),” “traditional music (*chuangtong yinyu*),” and “folk music (*min yue*).” The term “national music” was originally put into use in the early twentieth century, mainly referring to Chinese music as opposed to Western music massively imported during May Fourth Movement<sup>7</sup> (Xiao 2003, 12-13). The first decade after the foundation of PRC (1949-1959), many scholars in mainland China kept using the term terminology until the political tension between Taiwan and mainland China initiated a series of changes of terminology. In Taiwan, the use of “national,” such as national opera was closely associated with the Nationalist-constructed “national culture” which was promoted “to keep alive the exiled Mainlanders’ psychological and emotional ties to mainland China,” namely their “Chinese consciousness” (Guy 2005, 74, 152); while in mainland China, the “national music” was gradually replaced by several new terms, such as “traditional music” and “folk music,” both are usually intertwined. The notion of “folk music” (*minjian yinyue*), or “music [from] among the people” (Rees 2009, 42), is often used to refer to “all kinds of traditional music ‘disseminated in the everyday lives of the ordinary people.’”<sup>8</sup> Hence the “traditional music” in this context more corresponds to the cultural nostalgia based on social-class, and less on a nation-state concept as it is in Taiwan. For many mainland music scholars, the differentiation between “national music” and “folk music” has been so vague that many take

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<sup>7</sup> Xiao Mei noted that in the early twentieth century, the term “national music” was used in the educational philosophy of the Music Transmission Institute of Beijing University (Beijing Daxue Yinyue Chuanxisuo): “to preserve and promote Chinese traditional music.” Simultaneously, the national music program was established in Peking Women’s College (Beijing Nüzi Shifan Daxue), providing traditional instrumental courses, such as erhu, guqin, and pipa. See Xiao Mei, “Ershi shijie de liangben shu” [The Two Books of the Twentieth Century], 13.

<sup>8</sup> Qiao Jianzhong, “Hanzu chuantong yinyue yanjiu sishi nian” [Forty years of research on traditional music of the Han], in *Tudi yu ge* [Land and song:] (Ji’nan: Shandong wenyi chubanshe, 1998), 324, quoted in Helen Rees, “Use and Ownership,” 42.

them as equivalents: the former is considered as a word used in Taiwan and the later in mainland China.<sup>9</sup>

There may have been complex reasons of why the notion of “national music” was kept in use through out the 1950s, which goes beyond the scope of the current thesis. But it is the consequence of collecting and developing qin music as one kind of national music that I would like to analyze. Undoubtedly, being labeled as “national music” justified the preservation of qin music because the qin was one of few musical instruments that were originated in China, and survived through ages with continuity. Thus, this label not only provided a temporary shelter for this representative instrument of elite culture in a new conceptual environment in which no cultural heritages of elite tradition would be valued, but also offered qin players an opportunity of preserving their music.

Lü’s suggestion found many echoes within the circle of qin scholars who were concerned with the future of this instrument and had also brought the crisis to the government’s attention that qin music was fading away. Zha Fuxi, an influential qin master and a close friend of Lü, effectively organized a national-level project of recording qin musician’s performances nationwide, entitled “the recording survey of qin music,” in 1956 (Lin 2008). Zha coordinated with the Folk Music Research Institute (Minzu Yinyue Yanjiusuo), the Chinese Musicians’ Association, the Ministry of Culture, and the Central Broadcasting, and organized a research team consisting of many influential qin players and members of the Beijing Guqin Associations, such as Xu Jian, and Wang Di, to interview qin musicians across the country and record their live performances. With the support of the local broadcasting stations in ten big cities, such as Jinan, Nanjing,

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<sup>9</sup> For instance, in her article “Ershi shiji de liangben shu,” Xiao Mei says that she has ignored the difference between “national music” and “folk music” for a long time. She thought the most distinctive difference between the two terms lay in “whom the culture serves.” See Xiao Mei, “Ershi shiji de liangben shu,” *Yinyue yanjiu* [Music research]: 13.

Beijing, etc., the research team worked for 99 days, and recorded 262 traditional qin pieces by 86 qin musicians in 23 places, whose total length exceeded 1000 minutes (Wu 1959, 52; Lin 2008, 44).<sup>10</sup>

While this recording survey symbolized a historic moment when a broad circle of qin musicians in the People's Republic of China first encountered recording technology, it also reflected the authoritative role the government agency played throughout the entire recording process. This can be seen from three aspects: first, the leading musician of the team, Zha Fuxi, was also a member of National People's Congress (NPC), and his official identity facilitated the coordination with various relevant governmental departments and many local musicians to a considerable degree before the survey could be actually organized (Lin, 2008: 50). Second, almost the entire recording and production procedure was by local broadcasting stations because of the participation of Central Broadcasting Authority and the survey team's lack of qualified portable apparatuses. This is because all local radio services and broadcasting stations were branches of the Central People's Broadcasting Station, and were collectively under governmental supervision (Hamm 1991, 2); in most cases, the technical operation of recording music and replicating records was handled by government functionaries in local radio stations rather than by music scholars themselves. Last, after local broadcasting stations recorded live music played by local qin musicians in the studio, all the records were sent to the Central People's Radio Broadcasting Station for further selection, and the pieces selected were copied and shared with Chinese Musicians' Association (Lin 2008, 50).

Therefore, the recording survey of qin music, together with other similar recording projects of this kind in the early period of People's Republic of China, constituted the initial

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<sup>10</sup> According to Lin Chen's statistics in her article in 2008, the survey team recorded 327 qin pieces by 98 qin musicians in 23 places.

stage of collecting recorded materials for appropriating qin music in the socialist context for political purposes different from self-enlightenment. However, the socialist mass culture only privileged literature and art created for and by the proletariat, and qin musicians had to undergo a stage of modifying both their performances and this elite instrument in order to fit qin music in the new environment.

## **2.2 ALIENATION OF QIN MUSICIANS THROUGH RECORDINGS**

The appropriation of qin music did not automatically happen along with the application of recording technology. Here we come across another paradox that manifests itself in relation to the astonishing power recordings of qin music have had, a paradox revealed in the transition of qin music from a private tradition to a public appreciation.

Apart from receiving official approvals and technological support from the government, these early recording teams also needed the qin musicians' understanding and cooperation. Explaining the cultural value of recording their music to enlarge the national music repertoire helped persuade those qin players who were unwilling to play for the machines. But how did the officials help make these qin amateurs feel at ease at being recorded, a feat that would require performers' adaptability with the recording technology, which could hardly be achieved in a short period of time? Recording sessions would be much more challenging for qin players than for other musicians, because historically literati players were amateurs who played the qin merely to enjoy themselves (van Gulik, 1940; Yung 1998, 2008; Liu 2005). In other words, most of these qin players of the literati qin tradition were not accustomed to the involvement of "others" In the initial stages of qin music recordings in the 1950s and 1960s.

The qin tradition had remained relatively stable for centuries. Its steadiness was interrupted by tumultuous socio-political changes, particularly in the past half century. The most profound change lay in the transition of the qin from a personal belonging in a scholar's studio to a public entertainment on a concert stage and later on radio. Bell Yung delineates this transition by tracing the motivation behind this publicity back to the ideological framework of Chinese music proposed in Mao Zedong's "Talks at the Yen'an Forum on Literature and Art in 1942" (Yung 1998, 4). In addition, Yung argued that the fundamental change of the social function rendered a series of changes, from the change of the instrument structure, such as to replace silk strings with metal-nylon strings in order to increase the volume, to playing techniques and the change of performing circumstance, etc. Although all of these modifications caused a series of evident adjustment for qin players, such as their physical adjustment to the touch of new strings and the increased volume and the metallic timbre they generated. For many qin players, the presence of audience made an even more essential change in that it yielded a peculiar psychological adjustment to a new performing situation which challenged a lot of qin players' long-held conviction of self-enlightenment.

In most cases, music gets meanings by being heard, therefore it may seem unusual that musicians are afraid of having audience; however, the literati qin tradition is characterized by the practice of self-enlightenment, which is mainly achieved in literati qin musicians' performance mode of playing the qin for themselves or a limited number of qin friends. To give some sense to this attribute of qin tradition in an incisive manner, I need to first interpret a pair of concepts that represent two opposing ideologies in the history of qin music: the Literati's Qin ideologies (*wenrenqin*) advocated and practiced by the literati, and the Artists' Qin ideologies (*yirenqin*) by professional qin masters (Yung 2009, 143; Liu 2005, 9). One of the critical differences between

these two ideologies is that literati qin players' goal of playing the qin is to strengthen their moral character, and consequently to achieve self-enlightenment and spiritual communion with nature (Yung, 2009: 143-144), while professional qin masters concentrate on the acoustic effect of the music and emotional communications between performers' internal musical thoughts and the external environment, including audiences (Liu, 2005).

In Literati's Qin ideologies, the qin was widely recognized as a personal belonging of a scholar who would endow this instrument with sacred connection with remote ancestors,<sup>11</sup> noble saints,<sup>12</sup> and mysterious powers that keep the harmony between the heaven and earth,<sup>13</sup> etc. In these literati players' view, the qin was not "an instrument of the multitude," because it was "reserved for a small class, its study 'belonging by right to those whose studies are concentrated on literature and wisdom'" (van Gulik 1938, 399). The music itself is made for self-purification and self-refinement, not for entertainment. Many Chinese scholars, especially literati in the dynastic era, would use a description of "to amuse oneself by playing the qin and practicing calligraphy (*yi qinshu ziyu*)" to indicate their lofty cultural taste and noble educational background.

The long tradition of self-enlightenment among literati qin players gave rise to their concern of audiences. Audiences usually came from the circle of qin players' intimate friends who were members of elegant gatherings, or in very rare cases might be a stranger who happen to be a listener keenly appreciative of one's musical talents, like described in some legendary anecdotes. The appearance of strangers would arouse distraction or pressure for the players,

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<sup>11</sup> R. H. van Gulik noted that the qin is usually called the "Instrument of the Holy Kings (*shengwang zhi qi*)" and qin music is regarded as "Tones bequeathed by High Antiquity (*taigu yiyin*)."<sup>11</sup> See van Gulick, "The Lore of the Chinese Lute," *Monumenta Nipponica* 1 (1938): 389.

<sup>12</sup> Confucius was one of the saints that were closely related to this instrument.

<sup>13</sup> As R. H. van Gulik mentioned, the ideology of qin music was part of the rite-music (*liyue*) system in which "music is superior to rites," because it is "a direct manifestation of Heaven," and also "corresponds to what is Heavenly in man." See van Gulik, 1938: 408-409.

because they do not have the desire of catering their audiences who may have little interest in or barely understand their music. Since these players usually had certain rules of sharing their music, ideal performances should be given in personal places, such as a scholar's studio. Even though the rivalry between literati qin players and professional qin masters was dissolved in the early seventeenth century when two ideologies merged (Liu 2005, 18), the cultivation of oneself was still one of the primary purposes of most qin players who would intentionally avoid large groups of audiences and performances in public places.<sup>14</sup>

Performing situations involving recording activities may arouse a similar psychological disturbance at the notion of audience, even when there is no audience physically present. When qin performers are positioned in a recording studio or in front of recording devices, the discomfort may arise in a performer's consciousness that this performance is arranged for potential invisible audiences, and some players can hardly overcome the strangeness and alienation of his performing environment. In fact, it is not hard to find literati qin musicians who have trouble dealing with this technological alienation. Li Zhongtang, a qin musician and scholar, once clearly told me his concern for my recorder when I tried to record his performance with his permit. To alleviate his concerns, I sat beside him, and placed my recorder beneath his qin, a place that would not bother his performance at all. But soon after he started, he paused, and then looked at me and said: "I have never got used to recording my music, even though I have had several pieces recorded in some studios. It can be such a distraction that as long as I know the machine is on, I cannot resume my situation of playing how I usually do." So the final solution was that I kept the recorder working, and we chatted for quite a while in order to make him forget the existence of the recorder, and then he could play fluently. But it was still not as

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<sup>14</sup> Bell Yung describes music life of two literati qin masters, Yao Bingyan, and Cai Deyun, both are very selecting of their qin friends.



good as his demonstration several days ago when I took a lesson from him.<sup>15</sup> The displacement of his performing environment the recording device caused for him was profound.

In his book *The Last of China's Literati: The Music, Poetry, and Life of Tsar Teh-yun* in memorial of this literati qin master, Bell Yung also describes his qin teacher Ms. Tsar The-yun who disliked having her music recorded:

Unlike professional musicians, qin players in the literati tradition generally do not practice endlessly until they can play their pieces completely free of errors in pitch and rhythm. Tsar, for example, does not “practice” in the normal sense of the word. Rather, she plays through pieces one after another for her own enjoyment or for the benefit of her students. While she certainly has the music and finger techniques completely memorized — playing without reading the notation is mandatory for qin players — each rendering differs from the others in unexpected ways. Because she plays for herself, there is no pressure to adhere to a particular interpretation. She is completely relaxed and immersed in the hand and finger movements and in the music. When she is aware that she is being recorded, she becomes nervous, and with nervousness come errors and memory slips; she is no longer playing for herself but for the tape recorder.<sup>16</sup>

Probably this is a primary reason why Master Tsar The-yun only had a quite limited number of her performances formally recorded throughout her life.

This discomfort of facing recording devices connotes that the physical appearance of audiences is merely one factor that stimulates the distraction for these qin players; more significant, the ultimate disturbance may lie deeply in qin players’ consciousness of whether or not their music is made for themselves. Similar to Walter Benjamin’s analysis on the early stage of films that were believed to create “the feeling of strangeness that overcomes the actor before the camera, [which] is basically of the same kind as the estrangement felt before one’s own image in the mirror”<sup>17</sup> because one felt that he/she is being watched, the use of recording machines probably cause a similar but no less intense disturbance to literati qin players: what

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<sup>15</sup> Li Zhongtang, in discussion with the author, April 26<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

<sup>16</sup> Yung, *The Last of China's Literati*, 89-90.

<sup>17</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”, 1935, 9.

really matters is not who are listening to their music, but the situation consciousness of being aware that their musics are being or will be listened to.

Moreover, recording technology will turn a one-time performance into a permanent record. If performers make a mistake, they won't be able to correct it after their performance being recorded. This concern probably accompanies not only qin musicians, but other musicians who are particular not accustomed to having their music recorded.

Not only can the recording process create internal disturbance for literati qin musicians, but the result of recording, such as tapes, CDs, and broadcasting programs, can be disturbing as well, in that the advent of recordings breaks the ideal appreciation circumstance. After recordings are made in a studio, a musician's music-making becomes a "past-tense" performance, which on the one hand saves the aural perspective of music, and on the other hand separates the sound from the performing behavior and the performer. As a result, qin players cannot control the dissemination of their music, and to be more specific, they won't be able to regulate how and where their music should be appreciated. In other words, when the simultaneity of performance and music is destroyed by the recording technique, performers will lose their control over their music after the recording process is finished, during which their music is transformed into a mechanical product that can be copied. Consequently their music may face a possibility of being put into "situations which would be out of reach for the original itself" (Benjamin, 3), and in this way the mechanical copies can easily facilitate the appropriation of qin music for purposes other than performer's original intention.

As a result, the application of the recording technology generated a complex mixture of both wonderment and anxiety. On the one hand it triggered government's recognition of the effectiveness and convenience of this medium in saving the acoustic perspective of qin music as

raw materials and separating the sound from the intrinsic ideologies in order to reconfigure qin music in the inscrutable framework of cultural policies; on the other hand, qin players might be anxious about the future of qin music after the recording technology diminished their rights of interpreting and controlling their music, in other words, the power of the performer agency. And their anxiety is understandable because a recording of their performance definitely cannot deliver all the essential merits of their qin music which does not exist in static and finished pieces, but in perpetuating moments of their contemplation, and music life.

### **2.3 QIN MUSIC ON RADIO**

While the recording technology contributed massively to the alienation of qin music from performing behaviors and ideologies of the literati qin tradition, radio programs brought qin music closer to the mass culture by enhancing its association with grassroots culture.

In the 1950s, radio was the most popular form of state-owned mass media in China because of the large area involved, and the inadequacy of the transportation system and the high rate of illiteracy among the masses (Jan 1967, 306). Due to these advantages, as Jan pointed out, the leaders of Communist Part “attached great importance to radio as a means of political propaganda and indoctrination” and regarded radio broadcasting as “an important weapon of class struggle” (ibid., 305). With such great significance, the Party had complete control over radio stations and broadcasting programs.

In Mao's terminology, the primary purpose of radio broadcasting was to serve the people of China and all the people of the world,<sup>18</sup> therefore the music used in broadcasting should fulfill the masses' need. However, as many scholars point out, the implication of "to serve the people" does not seem like what it literally means. According to Mao's interpretation, one of the primary aspects of serving the masses is to educate the masses, which implies his explicit disparagement of the masses' culture. In terms of music, he asserted that the unvarnished folk music as created by the masses needs improvement in order to serve socialist ends (Rees 2009, 47), which is an "explicit disparagement of folk arts" (ibid.). Therefore radio was used in practice as an educational tool to popularize the appropriate contents among audiences, and the state-controlled radio network became an essential instrument of the Party for propaganda and indoctrination.

Music played a significant part in these broadcasting programs. Among six categories: program announcements, educational programs, newscasts, weather forecasts, agricultural programs, and entertainment programs, the entertainment program which took almost 70% of the general radio broadcasting time, ranging from Peking opera, local operas, traditional Chinese music,<sup>19</sup> storytellings, etc. (Jan, 311-13). In his research, Jan implied that to include a proportion of these entertainment programs was probably for the sake of diluting the repetitiveness of the outright propaganda programs, and alleviating dullness of audiences.

Qin music broadcast in radio programs somehow functioned in a similar way and did attract some, if not a large number of, audiences' attention. Most of these audiences had limited

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<sup>18</sup> Mao made the speech on the twentieth anniversary celebration of the establishment of "People's Radio Broadcasting Station" in December 1965 (Jan 1967, 305).

<sup>19</sup> Since Jan's article on Chinese radio programs was published in 1967, his classification of Chinese musics may be too broad. What Jan regarded as Chinese traditional music includes several subcategories, such as Chinese classical traditional music, including qin music, and folk music, etc. Like I discuss in the previous section, there have been many terms put into use, including "traditional music," "folk music," and "national music," each referring some specific aspects of a large concept of Chinese music. The current classification of Chinese music is largely based on new theories of historiography on the classical genres brought up by the Music Research Institute's after the 1980s.

knowledge or even no idea of the historical background and ideological roots of this instrument, except its political significance as a national musical heritage as promoted, and they were simply fascinated by its elegant melodies and highly-refined techniques. The best-known case is Li Xiangting. As one of the most influential qin masters nowadays in mainland China, the first qin piece Li heard was from a radio program when he was little. In an interview by China Central Television (CCTV), Li described his first audio impression on qin music:

By that time [in the early 1950s], I had been sufficiently exposed to other national instruments, such as zheng, pipa, erhu and dizi, mainly through radio programs and film scores, both media made strong impressions on my fundamental understanding [of music]. Once there was a duet between qin and xiao (the end-blown flute) broadcast on radio, and it instantly took the most significant part in my soul. ... I recognized the timbre of the xiao immediately, but I couldn't tell the other instrument which made me feel wonderful, as though my heart was lifted up and my soul was captured. After the broadcast was over, [the narrator] said: 'What you just heard is "Guan Shan Yue," a duet between qin and xiao.' Ah, being joyfully surprised, [I suddenly realized that] this is the sound of a qin!<sup>20</sup>

The qin piece "Guan shan yue" is one of the classical pieces in the traditional qin repertoire, and the broadcasting of these traditional pieces fulfilled the political requirement of erecting a nationalistic musical tradition entitled "national music" in the 1950s. Based on Li's recall, qin music struck him in a musical way, rather than in a political sense. Hence this kind of traditional music programs on radio actually functioned as a preservation measure for some components of China's own art throughout the 1950s.

Much changed in the 1960s. Chairman of the Communist Party of China, Mao Zedong's attempt of "strengthen[ing] his ideological influence upon the Chinese people, the young people in particular" (Jan 1967, 305) massively intensified the political climate. As a result, many new cultural policies were issued during the early 1967 in order to "eradicate the remnants of traditional and foreign 'reactionary' elements in Chinese society" (ibid.). Therefore most

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<sup>20</sup> *Renwu* [People], "Li Xiangting," CCTV 10, May 29, 2004.

nationalist connotations attached to the qin tradition were replaced by the politicized criticism on this instrument, in most cases carried out in a manner tightly related to the social struggle between elite culture and mass culture. As many kinds of Chinese regional operas and traditional ensembles were denounced as “feudalistic, superstitious, and vulgar” because the plots and characters of these operas involved adventures of wealthy landowners, princes, generals, shopkeepers, high-born lovers, and other privileged characters from China’s decadent past (Yung 1984b, 146-147), the literati qin tradition was harshly criticized as a misleading practice of “zhongya qingsu (valuing elite culture and disparaging mass culture)” and was inappropriate to a modern revolutionary society. As a Chinese music scholar, Miao Tianrui, criticized in his article:

The seven-string zither has a long history and a rich repertoire based on the absorption and accumulation of musical materials from folk music ... however, historically the literati class ignored this fact and tried to obliterate folk elements from their music; moreover, they were also opposed to the popularization of the qin ... [therefore] it was a common practice for the literati class to give literate and elegant titles to folk pieces based on their point of views and interest, in order to make it mysterious and lofty. This habit can still be found on those who study and practice folk music nowadays. (Miao 1959, 12-13)

It is not surprising to discover that Miao’s criticism aiming at eliminating the elite elements of qin tradition, sprang directly from the most influential Maoist cultural theory according to which the preexisting qin tradition needed to experience a process of “weeding out the old to bring forth the new, selecting the fine and discarding the dregs, eliminating the false and retaining the genuine in order to make things conform better to the particular circumstances of their own age” (Fang 1981, 7). Similar to Mao’s talk in 1942, the standards of how to make the distinction between the fine and the rubbish in national music like qin music remained unclear in this statement.

However, Miao's essay also showed his cautious inclination attempt on convincing the government and officials of the special and useful value of qin music, its potentiality of merging with contemporary folk music and mass culture, and the feasibility of developing qin music based on appropriate adaptation and rearrangement. In order to justify this proposition, he particularly quoted a general principle which was taken from Maoist terminology and has been used as a sustaining cultural policy in China as well (Kun 1981, 9-11), that is "to make the past serve the present (*gu wei jin yong*)."<sup>21</sup> As he wrote:

To object to the tendency of valuing elite culture and disparaging popular culture does not mean that [we need to] go against the tradition left over from the antiquity; we still need to unearth ancient music, such as the seven-string zither ... etc., to collate, study and even put it into actual performance. As long as we aim at making the past serve the present by emphasizing on the popular element embedded in the ancient music, while drawing inspiration from extant popular music, then this collation, research, and performance of ancient music will be of magnificent practical significance. (Ibid.)

In the severe political atmosphere of purging the ideologically incorrect associations of qin music with the privileged classes and elite culture, many qin players worked on how to reform qin music to reflect new revolutionary contents and socialist mass culture, and their effort resulted in an emergence of a new revolutionary qin repertoire, mainly consisting of newly rearranged pieces based on widespread folk tunes or revolutionary songs, for example *Praise the Communist Part and Chairman Mao (Gesong gongchandang maozhuxi)*, and *What a Good Place, Xinjiang<sup>22</sup>! (Xinjiang hao)<sup>23</sup>*. In addition, qin musicians also actively participated in the

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<sup>21</sup> "Make the past serve the present and foreign things serve China. Let a hundred flowers blossom; weed through the old to bring forth the new." "Discarding the dross and selecting the essential, eliminating the false and retaining the true" is quoted from Mao Zedong, *Problems of Strategy in China's Revolutionary War*, December 1936, [http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1\\_12.htm](http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_12.htm) (accessed August 15, 2010).

<sup>22</sup> Xinjiang is an autonomous province in far northwestern China on the border with Mongolia and Kazakhstan; the largest province in the People's Republic of China and the homeland of the Uighur people.

<sup>23</sup> Since the original broadcast of the piece "What a good place, Xinjiang!" is unavailable, for the video example of the piece "Xinjiang Hao," please refer to a modern performance through the link: <http://v.blog.sohu.com/u/vw/1221458> (accessed October 3, 2010).

popularization of their revolution music via various forms of mass media. In Wu Jinglüe's article "Guqin" in 1959, he introduced the latest development of the qin until 1959, after qin musicians had massively participated in mass media, including radio broadcasting, records, and even in films and national and international public performances, and he estimated the rough number of qin consumers was 300,000, with a conclusion that the qin had become a popular musical instrument among the masses (Wu 1959, 53). Radio broadcasts definitely contributed a lot to this number, whether it's accurate or not, and became the platform on which the politically qualified qin pieces had their national premiere. In October 1958, Xiang Yu reported a qin concert presented by Beijing Qin Research Association which was dedicated to the National Day and the (Chinese Communist) Party. Xiang highly praised two newly adapted qin ensemble pieces "East is Red (*Dongfang hong*)" by Wang Di, and "Four Great Scenes (*Si da jing*)" by Guan Pinghu as creative labor that proved a profound ideological change" (Xiang 1958, 24). More important, both pieces were broadcast by the Central People's Broadcasting Station. These two pieces were selected for adaptation not because of their musical features, but because of the strong political message. The piece "East is Red" was one of the best-known songs representing the personality cult of Mao Zedong, and "Four Great Scenes" was adapted from a widespread folk tune, hence the adaptation delivered a clear political message: qin musicians praised the Party and the people of China, and qin music was capable of depicting the new socialist life and expressing revolutionary emotions, and could take part in the construction of socialist China. Apparently the adaptation was not a great success musically according to Xiang's evaluation; nevertheless the fact that the Central People's Broadcasting Station still recorded the two pieces and broadcast them nationally further proves that the media content of radio programming was chosen not for the sake of reflecting or catering musical tastes of the audience, but for reinforcing the political



ideologies and promoting propaganda. As a consequence, qin music broadcast on radio programs after 1960s was thoroughly transformed into a musical scene dominated by the Party, in which qin musicians' voice was muted.

The reformed music did not lead the qin to prosperity. Given the growing power of the radical "leftist" political ideology dominating almost all components of the musical life of the country from the late 1950s to the late 1970s, the qin tradition became totally unacceptable in a "classless" society, particularly during the Cultural Revolution, and disappeared from mass media and public view.

The function of a state radio service, as Charles Hamm wrote in the 1990s, is to "yield information about political issues and strategies within that state" and "the musical content of state radio programming is not designed to reflect the musical tastes and preferences of the listening audience, but rather to enforce or reinforce political ideologies and to shape or mold certain images of the state" (Hamm 1991, 1). While strictly controlled by the government agency, radio and recording technology used in pre-recorded music programs activated the vital link between the qin tradition and the populace, and re-contextualize this historical sound in an alien environment in social, political and ideological terms. But after the restricted socio-political sphere of Socialist China moved into a less politically radical era that focus on the economic construction, the state-owned and state-controlled mass media in China was gradually decentralized, and opened up spaces in which the greater changes and development of qin music were about to happen in the upcoming period of "Reform and Openness."

### 3.0 QIN MUSIC IN THE MARKET: ETHOS AND COMMERCIALIZATION

The policy of “reform and openness”<sup>24</sup> (*gaige kaifang*) initiated in the late 1970s has been widely accepted as a watershed in the development of China’s economy. A market economy began to emerge inside the general structure of planned economy and brought changes to all levels of China’s society, including liberalization of imports and encouragement of exports, foreign borrowing and foreign investment inflow, development of tourism, purchase of foreign technology, establishment of Special Economic Zones<sup>25</sup> (*jingji tequ*), more opportunities for Chinese nationals to travel abroad or go for foreign training (Krishnaswamy 1987, 75-76).

In the cultural field, the “Openness” policy enabled an influx of cultural products into mainland China, and the domestic economic reform energized a fundamental change in the sponsorship structure of cultural production and dissemination, and in the income system of artists and musicians. Inevitably, these reforms gave rise to the commercialization of cultural products and resulted in the detachment of cultural industry from governmental financial support. They also enabled the formation of the market-oriented music industry and the decentralized system of mass media in China after the “Openness” policy in 1978. These reforms did not truly launch in PRC until the agreement between Beijing and London to return Hong Kong from British governing to Chinese socialist governing was signed in 1983, at which point

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<sup>24</sup> Future references to this policy will be called “Openness.”

<sup>25</sup> In People’s Republic of China, Special Economic Zones were founded by the central government under Deng Xiaoping in the early 1980s in order to promote the free-market-oriented economic system that was different from China’s preexisting typical and national laws.

Hong Kong emerged as a transfer station for modern musical products that circulated from Hong Kong and Taiwan into Mainland China. These fresh musics are rapidly welcomed by mainland consumers, took large share of the newly unfrozen music market, and tremendously challenged the survival advantage of traditional musical genres, including qin music.

In this chapter, I probe into the effect of media reforms and the socio-economic changes on qin musicians, the issues most qin musicians encountered when the marketization of music unavoidably arose, including their effort of creating association with the rising popular media activated by the economic reform, and some qin musicians' expedient adjustment of their concepts and music. In order to present an in-depth analysis of the social change, this chapter offers a case study on Li Xiangting, one of the most influential qin musicians in mainland China nowadays, who successfully survived through the socio-economic transition of the qin practices in the 1980s and 1990s.

### **3.1 CHALLENGES TO THE YOUNGER GENERATION OF QIN PLAYERS**

The impacts of socio-economic changes in the 1980s on qin musicians, most of whom discontinued playing the qin during the Cultural Revolution and resumed their practice in the late 1970s, were multifarious. Some qin musicians retrieved the literati tradition, and their practice of self-enlightenment; by contrast, some worked very actively in cooperation with new forms of mass media and new agencies emerging with the newly formed music market, as the market economy gradually took hold. Li Xiangting has not only experienced several major stages of the development of qin music after the foundation of People's Republic of China, but also distinguished himself from the older generation of qin players who embraces all kinds of impacts

of mass media, accommodates to the commercial music market, and actively creates connections between the qin to the world not only by touring globally but also studying qin theories at the University of Cambridge as a visiting scholar. All these efforts have enabled him to become one of the most commercially successful qin master who has infused his qin music in a variety of domains.

Mass media played an irreplaceable role in Li Xiangting's musicality of the qin in the 1950s. Qin music on radio broadcasting led Li Xiangting, a member of a young audience whose life had little association with the qin art, into the world of qin music. Born in a middle-class family in the city of Liaoyuan in 1940, Li's father, a doctor of Chinese medicine, greatly valued education, so Li was exposed to Chinese poems and paintings at an early age. His first impression on this instrument was exclusively visual when he was copying some ancient paintings, mainly from the book *Jieziyuan Huapu*, in which the qin is depicted as an essential musical instrument among the Literati in their social activity. Literati play the qin in Elegant Gathering, or when a scholar brings his qin to visit an intimate friend—both are common subjects in literati's paintings. However, his acquaintance with the image of the qin could not bring him any acoustic perception about the music, and he had no idea of how a qin should sound like until he heard a duet between the qin and the xiao on radio when he was fourteen years old.<sup>26</sup> Compared to some prestigious qin masters of the elder generation, for instance Guan Pinghu and Tsar Teh-yun who were brought up in influential scholar families, Li came from a middle class family. His family could not provide him an access to a real qin, so he made his own by referring to *Jingu Qiguan*, a collection of legends and short novels compiled in the Ming dynasty and widely distributed among populace since then.

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<sup>26</sup> Due to the scarcity of the documents of Li Xiangting's early years, most information about his life experience before the 1980s is based on Li's own narration in a TV interview by CCTV.

Radio was also the first qin teacher Li ever had. He recalled playing his self-made qin and learned his first qin piece “Guan Shan Yue” exclusively based on his memory after listening to the radio program and imagining finger techniques; he even gave a public duet on a New Year’s party at school with one of his classmates who played the xiao (the vertical bamboo flute). He was extremely proud of his instrument, because nobody knew what it was, and this feeling of achievement greatly encouraged his thought of pursuing a higher level of performance by learning from a real qin teacher. In the same radio program, he became acquainted with the name “Zha Fuxi,” Vice Director of Beijing Guqin Research Association (Beijing Guqin Yanjiuhui). Without any concrete contact information, Li sent a letter to the Central People’s Broadcasting Station. He received a reply from Zha, and began to learn qin music from this qin musician in the same year.<sup>27</sup>

Different from most of the elder generation of qin players, Li Xiangting was trained in a time when the qin was indiscriminately identified as one of the national musical instruments, rather than a musical capsule that contains “a microcosm of China’s elite and refined culture” (Yung 2008, 6). The primary function of qin music in socialist China was to praise the masses, and a performer’s success almost entirely depended on whether s/he could reach the widest audience and win recognition from listeners who did not know this instrument well. Therefore apart from the playing techniques, Li also learned two more abilities that separated him from traditional literati qin players: the comfort of facing audience and the compatibility with mass-mediated technology.

However, Li’s learning process was characterized by bewilderment of a younger generation of qin musicians at the time of social transformation. As a beginner, he unfortunately

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<sup>27</sup> Li Xiangting, interview by Qu Xiangdong, *Da Jia* [Great Master], CCTV-10, June 18, 2006.

and tortuously experienced the shifting identity of qin players from amateurs whose qin practices were barely confined to external elements to institutionalized professionals, and his learning process exemplifies this confusing course. The initial stage of Li's qin learning followed a convention of the Literati Qin: his first qin mentor Zha Fuxi cultivated Li's literate temperament by taking him to visit historical remains in Beijing, antique stores in the most famous antique market district Liu Li Chang, and bringing him to some elegant gatherings held by Kun Opera Research Institute, and introducing him to several prestigious qin masters and painters (Pan 1986, 13). It is during this period that Li officially learned Chinese painting, one of the four arts,<sup>28</sup> along with qin music, calligraphy, and an ancient form of Chess, that Chinese scholars were expected to master, from the famous painter Pan Su.<sup>29</sup> These supplementary educations indicate Zha's attempt of consciously shaping an amateur Literati environment of Qin players for Li Xiangting that conformed to traditional scholars' cultural customs, even when many of these literati conventions were on the verge of disappearance.

Li's enrollment in the qin program of the Central Conservatory of Music in 1958 initiated the institutionalization of his qin practice and gradually turned him into a professional qin musician. The rise of music conservatories were the result of the social reforms in Republic of China starting from the 1920s, dedicated to developing new nation's artistic activities based on the Western music system privileged after the May Fourth Movement in 1919. Along with the establishment of the first music conservatory, the National Music Academy in Shanghai in 1927, was a modern pedagogical system in these professional institutes of music education formed: most programs were related to the performance of Western classical music and theories based on

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<sup>28</sup> The four arts are qin music, an ancient form of chess, calligraphy, and painting (qin, qi, shu, hua in Chinese) that Chinese scholars were expected to master.

<sup>29</sup> Li Xiangting, interview by Qu Xiangdong, *Da Jia* [Great Master], CCTV-10, June 18, 2006.

Western musicianship, with a small proportion of programs focusing on Chinese national music and theories (Wang, 2000: 67). Even though Russian music and theories were prioritized over European art music in the People's Republic of China, the fundamental system of Western-influenced professional music education was largely kept. Graduation from these state-owned musical conservatories would usually lead to the acquisition of a position in national music ensembles or state-owned musical educational institutes, such as music conservatories. Therefore, from the day Li Xiangting entered the conservatory, he was absorbed in a pedagogical approach pertaining to public performances dedicated to fulfilling the requirement of cultural policies, which would result in an institutionalized life as a state-employed musician. In Li Xiangting's case, he was assigned to teach at the Central Conservatory of Music after graduation. As Li recalled, it actually took him years to overcome the confusion generated through this transition from a qin amateur to an institutionalized musician facing an audience on an entertaining stage, and his stage experience did not improve until he switched to the Vietnamese dan bau (the monochord zither in Vietnam) during the Cultural Revolution from 1967 to 1977. It was at this time that the qin was banned for its historical association with "slouchy and arrogant" (Liu 1954, 42) literati qin player feudalist elite. This new instrument that freed him from the struggle between the restriction of traditional qin ideologies that emphasize the privacy and sanctity of qin music and the practical and political requirement of giving public performances and entertaining the masses. Those ten years, which forced him to leave qin aside, actually diluted qin music's cultural connotations affiliated with literati and their way of life, and shaped his perception of qin music as a form of musical genre that needed to be recontextualized in Socialist China where its musical meanings and functions were about to be reconstructed.

Another bewilderment accompanying Li's musical training was the ambiguous status of the qin as a renowned traditional instrument which suffered from indifference in practice. In the 1950s, the so-called national music had seen a polished version of many kinds of folk music, which, as Helen Rees point out, was normally viewed as “backward,’ ‘unscientific,’ and aesthetically inferior to Western art music or Westernized modern Chinese genres” (Rees 2009, 47). Therefore, less attention was generally paid to traditional instruments than to western instruments in the Central Conservatory of Music at that time. The qin was held in lower esteem than other traditional instruments, such as *erhu* and *dizi*, mainly because of its soft volume and unusual timbre. The marginalization of this historically important instrument can be best illustrated in one of Li Xiangting's performing experiences during this period. In 1963, a delegation of Chinese musicians was organized and put on tour in Japan in order to enhance cultural exchange and improve the diplomatic interaction between the two nations. Li Xiangting was selected to be a member in this cultural mission of great political importance in order to show qin as the most ancient string instrument of China. However, Li felt deeply the indifferent attitudes of the organizers from the Foreign Affairs Committee of China Cultural Council toward qin music because none of his requests were met, such as using a qin table and a piece of anti-skid table cloth, testing and adjusting amplifiers before the rehearsal. It seems that the significance of showing a qin on the foreign stage lay more in its long history than its music. Moreover, his performance did not actually achieve much public exposure because he was only arranged to participate in four or five concerts out of forty in Japan. This marginalization in the aesthetic perspective developed into a political suppression during Cultural Revolution from 1965 to 1977 when qin music was gradually banned because its old identification with feudal landlord class disqualified it from serving for the proletariat in a socialist society.



As one of a younger generation of qin players starting their qin career in the 1950s and struggling through the 1960s and 70s, Li Xiangting experienced several transformations, from institutionalization and professionalization, to marginalization. The recognition of qin music's cultural value within the intense competition between this ancient musical instrument and its modern rivals in the increasing expanding music market in the 1980s would go beyond what Li and his peers expectation.

### **3.2 CASSETTES AND THE POPULAR MUSIC MARKET**

The “Openness” policy taken by the Chinese government since the late 1970s has enabled an influx of information into mainland China and opened a new chapter of China's global communication. On the one hand, the most significant consequence in the field of music is the flooding of foreign music products and technology into the country. This includes Hong Kong and Taiwan (*gangtai*) popular music, rock, cassettes, tape recorders, and televisions, which instantly captivated a generation of young people and turned a considerably large proportion of these youngsters away from Chinese traditional cultural practices. The Chinese government tried very hard to keep the delicate balance between the intense foreign cultural influence and China's own cultural strength, with the hope of competing with the Western rival in the cultural battle, and erecting China's national image via cultural presentations domestically and globally. As one genre of Chinese traditional musics that had survived the turbulent political upheavals in the past several decades, qin music was positioned in a new socio-economic transformation of China initiated from the 1980s, seeking outlets in the mutation of the production and consumption of

music from a planned, and policy-oriented mass dissemination of music to a relatively free commercial music market.

### **3.2.1 The advent of cassettes**

The impact of cassette technology on the development of qin music was indirect, but nevertheless profound, because it decentralized the general music market in which the production and consumption of qin music could no longer exclusively rely on government support. This remarkable role cassette technology played can only be thoroughly examined when seen in the contrast with the period before its advent, when phonograph disks were the primary products of the music industry in China.

The record industry got off to an early start in China, with commercial records being marketed as early as 1908 in Shanghai by a French businessman, E. Labansat, who founded one of the earliest record companies Bo De Yang Hang in China, a branch of the French record company Pathé Frères Company (Ge 2008). After the establishment of PRC, along with the implementation of the socioeconomic reform in 1956 which nationalized individual investments and capitals, all the record companies originally privately owned were nationalized and followed a planned management of production and dissemination. For example, China Record Firm was established in the mid-1950s by incorporating three major record factories during its time: Great China (*Da Zhonghua*) Record Factory took over by Military Control Office of The People's Liberation Army in 1949, Victory Record Company invested by the Department of Industry of the Military and Political Committee in the Huadong District (MPCHD) and individual investors in 1951, and Shanghai Record Factory reorganized also by the Department of Industry of MPCHD in 1952, based on the plant and equipment of EMI in Shanghai (Zhang, 1994).

The consumption of music products, like other goods, was subject to public distribution at fixed prices. Correspondingly, the production of music products in China at the time has the design and distribution following political guiding more than market demands. In order to establish an appearance of prosperity of the music market, China Record Firm, and its later version China Record Cooperation, started issuing records of various types of music. From the mid 1950s to the mid 1960s, the content of music products by China Record Firm was mainly memorial collections of well-known and well-respected musicians (in socialist China), local ensembles and operas, minority musics, music for overseas Chinese, and songs for children. During the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976, most categories of musics mentioned above went out of production, replaced by “Model Operas” promoted by “the gang of four.” Along with the advent of stereophonic record in China after 1980, the records produced and distributed by the newly founded China Record Corporation can be divided in three parts: first, stereophonic reproduction of selected records that had been issued before 1966; second, record albums of special subjects and famous musicians, such as “Zhongguo lishi geming gequ [Revolutionary songs in Chinese history],” “Xin Zhongguo chengli sanshiwu nian zui chou qunzhong huanying de gequ [The Most Popular Songs Among the Masses in the Thirty-Five Years of New China],” “He Luting zuopin ji [Collection of He Luting],” etc.; third, record albums of Chinese operas and local ensembles , for example “Zhongguo xiqu yishujia changqiang xuan [Collection of Chinese Opera Artists]” (Zhang 1994, 91). The purpose of producing these records, as well as other media products, is to “introduce the precious national and folk heritages of China, contemporary voice and instrumental works and performing arts tested by experiences, as well as excellent contemporary and historical musical works of the West” (Zhang 1984, 32).

However, this panned music market caused its own set of problems, “partly because of the somewhat conflicting needs of producers and consumers, and partly because of the expansion of effective consumer demand beyond available market supplies” (Krishnaswamy 1987, 69). After the openness of mainland China economically and culturally, when import restrictions in many fields were liberalized, and many regulations and controls were eased, the two problems stated by Krishnaswamy became increasingly obvious, which led to the weakening of state media’s control of the market and the boom of private music companies. The private music companies were more sensitive to consumers’ needs and gradually started to claim a significant share of the market. This transformation was closely related to a new technology in music: cassettes.

Cassettes and Cassette players were introduced into the mainland, along with Hong Kong and Taiwan popular music, and immediately swept over the mainland music market. The cassette technology has the advantage of low cost, portability, and durability (Baranovitch, 2003). The first music company equipped with modern apparatuses of cassettes production in Mainland China was Taipingyang Yingyin Gongsi [Pacific Audio & Video Company], established on January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1979. Invested and managed by Bureau of Broadcasting, Film and TV of Guangdong Province,<sup>30</sup> this company indicates the beginning of a new era of production and dissemination of cassettes by major state-controlled companies in China. Subsequently, China Record Cooperation was founded in November 1982, whose predecessors were China Record Firm, China Record Plant, and China Record Distribution Company, and its branches in several big cities also started issuing cassettes releases. In 1988, Yang Xiaoxun conducted a significant survey on the mode of music appreciation. This survey retrieved 952 respondents (82.8% of the

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<sup>30</sup> Pacific Audio & Video Company is currently managed by People’s Broadcast Station of Guangdong Province, a provincial radio station that is controlled by the Central People’s Broadcast Station in Beijing.

original sample)which consisted of 1150 young and middle-aged people coming from nine professions in Beijing (Yang, 1988: 6). The result of this survey has been widely cited (*Zhongguo Wenhua Bao* 1989, Jun.4<sup>th</sup>; Hamm 1991, 34; Qian 2002, 46), and is worth citing it again here:

**Table 1.** Survey on the mode of music appreciation conducted by Yang Xiaoxun in Beijing 1988

<b>Appreciation Mode</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Rank</b>
Cassettes	59.80%	1
TV & Films	15.70%	2
Radio	11.50%	3
Live Performance in Concerts	10.00%	4
Participation or listening to others	3.00%	5

As the result shows, cassettes had surpassed many other forms of mass media, and became the most popular music carrier and also the most influential medium of the dissemination of music.

The advent of cassettes precipitated a number of interrelated effects in China. First, as Barne pointed out, “one of the central features of consumer culture is to differentiate between shoppers as individuals” (Barne 1999, 2), the first tide of cassette frenzy in an open music market led to vast expansion not only in the size of recorded-music market, but also the proportion of individual consumers as opposed to collective consumers. More significant, it accompanied the arrival of personal musical space. Ethnomusicologist Nimrod Baranovitch has observed the detachment cassette technology brought to individual consumers from public areas and mass gatherings, as well as the formation of an intimate sonic space with their privately

owned tape machines (Baranovitch 2003, 13). Even though it is difficult to estimate the precise percentage of individual consumers, I argue that some features of this technology, particularly the ease of duplication, greatly facilitated the dissemination of cassettes on an individual basis. As the same survey mentioned above indicated that, duplicated cassettes were very popular among college students and graduate students, and at the same time became their primary access to popular music (Qian 2002, 46). I will return to the discussion on this issue in the next chapter on audiences and reception.

The growing private owners of tape recorders led to the increased consumption on cassettes, and more important, they accelerated the growing divergence of official media and masses' media in the 1980s. Before the popularity of cassettes, the mass media, including the newspapers, Central TV, Central People's Radio, state-owned music companies, etc., serve mainly official voice on the meaning of national and cultural traditions and the manipulation of public ideologies. However, cassette technology, as Baranovitch points out, challenged most powerfully the tight control of the party because of the decentralizing and democratizing effect tape recorders and cassettes had in empowering people to choose and listen to the music they liked (Baranovitch 2003, 13). It is because of the legal or illegal dissemination of cassettes among individual consumers that some music genres have been able to bypass the disapproval or control of state bureaucracies (Manuel 1993, 33). As a result, "state-controlled media ceased to monopolize the cultural sphere, their homogenizing effect, too, lost much of its previous impact" (Baranovitch 2003, 13). In other words, the dominance of musical genres privileged in the official mass media were also challenged by some new sounds spread via cassettes.

In fact, not only the imported cassette products challenged the official voice, the state-owned and state-controlled mass media network suffered from its own defects in the market

economy. As media sociologist Zhao Yuezhi pointed out, “Chinese media reform also began as an attempt to correct specific theories and practices of the Cultural Revolution. The media were still viewed as instruments of the Party, but the objective was different in the new era of economic reform and openness. The definition of the media as instruments of class struggle was officially dropped. Instead, the media were promoted as instruments of economic and cultural construction, with a new stress placed on business information and entertainment” (Zhao, 34). With increasing prosperity, people have more money to spend on culture and entertainment, at the same time, the state, with a shrinking purse, was unable to provide funds for usual media operations, or investment in new technologies and expansion of services. As a result, the government adopted a policy of gradually cutting subsidies and encouraging commercialized financing (Zhao, 53). The consequence of this policy is the commodification of mass media in the forms of commercial advertising, commercial sponsorship of media content, eventually business involvement of non-governmental enterprises.

While the transition from a planned music market to a relatively free market of music products engendered a pop music fever in the form of cassettes, qin music suffered. Due to overwhelming impacts of international and domestic popular music instantly took the largest share of the music market, the music of qin, because of its historical distance from contemporary grassroots culture, accounted for only a small fraction of the cassette market. For instance, in the first two hundred types of cassettes China Record Corporation issued, there was only one album of qin music, “Xiaoxiang Shuiyun,” catalog no. HL-104, played by Wu Wenguang.<sup>31</sup> And even this small amount of cassettes did not sell well. In his article which introduced the development of Shanghai Audio and Video Company (SAVC), Qian Baoyu mentioned the poor sale of a qin

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<sup>31</sup> [http://myav.blog.hexun.com/11941707\\_d.html](http://myav.blog.hexun.com/11941707_d.html) (Accessed on August 18, 2010).

cassette. Shanghai Audio and Video Company is an economic entity owned by Shanghai Broadcasting and Television Bureau founded in July 1981. In 1986, they issued a qin album called “Long Xiang Cao,” played by a prestigious qin master in Shanghai, Zhang Ziqian. However, this album only sold 320 copies in total, and created a marked contrast with the first cassettes album “The White Wander—Songs from Foreign Films”, issued on July 25th 1981, which sold 200 copies within twenty minutes (Shanghai Guangbo Dianshi Zhi). According to Qian, the profit the company earned from the qin album did not even meet its production cost. The only compensation Shanghai Audio & Video Company received was the high appraisal from the music circle about their contribution to the transmission and development of national art that followed the Party’s requirement of constructing a socialist spiritual culture (Qian 1987).

The example of Shanghai Audio & Video Company indicates a typical dilemma state-controlled music companies faced during the transitional period in the 1980s. The company was caught between the financial benefit of issuing products that sell and the mandatory releases of musics that would meet official requirements. This dilemma took on new urgency because hundreds of private music companies/producers arose from 1983 to 1984, swiftly took over a large proportion of music market by issuing products that catered young consumer tastes, and ended the dominance of China Record Corporation and Pacific Audio and Video Company (Qian, 46) Moreover, the booming growth of these private producers was usually closely related to piracy, which further threatened the major music companies’ profits. As Hamm observed, in the 1980s, “[i]n an era in which as much as two thirds of the population depends on cassettes for the major share of its music, and at least two thirds of the tapes owned are pirated or copied at home, the music over which the state can exercise direct control (through radio programs under its direct supervision, or live public performance, or officially-approved imported cassette tapes)



makes up a small percentage of the music listened to within the country” (Hamm, 1991, 35). Therefore, in order to keep the appropriate benefits market share, many state-controlled music companies increased the absolute number and relative proportion of popular music products. Official media, such as China Central Television (CCTV) and CPBS also carried pop music in their programs (Ibid.)

As a result, the advent of cassettes restructured the music industry in China not only by decentralizing the production and dissemination of music products by major state-controlled companies, but also massively enlarging the proportion of western-influenced popular music products by small private music companies. The appearance of these new mass music products flooded China and dominated over an entire generation of young consumers. They also help shape the Chinese music market toward a consumerist mode. Therefore, qin musicians, as well as other traditional musicians whose music protected and privileged by the government, encountered a new circumstance during this socio-economic change. The popularity of qin music no longer relied entirely on governmental support, and the longer-term prosperity of qin tradition would have to depend on the mass consumers. Their sacred mission of “serving people” faced the competition with newly emerging popular music, disseminated through cassettes, TV programs, and radio broadcasting, for consumers who had more than one choice.

### **3.2.2 Qin music as a musical art**

While the flourishing of cassette technology effectively demonopolized the music market in China, Chinese government was seeking other approaches to enhance the mainstream of Chinese music in promoting musical practices and exercising cultural policies. In terms of practice, to win foreign recognition out of China became an effective approach to enhance the status of

Chinese traditional music domestically. As a result, the first ten years after the openness witnessed by the frequent appearances of Chinese traditional music delegations' at all kinds of international musical festivals (Li 1982/1983; Xiang 1985; Zhou 1988; Wang 1989). Usually state-sponsored, these delegations consisted of musicians from the official music institutes, such as national music conservatories and state-sponsored ensembles. One of their fundamental intentions was to enable foreigners to get an all-round understanding of Chinese traditional music (Fang, Pratt, Provine and Thrasher 1981, 5). Perhaps most profound during this period was the Durham (England) Oriental Music festival in August 1979, at which the principal of the delegation from the Central Conservatory of Music, Fang Kun, openly invited comments and criticisms after their first concert, and later published two articles. He responded to Western scholars' criticisms and doubts particularly with regard to the definition and features of the notion of Chinese "traditional music" based on their performance (Fang 1980; Fang, Pratt, Provine and Thrasher 1981). Fang's arguments that the term "traditional music" refers to a living tradition of outstanding-quality musical heritages rooted in mass culture might not be accepted by many Westerners, but it is undeniable that traditional music successfully attracted attention from foreign scholars and musicians.

The success Chinese traditional music gained abroad not only helped convince Chinese officials of the multifaceted value of traditional music (Rees 2009, 51), and the necessity of sending more Chinese musicians to perform abroad, but also confirmed these musicians' confidence in the intrinsic merits of their performances, among whom was Li Xiangting. In 1982, Li Xiangting was assigned to join the delegation of the Central Conservatory of Music to perform at the Durham Oriental Music in July. It is during this trip that Li discovered new values and meanings of qin music as well as a new avenue of publicizing qin music. At the festival, Li

gave a qin recital, which was claimed to be the first of its kind in the foreign country in the history of qin music. According to Li's description (Li 1982, 1983), the recital was a great success, with sustained applause, several curtain falls, and an encore. After the concert, there were more than thirty audiences that showed great interest in the qin and wanted to come onto the stage to ask him further questions. In addition, foreign mass media also showed great interest in his performance, and his recital was one out of the five concerts at the festival recorded live by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), and also broadcast by Swedish National Radio followed by an interview of Li.

Li Xiangting's participation in cultural exchange activities out of China might have caused him to reflect on the prosperity of Western music products, the significant role music products could play in promoting and managing certain kinds of music, and the potentiality of qin music in the domestic music market of China. As he wrote:

Several months before my departure to Britain, I got a letter from a book and music company in Britain asking me if I could bring some Chinese music records to the festival, particular my qin music records, because they would like to sell some books and music products related to East Asian music and dance. I replied that they could either contact the China Record Corporation for my qin record including twelve pieces I had played, or the Hong Kong Bailey Corporation for my qin cassette. But I failed to bring them anything. During the festival, it was a great pity that this company sold a great variety of records by musicians who attended the festival, and musical instruments from other countries, except any products about Chinese music. Economically it might be a small business deal; however, if we view it as an artistic career, shouldn't we treat it actively as other foreign musicians and those who managed their artistic career did? (Li 1982, 55)

The records and cassettes Li referred to in the statement are the record "Hujia Shiba Pai" and "Xiaoxiang Shuiyun" produced by the Chinese Record Company and released respectively in 1979 and 1980, and his cassette album "Guangling San" produced and issued by Hong Kong Bailey Corporation in 1980 (Zhao, website).

The substantial attention Li received from audiences and mass media abroad stood in such sharp contrast to the indifference he met in China that the success of the first qin recital in Europe completely went beyond his expectation (Li 1983, 55), and further confirmed his proposition of the aesthetic value of qin music (Li, 1981). Apart from Li Xiangting, another influential qin musician, Cheng Gongliang, reported the enthusiastic responses of his audiences when he made a performance tour in Germany, and was amazed at the appreciation ability of “the descendants of Bach and Beethoven” who could perceive the artistic beauty of the oriental instrument (Cheng 1986, 24). In the eyes of most Western audiences who had limited knowledge about the historical and ideological association of the qin, this instrument was appreciated, under no political shadow, by its refinement, virtuosity, and beauty in the music. When these merits are combined with the long history of Chinese civilization, an aura of qin music as Chinese national music became strength, and re-affirmed a qin player’s pride that had been oppressed for decades. As Li wrote: “The qin is a pearl in the history of Chinese ancient music (Li 1983, 55),” and “[it] definitely deserves pride due to its long history, richness of content, broadness of subjects, profoundness of ideas, sublimity of art, and colors of tones, all of which represent Chinese culture that has continued for thousands of years. Audiences’ intense reaction, and many people’s close attention to and great respect for qin music also indicate that the understanding and appreciation of qin music could be achieved in a worldwide range” (Li 1982, 54).

This shift in the identification of qin music from a propagandistic tool for socialist mass culture to “a pearl in the history of Chinese ancient music” illustrates the fluidity and changeability of conceptions of the qin’s values in different contexts, and also reveals two renovations related to qin music in cultural policies after the 1980s. The first is the return of the stress on the continuity of Chinese culture, which can easily and misleadingly “merges with the

idea of changeless in contemporary imaginations of Chinese history, particularly imaginations of what is called traditional China” (Tuohy 1991, 197). It is not my intention to discuss whether the continuity of Chinese culture is an imagination or a fact in a historical or political sense in this thesis on qin music and mass media,<sup>32</sup> however, the long history of this instrument and its traditional repertoire do prove the claim of continuous past and help people develop their imaginations of the continuity and longevity of other molecules of the organic Chinese culture. Li regarded the qin tradition as a representative of Chinese culture that “has continued for thousand of years” is exactly an example to demonstrate this correlation.

The second change lies in the reinterpretation of the essence of socialist musical culture, particularly traditional/national music in the current case. Before the 1980s, the emphasis of constructing the national music was put on eliminating the errors and the dross, hence qin music had never thoroughly got rid of the reputation of “the dead antique of the class of feudal rulers” (Li 1983, 55). However, the issue of how to construct socialist musical culture in the new era was specified in National Symposium on Musical Theories held in December 1979, and the cultural polices promoted before the openness period, namely the abusive and absolute politicization of literature, art and music was generally criticized. As Lü Ji pointed out,

Politics is only one aspect of people’s life, ... and literature and art should reflect other aspects of life apart from politics. [Nowadays] people request to enlarge and enrich their inner world, to improve the understanding of the current world—a world not only has a long history, but is speedily developing as well—through music, to have aesthetic satisfaction, to enjoy entertainment and rest as well. ... [Therefore] the contents and functions of literature and art should not be limited to serving politics. ... and we should allow the coexistence between the artistic works serving politics and those works not directly serving politics, which is in accord with the facts, for sake of fulfilling people’s need. ... Like Xun Zi brought up in the Warring States period, there are two types of music, one serves for political needs, and the other entertains people. (Lü 1980, 4-5)

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<sup>32</sup> For more information on the discourse of the continuity of Chinese culture, see Sue Tuohy 1991, Gates and Weller 1987, 4-5.

Since the reconstruction of national music concentrated more on the glories of the past rather than on its mistakes (Tuohy 1991, 201), some features of qin music such as its sophisticated implication of philosophy, which had been criticized as disadvantages in a mass culture of/for workers, peasants and soldiers, was intended identified as an embodiment of Chinese culture. This transition was immediately manifested in the emergence in the early 1980s of scholarship on various aspects of the study of qin music, ranging from the history, playing technique, to musical analysis, in which the qin was depicted as a representative musical instrument in China, a country known for its long history and “brilliant” culture (Zhang 1980; Gong 1980; Lin 1980; Fang 1980; Li 1981 1982 1983; Huang 1981; Gong 1982). The purpose and benefit of this shift is obvious: to promote the national culture can enhance nationality self-esteem, strengthen citizens' patriotism, and help China locate a sense of stability in a complex global environment.

In the musicians' point of view, the direct consequence of these renovations in cultural policies is their relative freedom to develop their music more based on an artistic and market-oriented consideration. In the field of qin music, from the very beginning of 1980s, a time Li regarded as the turning point of qin tradition (Li 1983, 55), some qin musicians started to use their artistic talent, combined with predecessors' knowledge, to continue and develop what they believed to be “art”. Li Xiangting and many of his peers moved into a new period, when they could negotiate the complex tensions between two agents, namely the national government and the performers themselves, as cultural intermediaries.

#### 4.0 NEW SOUNDS OF QIN MUSIC

The emergence of the cassette market of popular music in the 1980s was quite a remarkable phenomenon in the cultural life of Chinese people. But it was just the tip of the iceberg. After the import of “Pacific pop” in 1978, contemporary popular musics started to flood into China from the peripheral countries and regions of China and from Europe and North America as well. These new sounds triggered intense inquiries on the nature and social function of music, as well as the relationship between music production and consumption in the newly formed market economy. The popular music cassettes profoundly challenged the preexisting socialist mass culture; the music market became a model for the development of a popular culture in which the social impact and cultural vitality of a musical genre are largely determined by their commercial value. The commercial music market urged some qin musicians to attract audiences in the competitive commercial distribution network, and consequently it hastened the formation of modernized qin music.

In this chapter, I intend to show that some qin musicians were striving for a change of their music in the transition from mass culture toward popular culture. My arguments are divided in two parts: in the first part, I use Li Xiangting’s Artistic Qin theory as an example to inquire into his and a few other qin musicians’ awareness of the growing significance of individual consumers in the popular culture through the 1980s and 1990s; in the second part, I analyze Li’s extemporizing performance which facilitated the incorporation of his music into commercial

music industry and his collaboration with different forms of prevailing mass media after the 1990s.

#### 4.1 THE ARTISTIC QIN THEORY

In his book *Tandai guqin yanzou meixue ji yinyue sixiang yanjiu* published in 1992 in Taiwan, Li Xiangting poses a dichotomy of qin ideologies: the Artistic Qin and the Literati Qin. Based on qin documentations in the Tang dynasty, he defines the notion of the Artistic Qin as “a musical art that reflects both social life and people’s emotion historically and presently, and stresses on the artistic beauty and musical technique in order to achieve the goals of preoccupying the players themselves, and moving their audiences” (Li 1993, 21). In contrast with the Artistic Qin, Li defines the Literati Qin as “an avocation of Chinese literati who play the qin for self-refinement and self-contemplation, entertaining oneself or their guests, and pursuing immortality beyond earthliness; but some literati also play the qin for emotional sustenance” (ibid.).

Li’s qin theory taps into the complex discourse on the preexisting dichotomy between the Literati’s Qin tradition and the Artists’ Qin tradition. This conventional dichotomy classifies qin practices according to players’ professions: literati qin players are amateurs and play the music for themselves, but artist qin musicians are employed professionals who play for their audiences.<sup>33</sup> Compared to this widely known dichotomy, Li Xiangting makes two major changes in his classification. First, he narrows down the scope from “qin musical traditions” to “qin

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<sup>33</sup> For accounts of the dichotomy between the Literati’s Qin tradition and the Artists’ Qin tradition, see Bell Yung, “Historical Legacy and the Contemporary World,” in *Music and Cultural Rights* (Chicago and Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009): 143-47; Xu Jian, *Qinshi chubian* [First study of qin history] (Beijing: Renmin yinyue chubanshe, 1982): 58; Liu Chenghua, “Wenrenqin yu yirenqin guanxi de lishi yanbian,” *Zhongguo Yinyuexue* no. 98 (2005): 9-19.



musical ideologies.” By doing so, he removes social relations of qin players from consideration, such as professionalism and sponsorship. The second change lies in his subtle rhetorical use of “artistic” (*yishu*) to substitute “artist” (*yiren*). This subtle verbal change is probably due to his cautious intention to avoid the derogatory implication of “artist” (*yiren*) who had been historically identified as a professional for the service of others;<sup>34</sup> moreover, it indicates the change of classification principle of Li’s terminology: it shifts the focus of the term from musicians to music itself (Yung 2009, 157).

The fundamental characteristic of the Artistic Qin music is its strong emphasis on the emotional expressions. As Li argues, the primary function and meaning of the Artistic Qin music lies in the emotional communications which can enable the players to not only convey their feelings via their musical language, but also affect their listeners (Li, 1993: 22). Unlike the Literati Qin players who mainly privilege the subjects of self-cultivation and contemplation, the Artistic Qin players deal with a much broader repertory whose topics range from depictions of natural sceneries to expressions of moods and emotions. Hence some secular topics, for example romantic love, are acceptable if played in decent contexts.<sup>35</sup>

This feature of the Artistic Qin theory can be reflected in Li Xiangting’s personal performing style. His performance is characterized by violent changes of dynamics and passionately flexible control of time, both of which are in sharp contrast to the Literati Qin musicians’ peaceful and serene manner. In order to show the distinctions between his Artistic Qin style and a relatively conventional style, I make a comparison between two performing

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<sup>34</sup> The word “artist (*yiren*)” in Chinese has a derogatory tone in the history of Chinese music. See Bell Yung, “Historical Legacy and the Contemporary World”, *Music and Cultural Rights*, (Chicago and Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009): 164, note 9.

<sup>35</sup> Li argues that there are two categories of music associated with love, one depicts pure and earnest love, such as the piece “Xiang Fei Yuan (Lament of Lady Xiang)”, and the other is regarded as erotica if the music depicts overtly lewd stories or refers to sex by means of euphemisms (Li, 1993: 23). It is the latter category that should be prohibited in the Artistic Qin.

versions of the same qin piece *Flowing Water*. The first version was played by an influential qin master Guan Pinghu (1897—1967A.D.), who was considered as one of the most important and authoritative qin masters in the contemporary history of qin music,<sup>36</sup> and the second version was played by Li Xiangting for a TV program “The Grace of National Music” (*Fenghua Guoyue*) produced and broadcasted by CCTV in 2003.<sup>37</sup>

I begin with a discussion on the analytical approach I use in this comparison. Unlike the Western musical analysis which is largely based on scores in most cases, this analysis is mainly based on recordings rather than the score in *jianzi pu* (the qin tablature), or the transcription in Western staff notation. Two factors make the qin notation inappropriate and unnecessary for the current analysis. First, qin notations are tablatures which indicate string numbers and finger positions rather than pitches (Yung 2001, 161); therefore reading a qin score notated in *jianzi pu* does not indicate much about pitches which are usually the fundamental elements in a musical analysis. Second, “traditional qin notation does not generally specify the durational proportion of notes” (Yung 2008, 106), and this feature usually evokes musical creativity and individuality of performances beyond the notation. Considering that it is my main goal to probe into the personal style, which is conveyed through the individual creativity, the qin notation may not illustrate these extra subtle elements.

Similarly, it is this musical creativity of individual qin players that makes the transcription in the Western staff notation less helpful for the current analysis. For most qin players, the subtle treatment of metrical regularity, tempo, and dynamic variations can greatly

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<sup>36</sup>Guan Pinghu, *Master of Chinese Traditional Music—Guan Pinghu*, ISRC CN-E01-04-0083-0/A-J6 HCD-0266. This version is also available online, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qC5oafRNE-4> (Accessed July 20, 2010).

<sup>37</sup>Li Xiangting, “Flowing Water,” *Fenghuang Guoyue*, CCTV-3. The video of this program is available online, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TZtx4MH2r5Y> (accessed July 20, 2010).

affect their personal performing styles. As Bell Yung points out in his study of the playing features of the aforementioned qin master, Tsar Teh-yun:

The single most outstanding stylistic trademark of Tsar’s playing is her treatment of time, which is characterized by its irregularity, unpredictability, and non-conformity. Not only is time, or duration of tonal events, including the related concepts of tempo, rhythm, beat, and meter, among the most important building blocks of any kind of music, but its manipulation is also the most effective way for a performer to convey personal expression (Yung 2008, 106).

These parameters of performance can hardly be precisely transcribed in Western staff notation even with additional symbols. Since the staff-notation system is by far the most effective approach that reveals most musical details, I provide a transcription of the excerpt in the musical analysis based on the qin tablature in the qin handbook *Tianwenge qinpu*, played by Guan Pinghu and transcribed by Xu Jian (Appendix A)<sup>38</sup>.

The method I adopt is the spectrogram produced by digital recording devices or sound editing software that usually uses Analog-to-Digital Converter (ADC).<sup>39</sup> A digital sound waveform graph can clearly present dynamic variations and the division of time in a more direct visual depiction, which fills in the disadvantage of both Western staff notation and the qin tablature.

The excerpts used for comparison are selected from the climax section of *Flowing Water*, characterized by virtuoso playing techniques of *gun* and *fu*.<sup>40</sup> This part is Section 6 in Guan

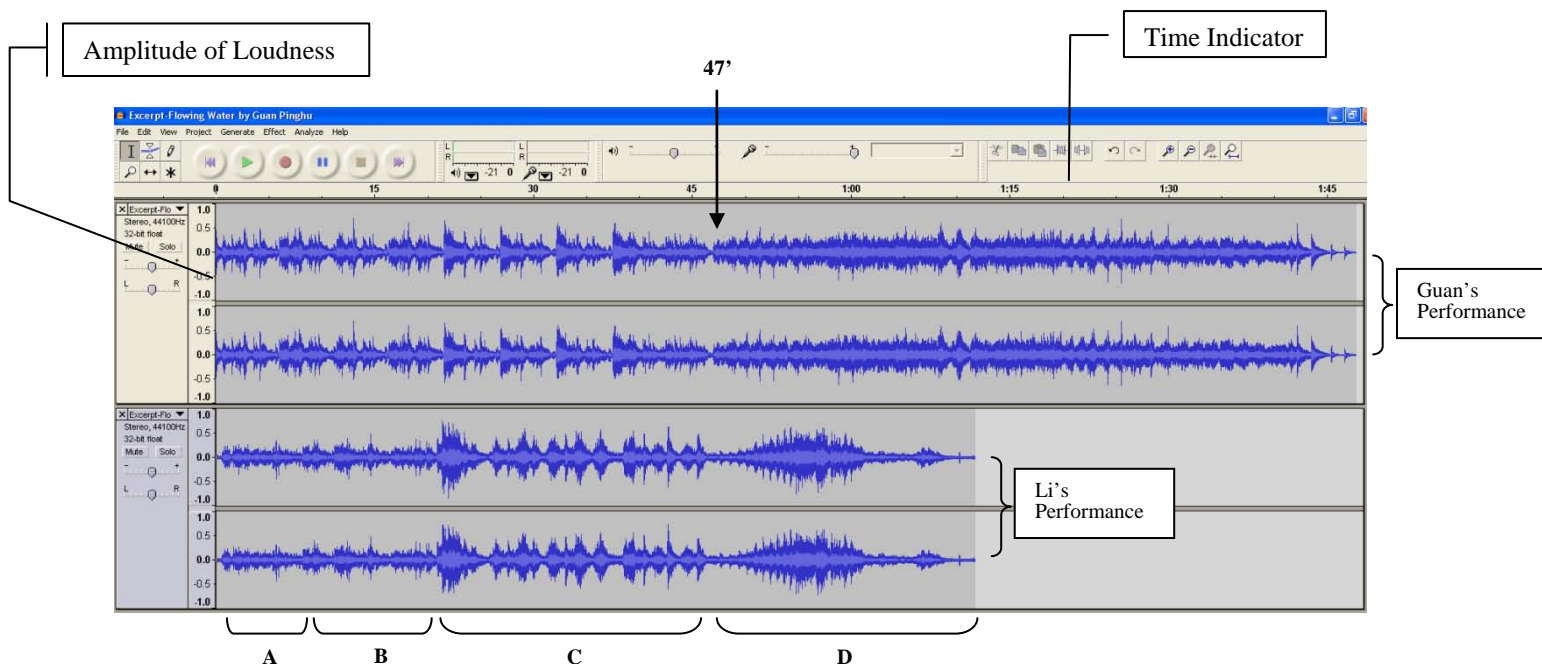
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<sup>38</sup> For the transcription of the entire piece of “Flowing Water” played by Guan Pinghu, please refer to Zhongguo Yishu Yanjiuyuan Yinyue Yanjiusuo, “*Liu shui* [Flowing Water],” *Guqin quji* [The Collection of Qin Pieces], (Beijin: Renmin yinyue chubanshe):38-44.

<sup>39</sup> The software used in the current analysis is *Audacity 1.2*.

<sup>40</sup> R. H. van Gluik explained these two techniques in details. *Gun* 滚 means “welling up” using the middle finger pulls over several strings in succession, from 7 to 2, or from 6 to 1. *Fu* 拂 means to “to brush.” It is the opposite of the preceding *gun*,

Pinghu’s version and Section 5 in Li Xiangting’s version.<sup>41</sup> To facilitate the comparison, I choose the excerpts that share the greatest similarities based on the score between two performers: Guan’s excerpt begins from 3’09 and ends on 4’54 on the CD player’s time indicator; Li’s excerpt begins from 2’15 and ends on 3’36. Each video example is transformed into two identical sound tracks, manifested in two amplitude envelopes of the audio signals.



**Figure 1. A comparison between the spectrograms of the climax section (Section 6) of *Flowing Water* by Guan Pinghu, and the climax section of *Flowing Water* by Li Xiangting (Section 5)**

There are three essential parameters the graphs clearly illustrate: tempo, rhythmic density, and dynamic variation. The horizontal axis, namely the time indicator, shows the

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played over string 1 to 6 or 2 to 7. He particularly mentioned the climax section of this piece “Flowing Water,” in his translation as “Flowing Streams,” and said “the technically extremely difficult version of the thune ... has one part consisting of practically nothing but variations on this kun. When it is played by a virtuoso (ordinary players would hardly dare to touch this tune!), one hears the babbling of water all through the melody: now the melody dominates, then the sounds of water, a fascinating effect” (Gulik 1938, 137).

<sup>41</sup> This difference is caused by their individual selection based on the same score. As Bell Yung explains, “one may hear a performance in which notes, phrases, even whole sections have been deleted from or added to the original notation, or otherwise altered” (Yung 2001,161). It is the case in the current comparison that Li Xiangting deletes a whole section before the climax section starts.

difference of tempo in two versions of performances. In most cases, “the manipulation of tempo is one method by which some qin musicians exercise their creativity and establish their individual styles” (Yung 2008, 109). Apparently, Li Xiangting finishes this section in a much shorter time than Guan does; since he does not delete any notes, playing in a shorter time can only be achieved via increasing the tempo and shortening durations. Guan controls the tempo with greater steadiness, which can be seen from the relatively regular wave pulses in the graph. After 47’’ of his excerpt, the rhythmic density is kept in a high level, however, those pitches created by the finger technique “gun” and “fu” are evenly distributed in a steady tempo. Even though the absolute volume is loud, the dynamic variations are confined to a narrow range. These features shown in the graph echo Bell Yung’s comments on Guan’s personal style: “A stylistic characteristic of Master Guan is a regular beat and a steady tempo; rarely did he make sudden and drastic tempo changes” (Yung 2008, 110).

In contrast, Li Xiangting’s performance is full of radical changes in terms of rhythmic density and tonal density. In his article “Factorial Analysis of the Song as an Approach to the Formation of a Unitary Field Theory,” Charles Seeger introduces the notions of rhythmic density which consists of tempo and duration, and tonal density which includes pitch and loudness; both constitute two important parameters of musical density (Seeger 1968, 34-36). The pitch is not the parameter that Li Xiangting obviously changes, because his performance follows the pitches notated in the qin tablature. Therefore, his personal style is mainly manifested in other parameters: tempo, duration, and dynamic variation. As the graph presents, he builds upon the tempo and shortens the durations in stages: in the first stage from 0’’ to 8’’ (stage A) he evenly presents beats in a regular tempo; then he accelerates the previous tempo in the second stage from 8’’ to 21’’ (stage B); the third stage from the 21’’ to 46’’ (stage C) shows a succession of

clusters of sudden changes of increased durations regularly set in a generally slower tempo; and in the final stage from 46'' to the end (stage D), he gradually speeds up and increases the rhythmic density and dynamics created by the techniques “gun” and “fu,” followed by a decrease in all three parameters at the end. The final stage forms an olive-shape complex of three sonic parameters and stands in stark contrast to Guan’s style. This graph also reveals an association between the rhythmic density and dynamic variations in his performance: the increase of the rhythmic density is usually accompanied by the rise of dynamic as well. Compared to Guan Pinghu’s style, Li’s performance is characterized by flexibility, unpredictability and unsteadiness. Li Xiangting believes that it is through these features that his music can arouse his audiences’ sentiments more easily than the other qin player.

It is not difficult to find the relationship between Li’s performance and the so-called “lyrical music” (*shuqing yinyue*) that was imported from the very beginning of the Open Era. The term lyrical music used here mainly refers to, in Baranovitch’s words, the sweet, romantic type of popular songs, themes of which usually depict people’s emotional world more or less in the realistic context of daily life. The most significant difference between lyrical music and the music that had been popular before its advent lies in the theme. Before the 1980s, the majority of songs mainly reflected on social struggles, bitter life before the foundation of People’s Republic of China, and hatred for enemies and invaders; after the 1980s, lyrical music has been introduced to mainland China, a genre that aims at relaxation and entertainment. This kind of music played an important role in challenging officially sanctioned discourse, practices, and ideologies, and in changing Chinese culture, long before rock music appeared in China in the 1980s (Baranovitch 2003, 18). In the early 1980s, when the cassettes of lyrical music flooded into mainland China, this popular genre immediately captured China’s youngsters; moreover, it generated a

widespread and profound confusion among many Chinese music theorists and musicians about the social and aesthetic values of the existing socialist music culture. This confusion is mainly manifested in a comparison between the existing socialist cannon and the rising genre, as Li Huanzhi poses, “Why does popular music from capitalist society share similar things with socialist life style and artistic interest, and is even more ‘touching’ than socialist music? What is the artistic enchantment of these popular musics?” (Li 1982, 5) The younger generation’s growing fondness for the imported “lyrical music” aroused a sudden overwhelming panic among some authoritative scholars who affirmed their strong opposition by regarding these lyrical musics as unhealthy, inappropriate music that was not acceptable. To give a sense of the criticism of lyrical music, I provide some representative comments by influential scholars representing the official and authoritative voice in this debate. First, the loosening of official control of music market had led to the reappearance of decadent music that focused on personal emotion, particularly love (Li Huanzhi, 1982). These kinds of musics should be prohibited, because they could easily lead audiences to “indulge in personal and emotional world, make them forget the vigorous revolution and class struggle” (Zhao 1982, 19-20) and might direct people to a filthy, unhealthy, and vulgar mental state. Consequently they would cause a “spiritual pollution” (Zhao 1983, 1984; Huang 1984; Zeng 1988), then inclination of deviating from the “socialist road” and forgetting Party’s instruction, and then falling for capitalist individualism and commercialization (Zhao 1984, 2). This point of view was closely tied to a consistent cultural theory of socialist China in which aesthetic values and appropriateness of a song rely on its political significance (Li Wei 1982; Zhao 1982a), and the individual expressions not considered as political correct are downplayed or considered as a trivial element that could only

partially contribute to the artistic value of music and on a superficial level (Li Huanzhi 1982, 3; Zhao Feng, 1982: 2-3; Lü 1980, 6-7).

Those scholars who opposed such condemnation of “lyrical music” invoked a discourse of the nature and aesthetic value of music in order to defend the younger generation’s musical tastes. Their primary arguments are: does music have aesthetic values that are independent of political connotations? If it does, then music should be depoliticized at least in some cases, and the evaluation of music should be based on its artistic features, individual aesthetic conception and perception, rather than in the political sphere exclusively. Additionally the social function of contemporary music in a peaceful era should lie in its power of depicting and representing the contemporary peaceful life and meeting people’s needs for expressions of personal affection, as well as entertainment (Deng 1980; Wang 1981; Jin 1988). Influenced by Western aesthetic theories on the autonomy of art, some scholars in the field of musical aesthetics also initiated a discussion on the intrinsic value of music and the beauty of logic in music works (Han, 1987; Ju, 1986; Lang, 1986; Jin, 1988), with an intention to further tear music away from politics. But both discourses shared a final comment that the contemporary aesthetic standards of music should be featured by its diversity and presentation of individualism, hence both the composition and appreciation of music should be carried out in a personalized way (Li Xiwei, 1986).

Given this background, Li’s Artistic Qin theory appeared to agree with this point of view that favored the emotional expressions from an individual perspective, and identified the artistic essence of qin music in musical, rather than political terms. Therefore, qin music, with the application of corresponding playing techniques, should be able to depict both the players’ inner world and the external world based on their perception. Moreover it affirmed musicians’ power of delineating their thoughts triggered by their musical sensation, and defines this power as an



important component of the artistic quality of qin music. An extreme expansion of this power is improvisation. As Li stated, qin players could use the qin to depict their feelings regarding objective events. For example Li referred to an anecdote of Cai Yong,<sup>42</sup> as documented in *Su Qin Zhuan* by Sima Zi Wei,<sup>43</sup> which tells how Cai Yong perceived an intention to kill when he saw a mantis was stalking a cicada and depicted this feeling in an improvised qin piece (Li 1993, 24). Hence, artistic qin musicians move beyond being music servants who produce entertainment, rather they can serve as a vehicle of their own thoughts and saturate the sounds of the qin to express own ideas in a manner of improvisation.

This feature of expressiveness of the Artistic Qin helped Li Xiangting's music reach a genuinely mass audience. It accommodated this ancient musical instrument to existing forms of media which few qin musicians before Li Xiangting did, such as films, but also to new forms of mass media that swiftly grew and spread after the 1990s, such as CDs and TV programs.

The emotional expressiveness of Li's music led to its popularity. Many of his audiences gain emotional satisfaction from the dramatic change of dynamics, the virtuosity of finger technique, and the vivid melodies and themes. All of these aspects contribute to the excitement that this music can arouse. However, this expressiveness conflicts with the Literati Qin music, which values the serenity, peace, and loftiness that the sounds of the qin can embody. While Li does not object to the longstanding Literati Qin style, he deems that the emotionally expressive qin music is more artistic than the plain performing style. He states, "Is it right to play an emotional piece in a mild manner? ... Qin music in the Tang dynasty valued [its ability to] move

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<sup>42</sup> Cai Yong (132–192A.D.) was a Chinese scholar of the Eastern Han Dynasty. He was well-versed in calligraphy, music, mathematics and astronomy.

<sup>43</sup> Sima Ziwei (647 – 735A.D.) was "one of the most eminent religious figures of the Tang dynasty and an important member of the literary world during the Xuanzong Emperor's reign (712 – 756A.D.)."

ghosts and gods, and if it can achieve that purpose, it can definitely move humans. [On the contrary,] if it cannot move people, then it is not qualified as art.” (Zheng 2006, 84-85)

The Artistic Qin is also characterized by the fact that audiences play a significant role in creating musical meanings in their appreciation processes. In his book, Li refers to Ji Kang’s famous treatise, *Sound is Without Grief or Joy (Sheng wu ai le lun)*, and argues that “the completion of the phenomenon of music ends with listeners’ perception, and it is in listeners’ inner world that the physical effect and emotional expression of music can be manifested” (Li 1993, 23). In other words, Li advocates the interpretation of audiences, and assumes that audiences are also effective creators of the musical meaning to some degree. This assumption is well supported in the Tang poems about qin music he analyzes, most of which stress audiences’ perspective. That is to say, the majority of these poems focus on the poets’ appreciation experiences as listeners, for example, the poem “*Qin ge*” [Enchanting melody ]<sup>44</sup> by Li Qi (690-751 A.D.) (ibid., 33):

The host has good wine  
And drink with us this night,  
A player who comes from Guangling  
Is invited to play strains in our sight.

The moon sheds her light on the city walls  
And the crows sail in the sky,  
Cold frost falls on the trees  
Into our clothes and the wind does fly.

The resplendent candle makes the moon  
More bright while he does play,  
At first The Song of Green Waters and then  
Sign of Chu concubine, the famous lay.

When the beginning sound comes out from the strings

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<sup>44</sup> The English translation is by Luo Zhiye. See Wu Juntao ed., *Tangshi sanbai shou* [Three Hundred Tang Poems], Changsha: Hunan chubanshe, 1997), 89-91.

Still the whole world seems to be,  
All guests around are silent with no words  
And the stars that are sparse to see.

An order makes me take up an official post  
In Huai River region that is clear hundreds miles away,  
But now after enjoying such enchanting melody  
I'll be a hermit in the cloud-mountains, I say.

#### **4.1.1 Mass musical culture vs. popular musical culture**

The view that highly values audiences' dominance and significance is closely related to a turbulent debate on artists and musicians' social responsibilities in an openness era of mass media and music market throughout the 1980s. The most essential question in the debate is: should music in Socialist China cater to the mass's taste by depicting some filthy and vulgar subjects, or should it instruct masses' taste? Such a debate was brought up when the authoritative socialist music was greatly challenged by the influx of lyrical popular music in mainland China and the abrupt rise of musics by Chinese music producers imitating the romantic style of imported music. The question on musicians' responsibilities implies a crucial fact that, according to music market and media trends, popular music had turned a younger generation of Chinese away from the cannon of socialist music even after many years of socialist musical education. Many authoritative scholars criticized this new trend by reinforcing the longstanding cultural policy that while it is artists' responsibility to serve the people, it is more essential to educate people in order to refine popular aesthetic taste in the first place. In other words, artists should instruct rather than cater to audience tastes by providing them "decadent and unhealthy music"<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> It was a common consensus to label romantic musics, particularly in Hong Kong and Taiwan popular music, as "yellow" and "decadent" music. Nimrod Baranovitch also mentioned this phenomenon in the first chapter of *China's New Voices*, p. 15.

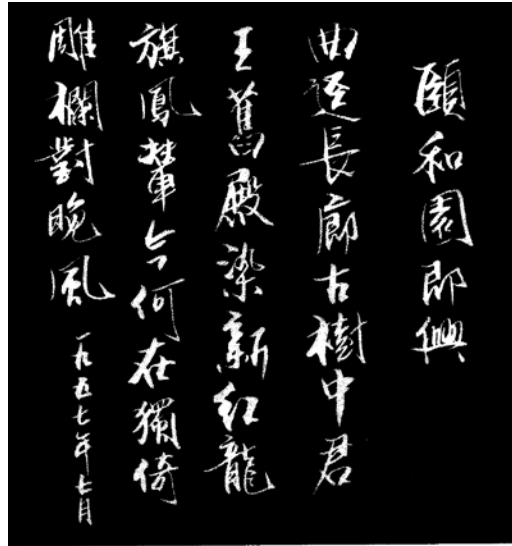
in order to satisfy their desires (Zhao, 1980: 18; Wang, 1983; Li Wei, 1982; He, 1980:13). This point of view is an extension of Mao's talk in 1942 on the relation between artists and the masses, which assumes the masses as passive audiences who were ignorant, uncultured, and with coarse musical tastes, waiting to be guided and helped by professional cultural cadres who were on a higher level musically and spiritually. But this argument also implies that the so-called decadent, unrefined music had gained great popularity among the masses and achieved commercial success in the music market, a fact that the authoritative scholars' explicit disparagement of popular music could not explain.

By contrast, some scholars interpreted this success of popular music as an inevitable manifestation of people's growing cultural vitality that should be encouraged. In addition, questions regarding the concept and structure of "people" or "masses," and people's aesthetic needs also occasioned considerable discussion from 1980 to 1988 (Luo, 1986; Zeng, 1986, 1987). These studies on music consumers showed that the general group of people in Mao's cultural ideology had undergone a transformation along with China's material progress, and gave rise to the formation of a more complex structure of music consumers. They identified their aesthetic standards and pursuits based on their cultural and educational background rather than exclusively on their profession and class status in Maoist classification (Jin 1988, 105). Therefore the discrepancy on "who are the people" and "what kind of music do people need" led to further questions, such as "Whom should art serve, people or politicians?" (Jin 1988, 105). The 1980s was a period when China underwent newly emerging liberalism, which nurtured these active debate in scholarly music circles who tried to unveil the relationship between *refining* public musical tastes and *homogenizing* public musical tastes, while at the same time distinguish between the music *of* people and the music *for* people.

These developments brought by the formation of individual sonic spaces mainly created by cassettes, and later by CDs, have greatly contributed to the rise of audiences' status and the general recognition of mass participation in the music industry of China. Therefore I argue that the popularization of Li Xiangting's Artistic Qin theory and his highly emotional performing style, to some extent, was deliberately created, and selected by the music industry after the 1980s, in order to appeal to a large sector of consumers who pursued their liberated musical personal space. Emerging as the modernized version of the Artists' Qin in contemporary China, Li's qin music has been particularly oriented toward middle-class audiences who started to retrospect their national music cultures by consciously avoiding overtly politicized socialist cannon and yet who lack comprehensive knowledge of traditional qin styles. Even though from the point of view of many Literati Qin players, Li's Artistic Qin music disobeyed many rules of the qin tradition, yet in the eyes of his audiences it projected a distinctly traditional image of Chinese literati. In the use of finger techniques, melodic features, and occasional improvisations, Li's qin music retains much information of the tradition. His CDs often feature him wearing a traditional Chinese gown, holding his qin (Figure. 2), and the liner notes function as a platform showing his calligraphy and Chinese paintings (Figure. 3, 4).



Figure 2. The Cover of Li Xiangting's Extemporization Album *Tangren shiyi*



Extemporizing on The Summer Palace, 1957  
 頤和園即興 作于一九五七年七月北京

Figure 3. Li Xiangting's Calligraphy in the liner note of *Tangren shiyi*



Figure 4. Li Xiangting's painting in the liner note of the album *Songren ciyi*

Apart from these visual elements of the qin tradition, his three improvisation albums, *Tangren shiyi* [Poetic moods of the Tang dynasty], *Songren ciyi* [Poetic moods of the Song dynasty], and *Yuanqu guyun* [Poetic tones of the Yuan dynasty],<sup>46</sup> musically exude an intention of constructing a personal appreciation environment related to the audience's experience as individuals, providing a sense of privacy and relaxation contextualized in the retrospection on the historical glories of Chinese literati. Inspired by the literary sources, such as poems of the Tang, Song and Yuan dynasties, Li improvises his qin music in order to depict affects conveyed through the poetic imageries that may reflect a traditional way of literati's life. While the music is presented in an extremely personal manner that seems to echo the traditional performing mode of self enjoyment practiced by literati qin players, the liner notes drag the lofty artistic conception of these qin pieces down to the practical ground. In the prefaces of the line notes of the albums *Songren ciyi* and *Yuanqu guyun*, he addresses that the primary function of his music is to serve for audiences' personal purposes, such as meditation in one's study or on one's journey, having a break from daily life in a secluded place, in order to escape oneself from external disturbance. Even though these albums are produced in an artistic, and lofty manner, they are commodities in nature.

Even though the advent of cassettes of lyrical music did not affect qin music directly, the cassette culture in China nurtured individual consumer's pursuit of releasing personal emotions in a private sonic space, molded consumers' growing need of listening to music for entertainment, and positioned many qin musicians in a market competition with other popular musical genres. The old norms in the top-down mass culture model simply did not work, because the masses are no longer passive receivers of cultural indoctrination; instead, they have the

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<sup>46</sup> The titles of the three albums are translated by the author.

power to certain degree in the newly formed commercial popular musical culture, for example they can decide to make a purchase or not. In this transition, Li Xiangting intended to bridge the artistic value and economic value of qin music, by attracting the middle-class consumers whose educational background might more easily arouse their resonance to the cultural messages embodied in qin music. However, these new intentions correspondingly required new approaches of musical expressions, which inevitable lead to change of qin music itself.

#### 4.2 IMPROVISATION IN CONTEMPORARY QIN MUSIC

The popularity of Li Xiangting's Artistic Qin music relies to some extent on his improvisation practice. Improvisation makes his performance more accessible to his audiences in three ways. First, it provides a new arena in which he can elaborate on emotional expressions in improvised pieces without distorting the existing traditional repertoire. Second, it bridges the qin players and their audiences intimately in the form of qin improvisation concerts. Third and most significantly, improvisation leaves open the possibility of wider cooperation between qin music and new mass media particularly TV, and films.

Improvisation of qin music, as Li asserts in his article "A Study on the Extemporizing Performance Art of Qin"<sup>47</sup>, can be traced back to the Warring States Period (2 Century B.C.), and he deems the formation of personalized and stylized interpretations or variations of the same piece in the extant qin repertoire is also one of the most profound consequence of the practice of improvisation. Due to the lack of notational documents of these improvised pieces, the extant

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<sup>47</sup> This is article was based on his research proposal when he studied improvisation of qin music in University of Cambridge. Probably due to its controversial effect to the Literati Qin tradition, this article has never been officially published in any academic journals in mainland China, except in the linernote of his first CD of improvisation of qin music Tangren Shiyi.



documentation can only provide us with anecdotes of how some qin players improvised based on some scenes they witnessed. They leave the theories and methods of how to improvise unmentioned. Even though there were historical evidences on improvisation in qin music, this skill was never developed into a major practice among qin players, until Li Xiangting regularly presented this skill in most of his concerts, and subsequently theorized it in the 1990s. Beginning his experimentation in improvisation as early as 1957, the year he officially began to learn the qin from his mentor Zha Fuxi, Li Xiangting experienced the indifferent attitudes of qin musicians in contemporary China toward improvisation (Li, 14), but he never gave up exploring this lost skill and building upon theories. In a lecture on qin art in the Musical Festival of China in Hong Kong he gave in 1984, he made his first public demonstration of the art of extemporizing performance (Li 2002, 9), which signaled the beginning of his public performance of improvisation that has continued until now. Probably because his experiments were too controversial in the point of view of the majority of qin players in mainland China, his theory on qin improvisation “Guqin Jixing Yanzou Yishu (An Study on the Extemporizing Performance Art of Qin<sup>48</sup>)” has never been officially published in any academic journals in mainland China. This article, largely based on a research proposal he finished on April 10, 1989 when he studied the extemporization theory at the University of Cambridge as a visiting scholar, was published in the journal *Beishi Guoyue* issued by National Ensemble of Taipei in Taiwan in 1995, and later published in mainland in the form of the liner notes of his first CD of qin improvisation *Tangren Shiyi* in 2002. In this article, he considered that the practice of improvisation is an extreme embodiment of qin performers’ musical thoughts which can be triggered by a subject, an incident, a view or a sentiment and then grow into an independent piece. He said,

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<sup>48</sup> The translation of the title is directly cited from the English translation of the paper in the liner note of the CD issued in 2002.

Judging from Chinese tradition and my experience, what the extemporizing performance expresses is a kind of music thinking induced by an idea point. The point can be a subject, an incident, a view or a sentiment. Its development forms a melody in mind, and is expressed out as an independent piece. Contrary to the extemporizing in European music, it is not artistic disposal or development of the original piece, nor supplementary ornament to the original melody. ... [I]t is my experience and pursuit that all the Chinese traditional extemporizing have all along embodied successive flow of inspiration and thoughts. (Li 2002, 10)<sup>49</sup>

A fundamental issue in the understanding of Li Xiangting's improvisation of qin music involves the degree to which his improvisation is distinguished from pre-composition. Bruno Nettl provides an insightful theory of improvisation for the current analysis. He defines improvisation as "The creation of a musical work, or the final form of a musical work, as it is being performed. It may involve the work's immediate composition by its performers, or the elaboration or adjustment of an existing framework, or anything in between" (Nettl, "improvisation"). From this perspective, the improvisation practiced by qin players falls into the second category, and as Li notes, the elaboration of an existing qin piece has become a common practice among qin musicians approximately after 1000 A.D.<sup>50</sup> But Li clarifies that the nature of his improvisation is essentially different from others' in that he does not rely on existing pieces, most of which are limited to folk songs and could by no means hold his sentiments and enthusiasm. Consequently his performances were completely self-oriented for the sake of expressing free flows of his feelings. In his improvisation theory, he suggests ten "basic solutions" if one would like to accomplish this extemporizing process which produces "successive flow of inspiration and thoughts" in his own words<sup>51</sup>, including rhyming, leading

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<sup>49</sup> The passage is directly quoted from the English translation of his article *An Study on the Extemporizing Performance Art of Qin* included in the liner note of the album *Poetic Moods of the Tang Dynasty*, p.10.

<sup>50</sup> Li Xiangting, The liner note of *Tangren Shi*, 2003, 8.

<sup>51</sup> Since there is an English translation of this article included in the same liner note, the terms are directly cited from Li's liner note.

figure repetition, parallel development, recurrence, diversity, theme conception establishment, conception-abiding, conceiving, exertion, and elicitation of techniques.<sup>52</sup>

Li employs his extemporizing approaches, which share great similarity with compositional principles, as means of linking his thoughts and inspirations with an independent musical work. I argue that this improvisation practice is very close to an instant composition process. This can be seen not only from the composition-oriented solutions of repetition, prolongation and variations, but also from his use of the term “extemporization,” as opposed to “improvisation.” Ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettl argues that these two terms are interchangeable in most cases, “extemporization” implies that a piece may not be essentially evanescent.<sup>53</sup> Hence some of his extemporized pieces, if not all of them, are probably intended to be kept as qin compositions. Two pieces composed by him reinforce this intention. As he introduces in the same article, two qin compositions, *Sanxia change* [Yangtse Gorges Chantey], and *Fengxue zhulu* [Roadbuilding in Snowstorm] which were respectively published in 1976 and 1977, were generally based on his extemporizing performances. Therefore, his extemporization practice can be seen as an integral component of his composition.

The emergence of new repertoires of qin music served as an inevitable consequence of the creativity of Li Xiangting’s extemporizing performance. Whereas the majority of qin musicians adhered to the extant traditional repertoires and endeavored to “*dapu*,” namely to transcribe old qin tablature notation into a playable form for contemporary qin players, Li Xiangting has been performing his own extemporizing pieces in many public occasions. He implies that these new sounds are no less effective than ancient pieces in conveying one’s feeling. According to Li, “extemporizing performance was the only way to express one’s real thoughts and feelings, or to

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 11-15.

<sup>53</sup> Bruno Nettl, “Improvisation,” *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*.

show his spirits or sentiments in an original, unsophisticated, elegant and profound way. By any other means one can't reach such extent (Li 2002, 9)

This statement regarding the significance of extemporizing performance reflects Li Xiangting and some qin musicians' desire of exploring beyond extant repertoires and representing their own voices in the area, and to some extent start to constitute a new experimental arena which the various kinds of new sounds of this ancient instrument could possibly flourish in.

The driving forces behind such changes may be very complex, but one factor was derived from the pressure these qin musicians felt when they faced the decline of the qin after Chinese music moved into an era of market competition. After lyrical music took away a large number of music consumers and the governmental support for national music and Socialist canon became debilitated, many musicians and scholars began to call for the necessity of accommodating old musical traditions to newly structured musical markets and industries. As the Chinese music scholar Li Xiwei criticizes that some traditional musics, including some kinds of regional operas, and qin music, were conservative and obsolete in their systems of musical language, compositional skills, intonations. He argues that they could hardly fulfill the need in a new era, and this status quo could be observed in their aging audience, as well as the falling of the number of consumers (Li Xiwei 1986, 4). Even though his statement tapped into an overtly Westernized reflection on Chinese music, he accurately delineated the practical challenge most qin musicians encountered in the era of cassette culture, relatively open market, and brave embracement of Western influence in most domains. Further, he pointed out the importance of reforming compositional techniques in order to draw younger audience' attention. Most of experiments on reforming traditional compositional techniques were carried out by New Wave musicians. "New

Wave” was a new trend in composition mainly among academic composers in conservatories of music in the 1980s. This trend aims at developing new aesthetic taste and musical experimentation in order to “stimulate the development of Chinese music and enable China to enter the world musical scene.”<sup>54</sup> In his research of New Wave composers, Peter Chang reveals several significant features that help define this trend. He notes that in their compositional process, “New Wave composers tried to search for the real roots of the Chinese culture and folk arts” (Chang 1991, 134), many of which had been seriously damaged by the political campaigns from the 1950s to 1970s; their music expresses the tradition through contemporary Western compositional language. In addition, “their compositions seek quality for purely artistic reasons, and tend to disassociate itself from moral obligations” (ibid., 135), the most essential among which is “Music is for the masses.” Even though the “New Wave” music was actually developed into a very exclusive subculture, “New Wave” music had far-reaching consequences in the aspects of interpreting Chinese culture, modernizing traditional music, and adapting Western contemporary techniques; and they ignited some traditional musicians’ passion for modernizing, or Westernizing Chinese traditional music. Li Xiangting was one of them. Li’s extemporizing performance theory should not be seen as a coincidental, detached exploration, but rather falls in line with some qin musicians who were also experimenting with their qin music in a similar direction. For instance, Cheng Gongliang explored improvisation in the same period. He collaborated with a Dutch flutist Christ Hinze and improvised eleven duet pieces featuring the qin and the flute (Cheng 1990). Their effort was turned into an album *China Dream*, and was released by Keytone in Holand in the forms of cassette, CD, and LP in the summer of 1990 (Nanjing Art Institute 1991, 53).

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<sup>54</sup> Liang Mao-chuan, “Speeches at the National Symphonic Composition Symposium,” *Music of China Newsletter* 3(1986): 5, quoted in Peter Chang, “Tan Dun’s String Quartet *Feng-Ya-Song*,” 129.

Although Li Xiangting had not released any official music products of his extemporizing pieces as Cheng did, he went further in theorizing his extemporizing performance and endeavored to develop it to a greater academic depth. The theoretical development of extemporizing approaches was closely associated with the reform of Chinese traditional compositional techniques, which was first initiated by academic composers in conservatories. The Central Conservatory of Music, where Li studied and later taught the qin, was probably the most active atmosphere during the liberalist period from which a lot of influential “New Wave” composers, including Tan Dun, Liu Suola, Qu Xiaosong, Zhou Wenzhong etc. who graduated during the 1980s. It also became the hot bed for a variety of musical experimentations on the fusion of the East and the West, the traditional and the avant-garde. These experiments privileged a value of breaking down old rules, and erecting new parameters of musical engagement. Many composers and musicians began to pursue their artistic ideals abroad. Therefore, it is not that surprising to see that Li started his research on extemporization of qin music at University of Cambridge in 1989, worked with Professor Alexander Goehr in the program of composition, and finished his preliminary report “Guqin jixing yanzou yishu yanjiu dagang” (An outline of the research on the art of guqin extemporization) in the same year. His study abroad very likely catalyzed Li Xiangting’s exploration in combining Chinese elements and Western logic in extemporization, and many creative experiments he made also vividly show a collision of the Chinese traditional materials and Modern/Western presentations. One of his Chinese paintings *Extemporizing No. 2* that he drew in 1989 illustrates this principle (Figure. 5). Additionally, he consciously created this parallel between his extemporizing performance and the improvised Westernized Chinese paintings by including these paintings in the liner notes of his extemporization albums.

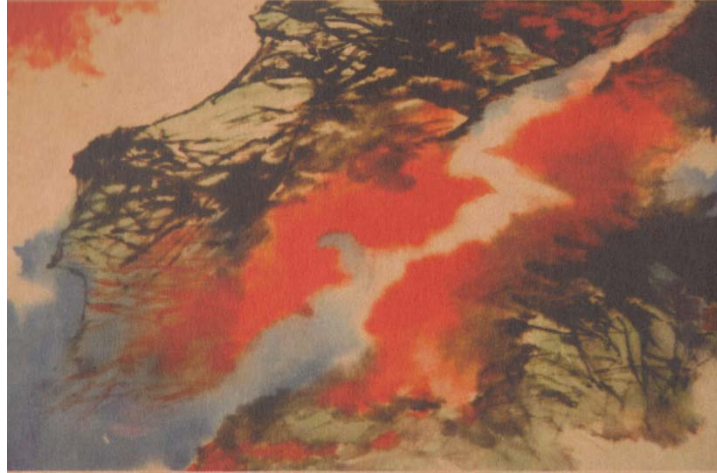


Figure 5. Li Xiangting's *Extemporizing No. 2*, in 1989<sup>55</sup>

Many of Li's methods are found in compositions worldwide, for example one can hardly find any music culture that does not employ repetition as a tool to develop the body of music, but Li's terminology revealed a strong Western influence. When he analyzes rhyming, he explains that "the music figure in a large-scale music sentence that first occurred can be used as the ending figure of the next sentence or more in succession" (Li, 2002, Eng 11). Even though these extemporization skills are commonly used in the qin tradition, the terms he uses and the way he understands and interprets it show a Western analytical approach one would use in a musical analysis.

Unlike the Western analytical language used in his paper, the musical language in his CDs has barely shown any Western impact. On the contrary, most of his extemporizing albums reveal a strong sense of traditional qin repertory<sup>56</sup>. This Chinese tradition in Li's music can be unfolded in three aspects. First, most of his extemporized pieces are played in the pentatonic scale and most commonly used traditional modes, such as the modes of *gong* and *zhi*, therefore

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<sup>55</sup> This painting is included in Li Xiangting's extemporization album *Tangren shiyi*.

<sup>56</sup> For examples of Li Xiangting's extemporizing styles, please refer to his albums, such as *Tangren Shiyi*.

the musical language system does not render any foreign or exotic taste. The second aspect is the fingering technique. In his extemporization theory, he did not add any new fingering technique; instead he regard the existing techniques as a significant resource for his extemporizing practice, because certain patters of finger techniques can be used to trigger his improvisational inspiration, an improvisational technique which he regards as “elicitation of techniques” in his theory(Li, 2002, liner note, 14). The third aspect is the slow tempo used in his performances. Since Li claims that his extemporization is more like composition than adding decorations to an existing piece, his composition and performance actually happened simultaneously, or the composition may be a little ahead of his performance. Hence, a slow tempo can provide more time for him while he is conceiving the next musical phrase. It is the slow tempo, however, that brings his musical style close to that of the repertory of the Literati Qin tradition which emphasizes on serenity and peace. Therefore, the Western musical influence did not transform Li Xiangting’s music into an experimental genre or a fusion which blends Western elements into the traditional styles of qin music.

In his theory of extemporization, Li says his intention is to resurrect a lost skill of qin players, while in practice he used this skill largely as a marketing strategy. The primary medium he employed was a new foramt of concerts, which he called extemporizing concerts. In this form of performance, Li extemporizes pieces based on the titles randomly assigned by his audiences, and these titles are usually highly diverse, ranging from ancient poems to modern subjects, such as “airport.” It is not my intention to discuss whether his extemporizing performance can accurately depict these assigned titles or not, but the outcome of this extemporizing concert is closely related to the current study in that extemporization becomes a communicational tool that bridges Li Xiangting and his audiences instantly by making them participate in the composition



process, or making them think they are partially involved in the composition. Hence, his extemporizing concert constitutes a mutual platform on which Li plays music to satisfy his audience's expectation, interests or curiosity. In addition, Li uses extemporizing performance to popularize the aesthetics and features of the qin tradition among a group of people who pay for the ticket, but may have little knowledge about what they are consuming. Most importantly, with extemporizing concerts, Li cultivated a group of consumers that regarded his music as the most classical and supreme presentation of qin tradition. While some qin musicians criticize Li Xiangting as an employed qin musician who cater the audience's taste with indulgence by extemporizing based on audiences' requirement and expectation, and imply this practice as a loss of tradition (Zheng 2006, 77). Li objected this opinion in two ways:

Firstly, Prof. Liu Chuhua said, we, professional qin musicians are forced to use metal-nylon strings, because we need to face consumers. Here, "consumers" seems like a derogatory term, as if we need to make a living by catering consumers. It is not the case. It is not the group of consumers, but a social cultural need that we are dealing with. ... [Secondly,] in terms of educating the mass, I think it is an arrogant and unpractical opinion. Masses can reject your education by not purchasing tickets. Or they may never attend your concert again after the first time. How are going to educate them? ... Therefore I don't think it is an appropriate idea to educate mass, rather we need to use our music to move, influence, and attract them. In addition, the term "mass" should be avoided, and we should use "to attract socio-cultural insights" instead. (Zheng 2006, 82-83)

Li attempted to clarify two issues in this talk. First, the consumers are not passive receivers who need to be enlightened and would buy anything provided for them; on the contrary they have their aesthetic standards and cultural opinions that would direct their consumption to some extent; second, to fulfill the need of these consumers does not necessarily lower the quality of the music, and it is not a shame to attract consumers who have ability of appreciating one's music. Moreover, he boldly and proudly made a comparison: his qin recitals sold well, and many audiences would not only come back again after attending his recital, but would bring friends

with them as well; whereas some traditional Literati Qin concerts would only make audiences sleepy (Zheng 2006, 83-84).

The extemporizing performance can be seen as Li Xiangting's adjustment to the market consumerism and commercialism that have been pervading Chinese society since the early 1980s. It is during this commercialization process that some musicians began to realize the distinction between "mass culture" and "popular culture": the former implies a top-down mass indoctrination that features government cultural policies, and the latter indicates a bottom-up popular consumption in which people were endowed with a power, even though limited to some degree, of expressing their opinions by purchasing cultural products or not. The difference between these two notions led to musicians' different strategy of promoting the popularity of qin music, because they could no longer rely on the politically managed performing activities and the guaranteed consumption. On the contrary, they needed to adjust their music in order to attract consumers based on the economic principles of marketing their music. As one of the pioneering qin musicians, Li played an active role in adjusting his music, breaking the boundary of the extant qin repertoires and increasing the accessibility of qin music among general music consumers. It is significant that the non-traditional pieces not only contributed to his endeavor of cultivating a qin music market by bringing people to his concerts, but also initiated a possibility of his collaboration with more influential mass media—films and TV.

## **5.0 QIN MUSIC IN AUDIO-VIDEO MEDIA**

This final section on the visualization of qin music completes my analysis of the new sounds of this instrument emerging with qin musicians' application of and collaboration with new forms of mass media in China. Much of this section concerns the most recent endeavor of some qin musicians (again, I will emphasize Li Xiangting's exploration, since he created one of the most challenging and controversial visual work of qin music) to merge qin music, mainly through improvisation, into the audio-visual electronic media in which visual elements play an essential role in reaching and affecting audiences.

### **5.1 A PROVOCATIVE COLLABORATION: QIN MUSIC IN *THE FIRST EMPEROR'S SHADOW***

The last two decades witnessed a growing interaction in mass media contents in China between aural and visual elements in the form of audio-visual presentation such as films and TV programs. As media sociologist Zhao Yuezhi points out, "one of the first things many Chinese families, urban and rural alike, buy with their savings is a television set. There were only 3.4 million television sets in China in 1978; by 1992, the number had reached 230 million. "Television villages"—where every household has a television set—were still treated as news in the early 1980s; by the middle of the decade they were commonplace" (Zhao 1998, 53). The

popularization of TV sets gradually became the prevailing technological manner of mass media throughout the 1990s. As a famous Chinese writer, Wang Shuo, noted, “[the 1990s] were the heyday of TV dramas. ... even popular music needed its aid to facilitate dissemination. Pop stars sought opportunities to sing theme songs for TV dramas, and it was so common that a popular TV drama would easily make a singer widely known” (Wang 2000, 13). Consequently, audio-visual media became a new transmission venue for music consumption, and the dissemination of music has increasingly departed from exclusive and independent audio transmission but moved toward a visual package of music transmission. This transition is so significant that some Chinese scholars consider that it is one of most fundamental elements that constitutes the contemporary musical ecology in China (Ma 2010). More importantly, this change of transmission mode not only affects the dissemination of music products, but also shapes the contents of music products themselves.

In assessing the promotional impact of AV media products on qin music, it is important to note that there are two methods of using qin music that may cause significantly different effects. The first method is to use qin music as background. When hearing qin music, those audiences who know nothing about this instrument will not associate the sound with the instrument, or they may even barely notice the timbre and melody of the qin at all. In this situation, audiences’ perception of the music and creativity of the meanings of the music are largely because of their unfamiliarity with the music, since they can hardly index and resignify music they have not heard before (Manuel 1993, 17-18). The second method is to weave the performance of qin music into the plotline so that the performing activity can physically appear as a central part of the film. Compared to the first method, the second approach not only explicitly contextualizes the music-making, but also enhances the instrument with other visual

elements, which facilitates the resignification and reappropriation. It is the second method I will analyze in my following discussion.

As one of the earliest qin musicians who used mass media to promote their music, Li Xiangting's exploitation of AV media products, including TV programs, TV dramas, and films, can be traced to back to the early 1980s. Most of his works fall into the second types of application of music. In 1979 he took part in a TV documentary *Guqin and Qin Pieces* produced by CCTV, and in the following year he was asked to do a demonstration in a film documentary *Qin* by Beijing Science and Education Film Production. After 1981, he participated in the production of film score for the movie *Zhi Yin (Faithful Friends)* and stood in for the male protagonist in several close-up scenes. His work was fully acknowledged by the director Xie Tieli who even arranged for him to appear as a supporting actor in one scene in the final version of the movie (Li 2008). Similar collaborations also include his solo performance for a TV drama *Zhuge Liang* in 1981, and a TV film *Feng Qiu Huang* in 1982. In these early collaborations, Li's music benefited from this new medium mainly in two ways. The lofty and typically abstract qin music was presented with or embedded in images during which it was brought down to earth and turned into a more tangible and understandable performance. Most importantly, TV and films facilitated the popularity of music because these media could reach many more audiences.

Unlike his qin composition, such as *Yangtse Gorges Chantey* and *Roadbuilding in Snowstorm* that were regarded as an effective exploration of qin music (Feng 2000, 67), his film music was seldom mentioned in academic literature at that time, probably because most music scholars were absorbed in analyzing "serious" works and spared no time to unveil the cultural value of music embodied in entertainment forms such as popular films and TV programs. It was not until 1990s that critics began to notice his cooperation with a movie director Zhou Xiaowen

in Zhou's film *First Emperor's Shadow*. This film caused such a sensation in China that it could hardly be ignored.

*The First Emperor's Shadow* tells a story about a historical character Gao Jianli, who is, according to the film, a famous qin player, and also a friend of the First Emperor of China who united the whole nation and named the first dynasty as the Qin. In this film, according to Zhou's proposal, music has five significance functions: a) it renders the moods of the film; b) it structures the plot via several variations of the themes throughout the film; c) it connects the interrelationship between characters, because the main character Gao Jianli is a qin musician at court; d) it narrates the change of characters' thoughts and attitudes through the transformation of music from folk songs to the national anthem of the Qin Empire; e) it refines the aesthetical quality of the film and renders a mysterious and oriental atmosphere (Zhou and Chai 1996 ,51). Therefore, qin music is not only used in film score as background music, but used as a primary clue throughout film. There are several scenes in which the main characters play the qin, accompanied by dialogues and movements. Those sections of music were pre-recorded in a studio, extemporized and played by Li Xiangting, and the actors closely imitate the performance through gesture synch. In fact, in order to reproduce these gestures vividly enough, the leading actor Ge You, actually took qin lessons with professional qin musicians (Li 1995, 15).

The meticulous design of these musical presentations of the plot reveals the director Zhou Xiaowen's conception of using qin music to reflect the protagonists' personalities, as well as to create the desired atmosphere and dramatic tension at certain moments. In other words, the qin music needed to be customized for this film, because no extant repertoire could accurately fulfill the director's requirement. However, these requests unintentionally offended against three taboos of the historical Literati Qin tradition. First, the Literati Qin practitioners usually avoid explicit

emotional expressions in their music. Second, the Literati Qin tradition does not value contemporary compositions beyond the extant classical repertoire. Third, they do not play for purposes of entertaining other people or monetary benefits. In the actual preparation process, the director's requests were declined by several qin players, and some rejected in a strong tone against the use of qin music in any film. When the director went to Shanghai and talked to a qin master there, the musician responded, "How dare you position such an elegant instrument in an entertaining place like a movie theater?"<sup>57</sup> In the end, Li Xingting was the only qin musician willing to cooperate with Zhou in recording music and adjusting his performance to meet the director's requirement.

In fact, the collaboration between Li Xiangting and Zhou Xiaowen went so well that both Zhou and the composer Zhao Jiping were amazed by the smooth progress during the recording process. Li extemporized the themes based on Zhao's description of the characters and the moods of the plots, including even some scenes inappropriate for the qin. One extreme example is a love-making scene. The director and the composer Zhao Jiping asked Li Xiangting to extemporize a passionate piece to show enthusiasm between the lovers, and he did (Ibid.). This theme was probably one of the most challenging commissions for a qin player. Even though there are several classical qin pieces depicting romantic love, explicit expressions of sexuality is not known in the repertoire; the close association of this instrument with the literati, known to be the bearers and guardians of moral integrity and social responsibilities made such a link inconceivable. Hence when the movie was shown publicly, Li Xiangting's performance combined with images of love-making was considered scandalous, distortive and totally incongruous with the highly respectable and sacred musical instrument.

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<sup>57</sup> *People*, "Li Xiangting," CCTV 10, May 29, 2004.

Apart from extemporizing themes for the film, Li Xiangting was also willing to tailor his performance to the director's demand throughout the recording process, particularly with regard to time control. Although the control of the length of music may seem crucial and common in the production of a film score, qin musicians have their own understanding and manipulation of tempo. As Bell Yung points out, "Control of relative duration of individual pitches is directly related to control of tempo, and the manipulation of tempo is one method by which some qin musicians exercise their creativity and establish their individual styles, so long as they stay within the bounds of acceptable performance practice" (Yung 2008, 109) Therefore it is not easy to demand qin musicians to regulate their tempo in accord with another person's management of timing. Nevertheless, Li eagerly worked to fulfill the director and the film composer's requests on timing in the studio, by strictly controlling his performance by seconds, extemporizing one or two short phrases to fill a small gap of silence, or making a deliberate and sudden pause to leave time for an added sound effect, like a thunder.<sup>58</sup> All the relevant discussions and trials of performances took place in the studio, with the director standing right beside him.

This film aroused great controversy in 1996, the first year following China's comprehensive marketization reform of the film industry. Most criticisms mainly targeted one feature: in this historical drama, the director was "abusing" his creativity and imagination so much that the plot greatly suffered from inaccurate depictions of historical facts. As a result, what was wished as a historical drama became mostly fictional, made up by the director Zhou Xiaowen and the screenwriter Lu Wei (Yang 1996, 13). The most apparent "error" related to the

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<sup>58</sup> *People*, "Li Xiangting," CCTV 10, May 29, 2004.



qin is that, according to historical documentation, the main character Gao Jianli was mostly known for his performance of the zhu<sup>59</sup> rather than the qin.

Li Xiangting's extemporizing performance, and particularly his musical expression of the lovemaking scene also contributed to the "distortion of history" and the deviation from "historical value and traditional image that embody the sedimentary accretion of our national aesthetics and cultural preference" (Ibid.).

The successful collaboration between Li Xiangting and Zhou Xiaowen illustrates that the production and release of this film could serve interests for both sides. In Zhou Xiaowen's point of view, the production of this film would provide him a possibility of fulfilling his artistic inquiry in a commercial film executed by a private film company. While he was preparing the script, this film was regarded as a political allegory contextualized in a historical background (Qinsong 1995, 82). Yet *The First Emperor's Shadow* is more like Zhou's own artistic creation in the name of history. It was not his intention to accurately reconstruct what had happened between these historic figures. When he accepted media interviews, he did not even try to hide his indifferent attitude toward the inaccuracy of Chinese history. As he said,

I'm not interested in history. ... Due to its flexibility and utility, history can function as a tool, which makes it less real. [Therefore] I don't trust what is written down in books. Sima Qian, the author of *The Records of Grand Historian* might be merely a storyteller, and if that's the case, why can't we tell a story? (Zhou and Chai 1996, 46)

Zhou's conception of history was echoed in some Chinese scholars' articles at the time. This new understanding of history was regarded as a conceptual change that emerged after the openness (Chen 1997; Wang 1999).

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<sup>59</sup> The zhu is an ancient zither, struck or plucked with a stick.

No matter what message the director would like to convey through this film, he had to face both his investor and the market, and this is probably another reason why he did not faithfully reflect the so-called history. Successfully attracting the highest investment in his time, Rmb 4, 000, 000, Zhou had to shoot a film that would sell for the interests of the investor, Ocean Film Company (Dayang Yingye). He said,

As a director, it's my professional ethics to be responsible for my investor, and for my audiences who will pay for the film. If I am a historian, and I get paid for doing research, then I will take the responsibility of [my research of] history. But I'm just a film director." (Zhou, Chai, 1996: 47)

Therefore, many details in the plot were made as selling points, among which was the use of qin music. As Zhou pointed out that one of the primary functions of the qin music is to create an "oriental" atmosphere. According to "The Summary of Discussion on the Script of *The First Emperor's Shadow*," the director and his consultants took into account the association between representing the orient in the film and winning awards overseas. However, maybe unintentionally, this movie aroused more domestic consumers' retrospection of the past of China, than foreign film critics' interest. In addition, *The First Emperor's Shadow* was considered as a step toward a general public tolerance of a rising subcategory of historical dramas in China, the dramatic interpretation (Xi Shuo) of history. This subcategory allows directors to tell a modern story via the displacement of time in order to fulfill a variety of purposes, such as pure entertainment or artistic creation. This approach has gradually grown into a major one in historical dramas nowadays. Consequently, the historical topics became popular along with the flexibility and accessibility of contents.

Similar to Zhou Xiaowen's decision to articulate his idea in a risky and controversial manner, Li Xiangting was also determined to present and promote qin music through this

unconventional setting. As Zhou said in an interview “Li Xiangting said, ‘as long as I can popularize this instrument, I would do anything necessary’” (CCTV, 2008). It is safe to say that to collaborate with a partner like Zhou Xiaowen, who was not only recognized as one of the most successful directors in the film industry in the 1990s, but also able to shoot a film that obtained the highest budget in its own time, facilitated the purpose of popularizing his performance in the film.

## **5.2 TOWARD COMMERCIAL COLLABORATIONS WITH THE AV MEDIA INDUSTRY**

The collaboration between Li Xiangting and Zhou Xiaowen resulted in the increasing application of qin music in the audio-visual media products and the formation of a commercial collaborative mode between qin musicians and media institutions and professionals.

This mode firstly manifests itself mainly in the heavy use of the improvisation of qin music, particularly when qin music is embedded in the plot, a skill which had not been used widely until Li Xiangting fully explored the flexibility and adaptability of this technique and utilized it to work with film directors. Improvisation is quite applicable to these collaborations in that it not only creates flexible changes of music in order to fit the tempo of the film, but also contribute to the development of the plot. Bill Laswell, the influential bassist and producer, said: “When a collaboration works between two people, that creates a kind of third power, a force or energy that becomes bigger than the two. That happens quite a bit in improvisation, where music can actually happen. It’s not preconceived. It’s not prerecorded. It’s not predicted. It’s not controlled. And it sometimes can produce a magical effect which is incredibly orchestrated and perhaps

even handed down from somewhere else” (Timothy 2007, 131). Laswell may not be able to speak for all producers, who create music products by sampling other musics, or film directors who accompany their films by using unfamiliar music or music irrelevant to the story. but his emphasis on the use of improvisation in creating unexpected effects does delineate a common feature of this collaboration: producers or directors, who are often outsiders of the music they use, intentionally bring some changes to the original music as their contribution to their products, and different degrees of improvisation usually become the most effective approach musicians would use to negotiate with the producers/mediators.<sup>60</sup> In fact, after *The First Emperor’s Shadow* was released in 1996, several more big-budget films utilized qin music in their plots, and all of these excerpts in which the qin plays a dominant role are characterized by qin players’ improvisation to different degrees, either based largely on existing pieces, or on completely new material. The excerpt of “In the Chess Court” in *Hero* directed by Zhang Yimou, released in 2002, and the scene of qin duet in *Red Cliff* directed by John Woo Yu-Sen attest to the ongoing trend of qin representation in film.

A fundamental issue in the study of the collaboration involves the extent to which producers/mediators manipulate the collaborative results. Some may argue, as long as qin musicians improvise their music loosely based on producers’ instruction, it is difficult to intervene or manipulate their music, because they exercise a crucial role by actually composing and producing the music. However, in some cases, the negotiation between the musician and the director is quite evident and even radical, and the results do not favor qin musicians. Li Xiangting once encountered a situation in which his negotiation did not work out. He said John

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<sup>60</sup> As Timothy Taylor notes, “[w]hereas a collaborator works with real musicians, onstage or in the studio, the producer is a mediator between sounds, some live and others not.” (Taylor, Timothy D. 2007. *Beyond Exoticism*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.)

Woo, the director of *Red Cliff*, once asked him to extemporize a qin duet between two characters in the film, with one part revealing one character's melancholy and discomposure, and the other part representing another's brightness and amicability. He declined the director's proposal and explained that a qin piece can only reflect a single theme, rather than embody two paradoxical thoughts; even if it is a duet between two qin players in the form of a dialogue. At the end, he did not get the job.<sup>61</sup> The point here is that the directors have their conceived ideas despite they are outsiders to the music. Thus, although improvisation can be greatly creative, the eventual creation has to somehow conform to and fulfill directors' expectation.

The presentation of qin performance in commercial AV media products also encouraged exaggeration of physical gestures in performance. In some cases, these gestures are so radical that they even change the musical language of the qin. Qin players who appear in the scene, no matter they are the actual players or not, often exaggerate their performing gestures in accord with the need of generating visual impacts. In *Hero*, the close-up shots feature the performer's hand gestures, and body movement. Even though the qin player in the scene, a real qin master named Xu Kuanghua, sits still, his hand gestures are expressive enough to convince audiences of the energy embodied in those moves. It should be noted that this exaggerated presentation of qin performance is not a borrowed practice, rather it is derived from the conventional concern for the visual component of a musical experience. Bell Yung has analyzed the choreographic and kinesthetic elements in qin performance, arguing that the visual impact some instructions in qin handbooks produce in the minds of both performers and audience must have had some effect on the performer and the audience alike (Yung 1984, 506). A consideration of the kinesthetic components of finger technique turns two hands into two dancers, dancing on the fingerboard

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<sup>61</sup> <http://paper.wenweipo.com/2008/12/24/RW0812240001.htm>, accessed on April, 30<sup>th</sup>, 2010.

(Yung 1984, 508). But qin music in AV media content exaggerate the performing features of the qin tradition which favors serenity and contemplation. In some cases, the alterations become so intense that some qin musicians will borrow playing techniques of other string instruments for the sake of enhancing the intensity in their qin performing behaviors. As Zhao Jiazhen, the qin musician who played for the film *Red Cliff*, notes,

In order to better represent the required plot in the film and reflect characters' inner emotions, as well as to enlarge the audio expressions of the qin, we tried every effort. For instance, in the film excerpt, you may hear some sounds like war horses' neighing, and (that is because) I borrowed a playing technique of the pipa, "sweeping" the strings (Sao Xian). However, it is not easy to produce the similar effect on the qin as on the pipa, in that first of all, the strings of the higher range are too thin to make solid sounds, and the strings of the lower range are so thick and tightly stretched over the high bridge, that it's difficult to firmly press them. Therefore, when I played, I had to use four fingers (of my left hand) to press four strings together and slide upward and downward, and this requires a lot of energy. As a consequence, after I finished playing the neighing sounds, I got blisters on my left hand fingers. As a reminder, all you hear in that excerpt was completely played on a qin, with each pitch infused with my painstaking efforts, rather than accomplished by any audio effects generated by computer.<sup>62</sup>

These special sounds produced by her qin performance was later transformed into a qin battle between two protagonists. Zhao posted on her own website a video of her actual performance of this duet piece, cooperated with another qin musician, and presented the extraordinary sounds and movements made more convincingly through visual display.

Qin musicians' increasingly active commercial collaboration in AV media products has hastened the incorporation of the qin into the realm of popular culture in China, especially after 2000. Juxtaposed with scenes that barely have any association with the qin tradition, this instrument is more and more reappropriated to convey alien meanings and ideologies usually by altering its own features in newly created settings. Beginning from his initial experiment of

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<sup>62</sup> For the Chinese account of Zhao Jiazhen's experience of playing film score for the film *Red Cliff*, see Zhao Jiazhen, "Huiyu wo wei dianying *Chibi* luzhi guqin yinyue" [Recall how I recorded qin music for the film *Red Cliff*], Zhao Jiazhen's Sohu Blog, <http://zhaogujin.blog.sohu.com/94338158.html> (accessed on September, 2010).

depicting sexual scenes in *The First Emperor's Shadow*, Li Xiangting provided a model of his successors with infinite possibilities. In *Hero*, qin performance leads two swordsmen into a medium of contemplation where they mentally fight a duel. This kind of mental duel was described in fantasy kung fu exists novels and then film adaptation, the use of qin music at such a mental duel can be traced to the most orthodox theories from antiquity on the nature of qin. The director therefore justifies the use of qin music in a fighting scene visually with artistic distortion and technological grafting. In another film I mentioned before, *Red Cliff*, the qin is not only used to provide the platform for two protagonists' mental communication in addition to their musical duel, but also suggests a friendship between these two rivals, based on the famous historical anecdote of faithful qin friends (zhi yin). Even though these visual presentations may mislead the audience, since a large proportion of audiences will not know more than what the movie shows and probably will take the outcome of the creative collaboration between the director and the musician for granted, the impact of these big-budge commercial movies has disseminate qin music widely and enabled it to reach audiences and inform prospective consumers to such a degree that no other forms of media products can surpass. Hence, by being part of the popular cultural products, qin music obtained unprecedented popularity.

### **5.3 STRUGGLES FOR MEANINGS: OFFICIAL MEDIA VS. COMMERCIAL MEDIA**

Qin music's increased exposure in AV media products produced and owned by different media owners helps develop its diverse symbolic meanings. In Chapter 3, I argue that the introduction of market economy initiated the struggles for media market shares between official

media and private media. This new framework shaped through the economic reforms of media, however, is not entirely free of Party control, because the Party authority still maintains political control of media institutions to varying degrees. This tension between Party control and market forces has formed a propagandist/commercial model in Zhao Yuezhi's term (Zhao 1998, 151). It has become the main feature of the current development of mass media in China.

This propagandist/commercial model leads to a variety of visual presentations that embody the relatively intangible parameters of style, melody, and rhythm, that enrich and articulate what the qin signifies. As I have argued in prior chapters, the so-called mass media in China has experienced a long process of transformation, from the state-controlled homogenous system, to the emergence of democratic-participant media forms that masses can genuinely enjoy being represented in. As Peter Manuel points out, "this diversification and decentralization, as promoted by the media, can be seen in a positive light, as conducive to individual freedom and choice, and to the vitality of specialized communities (whether based on class, gender, ethnicity, etc.)." (Manuel 1993, 12) Not surprisingly, the qin has been presented in a variety of manners in the AV media, and its meanings largely depend on media control and media content.

### **5.3.1 Qin music in official media**

China Central Television (CCTV) is one of the most influential state-controlled media, and has become a significant platform for the publicity of qin performance, particularly after the qin was proclaimed by UNESCO as the second group of "Masterpieces of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity" on November 7, 2003. A subsequent surge of TV programs on the introduction of qin music and interviews of qin musicians reflected upon the official media's rising interest. These programs showed an official and political stereotype of seeking the



authentic tradition of the qin, portraying qin music as national cultural heritage handed down from antiquity. This pursuit of an authentic qin tradition, as cultural geographer Tim Oakes states, represents a “glorious” past of “a cultural geography,” “an ultra-stable spatial identity of Chineseness” (Oakes 2000, 667). One example was the qin performance in the opening ceremony of the 29th Olympic Games hosted by Beijing and broadcasted globally, which I mention in the Chapter 1. The qin performer, Chen Leiji, was dressed in a traditional Han robe and sat amidst other cultural icons such as ink brush and rice paper, and his music was accompanied by a full orchestra. He was placed on a huge LED scroll on the ground that showed a scroll of traditional ink-brush painting and calligraphy. Such displays were intended to project an “authentic” and traditional prototype of qin music, which represents a “collective memory” of the Chinese people. This qin performance in the national stadium “Bird’s Nest” vividly reconstructed an elite literati that emphasizes private performance and self-enlightenment. The discrepancy between its visual presentation and its symbolic meaning in this context raises a question that whose memory is actually recalled and represented in this Chineseness.

The official portrait of “Chineseness” is also varied. In some cases, the visual presentation of the qin taps into a decontextualized nostalgia of Han people. In a “Spring Festival Gala Show” broadcasted live on China Central Television in 2009, Li Xiangting’s performance is juxtaposed with sexually dressed female dancers who imitate both the appearance and gestures of the figures painted on Dunhuang murals. Dunhuang is a city in Gansu Province, located in the Northwest part of China, contiguous with Xinjiang Province—the Autonomous Region populated largely by the Uygur. The Dunhuang music projects strong non-Han images. The physical setting featured a qin player at the center of the stage dressed in a Han robe, performing music that was associated with the Han people; he was surrounded by Dunhuang dancers who signify the “glorious” past of

“cultural harmony” in the Western part of China. Furthermore the soundtrack of the video has the music of pipa woven with the sounds of the qin. As is widely known in China, the instrument pipa originated from Persia and West Asia; it was one of the most commonly depicted instruments on the Dunhuang murals. The soundtrack fuses the qin and the pipa playing a tune of Middle Eastern origin, implying a harmonious whole. Even though the sound of the qin is barely audible except in the very beginning and the very end, this montage, transcending time and space, vividly projects a metaphor of the long-term harmony and union between the Han and minorities residing in the Western part of China. This performance became more thought-provoking if examined within the context of Uyger uprising, which occurred in Xinjiang Province five months later after this gala TV show. The implication here is clear: the symbolic meaning of qin music can be flexible depending on what political message the media content is supposed to convey.

### **5.3.2 Qin music in commercial media**

Even though official media outlets such as CCTV play a remarkably important role of promoting a “traditional” image of qin music among Chinese people, some private enterprises actively disseminate qin music through the mass-media without government intervention and with different meanings. Rather than focusing on the “glorious” past, commercial films project modern images of this ancient instrument. As I have noted above, the uses of qin music in commercialized AV media products, particularly films, have massively facilitated the incorporation of qin music in modern popular culture of China. One example already cited is The qin duel scene in *Red Cliff* that popular film stars gesture-syncing a highly virtuoso, and rhythmically dense qin piece played by Zhao Jiazhen. Apparently this modernized qin

performance conquer the audience not only by its virtuosity but also due to its association with both the film and film stars. More importantly, it makes qin music even more dependent on the visual presentation of the film. In Zhao Jiazhen's concert in August 2010, entitled "Qinyun Shuimo (The Charm of the Qin as Ink Wash Painting)" (Figure 6), the scene of qin performance in the film was featured as one of the prime selling points: the excerpt of the qin duet from *Red Cliff* was used to form a synchronic sets of performances between the gesture-sync performance in the film and her live performance on stage (Figure 7).



Figure 6. Poster of Zhao Jiazhen's Audio-Visual Qin Concert “Qinyun shuimo [Charm of the qin as ink washing paintings]”<sup>63</sup>

<sup>63</sup> <http://blog.sina.com.cn/zhaojiazhenlicongnong>, accessed on September 15, 2010.



**Figure 7. The Stage Effect of Zhao Jiazhen's Audio-Visual Qin Performance of "Qin Duet" from the film *Red Cliff*<sup>64</sup>**

Facing abundant resources of qin music, traditional and modernized available in market and via mass media, a younger generation of qin music consumers should be aware of how much modernized qin performances deviate from tradition. However, it seems that such facts do not bear consequence in how young audiences relate to qin music. Some support the new sounds by purchasing these cultural products, and their interest in the new tradition becomes an important dynamic of the current vitality of qin music in modern China. In other words, they advocate the living tradition of this instrument and its reflection of their realistic life, because they neither can nor want to continuously relive in the past. Thus, the juxtaposition and parallel between the "glorious" tradition and the commercialized new trend are acceptable for many qin consumers, and this modern sound of this ancient echo constitutes the present continuous tense of their "Chineseness."

The visual representation of qin music in audio-video media products has extremely complex consequences, far beyond what I have analyzed above. But one result is very clear: the

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<sup>64</sup> <http://video.sina.com.cn/v/b/33058562-1598511091.html#33058562> (accessed September 15, 2010).

incorporation of qin music in AV products inevitably deepens the commercialization trend of the current development of qin music, and narrows the gap between the qin and other instruments circulating in the less controlled music market as mass commodities. As Peter Manuel defines, “popular music, ... [is] music ... disseminated as a mass commodity, and whose style can be seen to have evolved through its association with the mass media” (Manuel 1993, 161). Given this assumption, if the popularity of qin music can only be achieved by being disseminated via the most prevailing mass media, some changes and assimilations seem unavoidable to some extent. And it is the convergent change and assimilation that makes the qin “no longer unique but has become just like many other kinds of music” (Yung 2009, 163)—a dreadful inclination that will do not lead this instrument to a promising future in many traditional qin musicians’ view. Ironically, this seeming dead end is the goal other qin musicians have strived for. As Zhao Jiazhen said, “Guqin needs to get rid of the burden, by eliminating tradition and emphasizing its entity as a musical instrument. The tradition has almost crashed the qin. It is unrealistic to expect this instrument to carry excessive responsibilities” (Jiang 2009, 29-30). The popularity of qin music achieved in a commercialization process is concomitant with the loss of tradition, the loss of the historical aura, and the evolving identity of the qin to some extent. But the diversification of aesthetic standards and opinions toward the future of the qin suggests that a mass-mediated development of qin music is complex in nature.

## 6.0 CONCLUSION

The contemporary development of qin music disseminated through mass media in the People's Republic of China in the last half century roughly experienced two phases of Chinese musical culture—mass musical culture and popular musical culture, whose transition was perpetuated by the economic reform and media reform. During the mass musical culture period from the 1950s to 1970s, most qin musicians and their music went through a series of changes mainly through recordings and radio broadcasting: this elite instrument was contextualized in a new alien environment of media. Its elite tradition was paradoxically re-appropriated as one of the national cultural heritages that were “discursively produced as” the collective memory of all Chinese people. In addition, qin music was transformed from a self-enlightenment to a public entertainment which is dedicated to promoting political policies, and serving the proletarian class through a Party-control media network. These changes were accomplished in a highly-centralized and Party-control mass media system.

The popular musical culture was initiated by the economic reforms after the late 1970s, when the mass media system in China was gradually commercialized. This transformation has not only given rise to, like some media sociologists called, the divergence between the Party logic and the commercial logic, but also had great impact on media contents disseminated through different media channels, including that of qin music. In the newly formed commercial music market by the influx of cassettes in the 1980s, qin music quickly declined. When the

debate about whether or not qin musicians should play for commercial profit aroused in the qin circle, some pioneering qin musicians, for example Li Xiangting, began their musical experiments in order to win back their market share in the emerging popular music culture, by composing new qin pieces and collaborating with all kinds of official and commercial media institutes.

The government logic and the commercial logic concentrated on two different features of qin practices and shaped this instrument in two perspectives: the official media exploits the qin as an object representing Chinese culture and national cultural heritage, while the commercial media focus more on the sounds of the qin for the purpose of merging its music with popular musical genres that sell well. In the new commercial media, the Party authorities still maintains political control of media institutions to varying degrees. Therefore this tension between Party control and market forces has resulted in the juxtaposition of both perspectives of the contemporary qin practices.

The current representation of qin music in various Audio-Visual media products has extremely complex consequences, but one result is very clear: the incorporation of qin music in Audio-Video products hastens the commercialization of the development of qin music. As ethnomusicologist Bell Yung pointed out, the convergent change and assimilation of contemporary qin music caused by mass media dissemination has made the qin “no longer unique but has become just like many other kinds of music” (Yung 2 009, 163). However, those qin musicians who do not reject the commercialization of qin music believe that it is the tradition of qin music that needs re-evaluation, because the tradition of qin can be understood as a historical utterance of the past, rather than the unique authentic essence that should be strictly carried on nowadays.

The diversification and decentralization of both the sounds and meanings of qin music formed in the market-oriented mass media system may be viewed from a broader perspective of the transformation of the modern Chinese society in recent decades. The individuals and the country have the choice of pursuing their cultural nostalgia by cultivating China's "glorious" long tradition, or to resist living in the past by embracing the vitality of modern life. The older generations believe in an organic society<sup>65</sup> in which changes happen naturally and choices are selected for them by elite leaders. In contrast, today's Chinese consumers are given many choices that they can make decisions on behalf of themselves. The market-oriented mass media in China today have provided a structure through which such decisions are possible and are exercised. As a result, the content inevitably changes accordingly. The qin music today provides a concrete example this change.

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<sup>65</sup> Li Xiangting attributed the modern changes of the qin, including the use of metal-nylon strings and virtuoso performing styles, to a natural selection and natural progress of human society (Zheng 2006, 75-76).



## APPENDIX A

### TRANSCRIPTION OF *FLOWING WATER*, SECTION 6<sup>66</sup>

This transcription<sup>67</sup> is based on Guan Pinghu's performance, transcribed by Xu Jian.

(6)

The musical score consists of five staves of Western staff notation. Below each staff is Chinese qin tablature. The tablature includes characters such as 鸞, 鷗, 筇, 四, 三, 二, 一 and numbers 1-7, often with '上' (up) or '下' (down) indicating fingerings. Some numbers are written vertically. The music is in a single melodic line on a Western staff.

<sup>66</sup> Music Research Institute of China Art Academy, and Beijing Guqin Association, *Guqin Quji* (Beijing: People's Music Press, 2003): 40-42.

<sup>67</sup> Due to the flexible rhythmic density of qin music, Xu Jian does not use time signatures in his transcription.



This page contains seven staves of musical notation, likely for a guitar or piano. The notation includes notes, rests, and various musical symbols such as slurs and accents. Below the notes, there are numerous annotations in Chinese characters and numbers, which appear to be chord symbols or fingering instructions. The annotations include terms like '第几' (numbered), '中' (middle), '大' (big), and '小' (small), along with specific note numbers (e.g., 二, 三, 四, 五, 六, 七). The staves are arranged vertically, and the music progresses from top to bottom. The overall style is that of a traditional Chinese musical score with Western notation.

## APPENDIX B

### GLOSSARY OF CHINESE TERMS

#### ROMANIZED READING

#### SIMPLIFIED CHINESE

Bai De Yang Hang	柏德洋行
Bai Juyi	白居易
Bailey	百利
Beijing	北京
Beijing Daxue Yinyue Chuanxisuo	北京大学音乐传习所
Beijing Guqin Yanjiuhui	北京古琴研究会
Beijing Nüzi Shifan Daxue	北京女子师范大学
Cai Deyun	蔡德允
<i>Changmen yuan</i>	长门怨
Chen Leiji	陈雷激
Cheng Gongliang	成公亮
chuantong yinyue	传统音乐
Dayang Yingye	大洋影业
dizi	笛子
Dongfang hong	东方红
Dongfang zhizi	东方之子
<i>Dongting qiusi</i>	洞庭秋思
Dunhuang	敦煌
erhu	二胡
<i>Feng qiu huang</i>	凤求凰
Fenghua Guoyue	风华国乐
<i>Fengxue zhulu</i>	风雪筑路
fu	拂

gaige kaifang	改革开放
Gansu	甘肃
Gao Jianli	高渐离
gaoshan liushui rumengpin	高山流水入梦频
<i>Gesong gongchandang maozhuxi</i>	歌颂共产党毛主席
gong	宫
gu wei jin yong	古为今用
<i>Gu yuan</i>	古怨
Guan Pinghu	管平湖
<i>Guan shan yue</i>	关山月
Guang Pinghu	管平湖
<i>Guangling san</i>	广陵散
gun	滚
guoyue	国乐
Guoyue Gaijinshe	国乐改进社
hanfu	汉服
He Luting	贺绿汀
He Zuoru	何作如
Hezhen Qin She	合真琴社
huaxia	华夏
<i>Hujia shiba pai</i>	胡笳十八拍
Jiang Fengzhi	蒋风之
jianzi pu	减字谱
<i>Jieziyuan huapu</i>	芥子园画谱
Jilin	吉林
Jinan	济南
Jingji Tequ	经济特区
<i>Jingu qiguan</i>	今古奇观
Jiuxiao Huanpei	九霄环佩
Li Qi	李颀
Li Tingsong	李庭松
Li Zhongtang	李仲唐
Liaoyuan	辽源
Lin Lizheng	林立正
Liuli Chang	琉璃厂
<i>Longxiang cao</i>	龙翔操
Lü Ji	吕骥
<i>Meihua sannong</i>	梅花三弄
min yue	民乐
minjian yinyue	民间音乐
Minzu Yinyue Yanjiusuo	民族音乐研究所

Miao Tianrui	缪天瑞
Nanjing	南京
Pan Su	潘素
pipa	琵琶
<i>Qin ge</i>	琴歌
<i>Qin song</i>	秦颂
Qinyun Shuimo	琴韵水墨
Renwu	人物
Renwu Xinzhoukan	人物新周刊
<i>Sanxia chuange</i>	三峡船歌
saoxian	扫弦
<i>Sheng wu ai le lun</i>	声无哀乐论
shengwang zhiqi	圣王之器
shuqing yinyue	抒情音乐
<i>Si da jing</i>	四大景
Sima Ziwei	司马子微
<i>Songren ciyi</i>	宋人词意
<i>Su qin zhuan</i>	素琴传
<i>Suwu sijun</i>	苏武思君
Taipingyang Yingyin Gongsi	太平洋影音公司
taigu yiyin	太古遗音
<i>Tangren shiyi</i>	唐人诗意
<i>Tianwenge qinpu</i>	天闻阁琴谱
Tsar Teh-yun	蔡德允
Wang Di	王迪
wenrenqin	文人琴
Wu Jinglue	吴景略
Wu Wenguang	吴文光
xi shuo	戏说
Xi'an	西安
<i>Xiangfei yuan</i>	湘妃怨
xiao	箫
<i>Xiaoxiang shuiyun</i>	潇湘水云
Xie Tieli	谢铁骊
Xinjiang	新疆
<i>Xinjiang hao</i>	新疆好
Xu Jian	许健
Xun Zi	荀子
yaji	雅集
<i>Yangguan sandie</i>	阳关三叠
Yao Bingyan	姚炳炎

<i>Yi guren</i>	忆故人
yi qinshu ziyu	以琴书自娱
yiren	艺人
yirenqin	艺人琴
yishu	艺术
<i>Yu ge</i>	渔歌
<i>Yuangqu guyun</i>	元曲古韵
<i>Yuqiao wenda</i>	渔樵问答
Zha Fuxi	查阜西
Zhang Yimou	张艺谋
Zhang Ziqian	张子谦
Zhao Jiping	赵季平
zheng	筝
zhi	徵
<i>Zhi yin</i>	知音
zhongyue	中乐
zhongya qingsu	重雅轻俗
Zhongyang Renmin Guangbo Diantai	中央人民广播电台
Zhou Enlai	周恩来
Zhou Xiaowen	周晓文
Zhu Changwen	朱长文
zhu	筑
Zoujin Muhou	走进幕后
<i>Zuiyu changwan</i>	醉渔唱晚

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