

A STUDY OF THE PIANO WORKS OF CHU WANGHUA, WITH AN EMPHASIS ON
SIX PRELUDES

By

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ABSTRACT

From the early twentieth century to the present day, Chinese piano music has begun to enjoy enormous prosperity, integrating a modern and distinctive Chinese style with Western musical language. Chu WangHua is one of the most distinguished Chinese composers and pianists and has had great influence on the recent development of Chinese piano music. During his most turbulent compositional periods, Chu struggled with deep depression and pressure to succeed; however, he persisted in composing, his great passion. In his sixty-year compositional career, Chu produced a large body of repertoire, including piano works, concertos, symphonies, ensemble, string quartets and more; the majority of these are piano works. *Six Preludes* is one of Chu's most representative and remarkable works written in the Chinese style. The six pieces in this set, named *Bamboo in the Wind*, *Sound of Valley*, *On the Banks of the River*, *Berceuse*, *Elegie*, and *Memorial*, are based on Chinese traditional folk tunes and instrumental music and incorporate Western musical style, harmonic language, and compositional technique. This study will examine *Six Preludes*, emphasizing the following musical aspects: traditional Chinese scales and modes, parallel harmony, counterpoint, and formal structure, to explore the distinctions between Chinese and Western styles. Chu WangHua's unique approach to composition not only enables him to stand out from other Chinese composers, but also promotes Chinese piano music worldwide.

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INTRODUCTION

Chu WangHua has been recognized as one of the most influential and productive contemporary Chinese composers. The majority of his compositional output has been devoted to Chinese piano music. Studying his works not only provides valuable insights into the development of Chinese piano music, but also reflects how history, society and culture influenced the development of classical music in China. Additionally, it brings an understanding of the transition of Chinese composers' styles from regional, oriental, and traditional to modern, integrated, and collaborative.

Chu WangHua's compositional career can be divided into four periods: an early period in the 1950s, the great cultural revolutions from 1960 to 1976, the period after the cultural revolutions from 1978 to 1982, and his study abroad from 1982 onwards. Chu composed *Six Preludes* during the 1960s and 1970s, a turbulent time in the history of China. At that time, literature and arts were heavily influenced by the political environment. Nevertheless, this set of preludes strongly demonstrates the distinctive characteristics of Chu's piano music; it is deeply rooted in Chinese traditional culture and folk music, and it integrates Western musical language.

This document will be structured in four chapters with an introduction, explanation, analysis, and demonstration. Chapter I will introduce the development and history of Chinese piano music, Chu WangHua's brief biography, and a summary of his piano works. Chapter II will discuss the development of piano preludes in the West and China, and the background of *Six Preludes*. Chapter III will analyze the piece in detail, including its use of traditional Chinese scales and modes, parallel harmony, counterpoint, and formal

structure. Chapter IV will discuss the Chinese style of *Six Preludes* and performance practice implications. The discussion in this document will examine the features of typical Chinese piano music, highlight significant differences between Chinese and Western compositional styles, and promote cross-cultural understanding of Chinese and Western music.

CHAPTER I

THE HISTORY OF CHINESE PIANO MUSIC DEVELOPMENT

Piano music in China did not develop until the early twentieth century. The earliest western keyboard instrument recorded in Chinese history was the harpsichord brought by Italian missionary Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) to Chinese emperor Ming Shen Zong as a gift at the beginning of the seventeenth century.¹ A few centuries later, in the 1850s, a British businessman opened the first piano shop in Shanghai, China, called *Moutrie*, and sold the Western-made piano in China.² Due to the dramatic increase in communication and economic exchange between the West and East, western music in China became a significant social phenomenon. Some churches and missionary schools started offering piano lessons to Chinese students, which provided excellent opportunities to the Chinese public to learn about Western keyboard instruments.³

In the early twentieth century, many young Chinese musicians studied abroad in the United States and European countries. According to an article published by the National Tsing Hua University Research Fellowship Fund and Chinese Institute in America, there were sixteen Chinese students majoring in music who studied in America between the years of 1900-1924. Among them, thirteen were women, all majoring in piano at the New England Conservatory and other music schools in the Eastern United States.⁴ In the first

¹ Bian Meng, *Zhongguo Hangqin Wenhua zhi Xingcheng yu Fazhan* [The formation and Development of Chinese Piano Culture] (Beijing: Huayue Publisher, 1994), 5.

² Chen Yu-Chien. "A Short History of Chinese Music for Piano," (DMA diss., Florida State University, 1988), 1.

³ Bian Meng, *Zhongguo Hangqin Wenhua zhi Xingcheng yu Fazhan* [The formation and Development of Chinese Piano Culture], 6.

⁴ Wang Rong-Shen. "A Study of Five Chinese Piano Pieces with a Review of the Introduction and Development of the Piano in China," (DMA diss., Ball State University, 1995), 27.

generation of Chinese musicians, Dr. Xiao You-Mei was known as the father of modern music education in China. He studied at the Imperial University of Tokyo in Japan and the Leipzig Conservatory of Music in Germany. Dr. Xiao was the first Chinese musician who earned a Ph. D. from a Western country.

After returning to China, Dr. Xiao dedicated himself to establishing a higher educational institute and founded the National Conservatory of Music in Shanghai in 1927, which was the first independent professional music institution in China. As the dean of the conservatory at that time, Dr. Xiao recruited the earliest foreign faculty, including E. Levitin, Z. Pribitkova, B. Lazareff, Alexander Tcherepnin, and Boris Zakharoff from St. Petersburg Conservatory, S. Aksakoff from Moscow Conservatory, pianist Ada Bronstein from Germany, famous violinist and piano pedagogue Alfred Wittenburg, and Mario Paci from Italy, who served as the conductor of Shanghai Municipal Orchestra.⁵ Many of these musicians devoted their lives to teaching Chinese pianists; they also introduced a large amount of Western piano repertoire to Chinese students, such as J.S. Bach's *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, Beethoven's piano sonatas and concertos, as well as works by Mozart, Schumann, Schubert, Chopin, Grieg, Debussy, and Ravel. The faculty of the National Conservatory of Music brought the most advanced level of piano education to China. Those students who graduated from the conservatory became active concert artists and leading pedagogical figures in China.

With the development of Western piano music in China, Chinese musicians (especially composers) began to search for their own musical language. In 1934, Russian composer and pianist Alexander Tcherepnin organized a competition for piano compositions in China. The goal was to encourage Chinese composers to write piano

⁵ Ibid., 30.

pieces in a Chinese musical style. In that competition, He Lu-Ding's *Mu Tong Duan Di* [*The Shepherd Boy's Flute*] won the first prize. It was the first piece of Chinese piano music to be known to Westerners, as well as the first Chinese piano piece to be recorded on a gramophone. The success of *The Shepherd Boy's Flute* increased the popularity of piano music in China, and became a monument in the development of Chinese piano music, providing a model for Chinese composers to create piano music that belonged to their own culture.

In 1949, the People's Republic of China was established. From 1949-1966, Chinese piano music underwent significant growth due to the more open political environment. Eight major music conservatories emerged: Shenyang Conservatory, Sichuan Conservatory, Wuhan Conservatory, Xi'an Conservatory, Xinghai Conservatory, Tianjin Conservatory, the Central Conservatory of Music, and Shanghai Conservatory of Music. Many more music schools were also established, and the system of comprehensive music education has now been widely established throughout China. With access to advanced music education, many talented Chinese pianists have successfully competed and won prizes at international competitions, such as the Tchaikovsky International Competition, Chopin International Piano Competition, Liszt International Piano Competition, Queen Elizabeth International Competition, and the George Enesco International Piano Competition.

From the twentieth century to the present day, Chinese piano music has experienced enormous prosperity and development. The past century has seen the emergence of a new and promising generation of Chinese composers, as well as a large variety of Chinese piano compositions. Of this generation, Chu WangHua was one of the most prominent figures.

BIOGRAPHY OF CHU WANGHUA

Chu WangHua was born in 1941 in Yixing, Jiangsu province in China. His parents both studied abroad in England. His father was the chief editor of two major journals, *Guang Ming Ri Bao* and *Guan Cha*, in China. From his childhood, Chu already showed extraordinary musical talent. He learned to play piano and other Chinese music instruments at a young age. In 1952, eleven-year-old Chu was accepted to the Central Conservatory of Music, one of the most prestigious music conservatories in China, majoring in piano. A few years later, Chu's first composition, *The Village Song for Erhu*, was chosen to be performed at the China First National Music Festival in 1956, which marked him as the youngest composers in the festival. After that, Chu was officially transferred to study in the composition and theory department of the Central Conservatory of Music, under the tutelage of Xu Zhen-Ming, Zhu Qi-Hong, and He Zhen-Jing. During that time, Chu composed a number of solo pieces for piano, flute, erhu, and a quintet for woodwinds.

During his undergraduate study at the Central Conservatory of Music, Chu studied under Professor Yi Kai-Ji, who had been a student of Russian pianist Boris Zakharoff. Also, he continued to compose in his own time. Upon graduation in 1963, Chu was appointed as the staff pianist for the conducting department in the Central Conservatory. There, he was exposed to a large variety of Western music literature, including symphonies, operas, and symphonic poems. All the while, he continued to write piano compositions. He composed two of his most popular Chinese piano pieces during this time: *Celebrating the Day of Liberty [The Merry-Go-Round]* (1963) and *The Celebration of the Harvest* (1964).

However, with the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution in China, Chu WangHua experienced the gloomiest period in his life. 1966-1976 was the most turbulent time in China's history, a cataclysm for the entire nation and its culture. Chu continued to compose during this time despite the deep depression he was experiencing. In 1969, Chu was appointed to join the compositional team for *Yellow River Piano Concerto* by Chairman Mao's wife, Ms. Jiang Qing. He contributed mainly the piano solo part. The first premiere of *Yellow River Piano Concerto* was in Beijing in 1970; it was a great success and was praised by Chairman Mao. The concerto was widely spread across China through concerts, public radio, newspapers, etc. Through works such as *Yellow River Piano Concerto*, the Chinese public gradually accepted the piano and other Western orchestral instruments.

In 1973, Chu WangHua traveled around China to collect Chinese traditional folk music and composed a great deal of classical Chinese piano compositions. Representative works include *The Spring Mirrored the Moon*, *Xinjiang Capriccio*, *The Shining of The Red Star*, *The Liuyang River*, *The Hai Nan Soldiers*, *Song of the Mountain*, and *Piano Preludes*. They were used extensively as both teaching material and concert repertoire, being warmly regarded by audiences both within China and internationally.

In June of 1982, Chu WangHua went to Australia to pursue postgraduate study at the University of Melbourne, where he studied piano with Donald Thornton and composition with Peter Tahourdin. Chu graduated with a Masters of Music both in piano and composition in 1985. In this new environment, he was exposed to new genres, instrumentation, harmonic language, and compositional techniques. There he wrote a wide range of compositions, including symphonies, string quartets, piano concertos, and many

other rich works. In 1987, Chu won the Albert Maggs Composition Prize and was awarded an honorable Doctor of Music degree in 1988. He also became a member of the Australian Music Center at that time.

Chu WangHua's compositions have been performed all over the world. Two of his symphonies, *Ash Wednesday* and *Autumn Cry*, were performed by the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra in 1984 and 1989. *The Borderland Moon for soprano, sextet and percussion* was performed at the First Contemporary Chinese Composers Festival in Hong Kong in 1986. His *Piano Sonatina* was awarded a prize at the 21st Century Chinese Children's Piano Compositions Competition in 2000.

Although living abroad, Chu WangHua still showed commitment to his motherland. His devotion to and enthusiasm for Chinese piano music made him stronger over time. Chu consistently writes music articles for major journals in China, such as *Piano Artistry* and *People's Music*. He also has been invited frequently to various music conservatories and universities and has given concerts, lectures, and workshops throughout China. In 2002, the Chinese Cultural Council invited Chu to give a concert tour of his own compositions in major cities, including Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen. Chu was appointed as a visiting professor in Xiamen University in 2014.

CHU WANGHUA'S PIANO WORKS

Chu WangHua's composition career spanned more than sixty years. He produced a large variety of repertoire, including piano works, concertos, symphonies, ensemble, string quartets, and more. In total, Chu's output contains more than 60 compositions, and 40 are

piano works. Chu's piano works have become the standard repertoire of Chinese piano literature, honorably performed in many Chinese concerts and widely published in the teaching materials.

In general, Chu's piano composition style can be divided into three categories:

1. Direct transcriptions of Chinese folk songs or traditional instrumental music.
2. Compositions using Chinese folk tunes or other instrumental music as the primary thematic materials.
3. Compositions based on newly composed materials.

It is similar to Béla Bartók's three approaches to the use of folk music in composition:

1. Writing an accompaniment to a folk melody, with the accompaniment taking second place so that it will "only serve as an ornamental setting for the precious stone: the peasant melody."
2. Giving equal importance to the folk melody and the accompaniment.
3. Allowing the folk melody "only to be regarded as a kind of motto" on which the work is built.⁶

Compared to hundreds of years of Western piano music, the history of Chinese piano music is very short. During its eighty years of development, Chinese composers devoted themselves to creating piano music with a Chinese flavor. The transcription of traditional folk tunes became one of the most important methods. Composers very often transcribe either traditional instrumental music or folk songs into piano music. Chu wrote approximately thirty transcriptions. Among them are works based on the folk songs or

⁶ Béla Bartók and Benjamin Suchhoff, *Bela Bartok Essays* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 350-352.

themes from other composers' songs (*Woodcutter Liu Hai, Merry Sun Rising, Song of the Mountain, The Jasmine, From Far Away, Love Song, Tune of Guessing, Celebrating the Day of Liberty, The Hai Nan Soldiers, The Shining of The Red Star, The Liuyang River*) and works based on the traditional instrumental music (*The Spring Mirrored the Moon, The Celebration of the Harvest, Impromptu*).

In the second category, composers usually use folk tunes or traditional instrumental music as the primary theme to unify the entire piece. Chu often traveled to remote areas in China to collect original folk songs and folk dances. He then combined those folk elements with Western compositional devices in his piano works. Representative works include *Fisher-Roy of the South Sea, Xinjiang Capriccio, Concert-Etude: Dance, Variations for Piano, The Suite for Jiannan Scenes, Manjianghong-Prelude for the left hand, and The Dockers Song*.

The pieces belonging to the third category are based on newly composed materials, but they maintain a distinctive Chinese musical flavor. These compositions directly reflect the composer's individual musical style. As Chu mentioned in an interview, "He find [sic] out from his own experience that it is not enough to just write the transcriptions, the real way to resolve the problem of piano music nationalized is to create our own music integrated with our heritage and culture."⁷ During his early compositional period, Chu tended to compose small-scale pieces. The genres he commonly chose were piano preludes, variations, suites, sonatas, and etudes. Representative works include *Capriccioso Suite: The Sound of the Temple, Sonata No.1, Sonata No. 2, Sonatina- to the Children of Today, Pillars of the Community, Barcarolle, Prelude and Toccata, and Six Preludes*.

⁷ Zhang Qian, "For developing Chinese Piano Music," *The Central Conservatory of Music Journal* Vol.1 (1982), 61.

CHAPTER II

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PIANO PRELUDE IN CHINA AND WESTERN COUNTRIES

The prelude is considered as one of the oldest genres of keyboard music. It originally functioned as an introductory movement to liturgical services, vocal music, or other instrumental pieces such as fugues or suites. The earliest preludes were written for organ, and they were used to introduce vocal music in church. The oldest surviving examples appear in Adam Ileborgh's tablature of 1448, which contains five short *Praeambula* for organ.⁸ The main purpose of these pieces is to set the pitch for the singers in church. During the sixteenth century, the keyboard prelude was developed in other forms, such as the toccata, fantasia, and ricercare, but the improvisatory function remained the central element. In the seventeenth century, the main development of the genre was found in the compositions of German composers (such as Froberger, Frescobaldi, and Sweelinck), Italian composers (Andrea and Giovanni Gabrieli), and English composers (William Byrd and John Bull).

In the Baroque period, new developments appeared in France. Inspired by lute music, French composers developed a new distinctive style of unmeasured preludes. These preludes are written without specific rhythm and meter, which allowed the performer to improvise its rhythm, tempo, and artistic interpretation. Louis Couperin and D'Anglebert are representative composers of this style.

⁸ David Ledbetter and Howard Ferguson. "Prelude." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music online.* Oxford University Press, accessed May 1, 2015, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.www2.lib.ku.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/43302>.

In the Romantic period, the prelude was revived but given a new definition. Many composers wrote preludes and fugues, such as Mendelssohn's *Six Preludes and Fugues Op. 35*, Liszt's *Prelude and Fugue based on the motif B-A-C-H*, and Franck's *Prelude, choral et fugue*. Hummel was the first to publish a set of 24 preludes (Op. 67) in all major and minor keys, in 1814-1815. However, Chopin gave the prelude a new definition in a set of 24 preludes (Op. 28) written 1836-1839, which became the new paradigm of the genre. The form of his preludes varies. Some are quite short, while others are larger in scale. These preludes are written as independent character pieces with exquisite musical qualities; they became the model for many later composers, such as Alkan (Op. 64), Heller (Op. 81), Busoni (Op. 37).⁹ Chopin's preludes also influenced even later composers, including Rachmaninoff, Debussy, and Scriabin.

Many composers in the twentieth century also wrote large sets of piano preludes. For example, Rachmaninoff composed 24 preludes. Debussy also wrote a set of 24 preludes in two books. Alexander Scriabin composed more than 90 piano preludes. Dmitri Shostakovich wrote *24 preludes* (Op. 34) and *24 Preludes and Fugues* (Op. 87). Olivier Messiaen composed a set of eight piano preludes in 1929. Kabalevsky wrote numerous preludes including *Twenty-four Preludes* (Op. 38), *Six Preludes and Fugues* (Op. 61), *Four Preludes* (Op. 5), and *Four Preludes* (Op. 20).

The piano prelude is also a common genre in Chinese piano music. In the early 1930s and 1940s, composers started to experiment with this genre. There are a few successful examples, including Ding Shan-De's *Three Piano Prelude*, Chen Tian-He's *Piano Prelude*, and Deng Er-Jing's *Prelude*. These works were typically composed as independent pieces, combining Western composition devices with Chinese folk music

⁹ Ibid.

elements. For instance, Chen Tian-He's *Piano Prelude* was written in ternary form but was based on Chinese traditional music modes.

After the 1950s, numerous preludes appeared in Chinese piano music. These works either appeared as independent pieces or paired with fugues. Many pieces also bear programmatic titles. Some representative works include Chu Wanghua's *Six Preludes*, Zhu Jian-Er's *Prelude No. 2 "The Flowing Water,"* Huang An-Lun's *12 Piano Preludes*, Zhu Gong-Yi's *A Minor Prelude, E Major Prelude, and B Minor Prelude*, Chen Min-Zhi's *Prelude and Fugue No. 1 and No. 2*, Rao Yu-Yan's *Prelude and Fugue-Poem, Prelude and Fugue*, and Xu Wei's *Prelude No. 1 and No. 2*.

In the 1980s, many young Chinese composers started to write music in modernist compositional languages such as atonalism, serialism, and neo-classism. As a result, Chinese piano music encompassed a variety of compositional styles and became a distinctly contemporary musical expression. The well-known pieces include Guo Wen-Jing's *The Gorge*, Ma Jian-Ping's *Prelude*, Chen Da-Ming's *Overture*, and Liao Sheng-Jing's *24 Piano Preludes*. Notably, Liao Sheng-Jing composed *24 Piano Preludes* in the twenty-four Chinese pentatonic modes, which are based on the twenty-four lunar seasons; Liao associated each prelude with one climate season. Meanwhile, the composers of the older generation continued producing many works using a less modernist compositional approach. For instance, Chen Ming-Zhi continued his series of preludes and fugues, Ding Shan-De composed *Six Preludes* during his late period, Wan Li-Shan wrote *Five Preludes and Fugues* (which became his signature work), and Luo Zhong-Rong composed *Five Preludes and Fugues in Chinese Modes*.

Although there are many differences between these preludes in terms of form, harmonic language, and compositional technique, the pieces all share the one common feature of distinctive Chinese music style. As seen in *Six Preludes*, Chu WangHua combined Chinese traditional music elements with different Western compositional devices to form his unique Chinese style.

THE BACKGROUND OF *SIX PRELUDES*

Chu WangHua shows a great interest in piano preludes. As he said in an interview, “I think [the] prelude as a genre can provide much more freedom in terms of subject and music style. As a composer, I can freely express myself and write improvisatory-like short pieces.”¹⁰ Chu wrote over a dozen piano preludes; of these twelve, he chose six to group as a collection, which he then titled *Six Preludes*. Chu also provided a programmatic title for each piece: *Bamboo in the Wind*, *Sound of Valley*, *On the Banks of the River*, *Berceuse*, *Elegie*, *Memorial*.

Bamboo in the Wind, On the Banks of the River, and Berceuse

Bamboo in the Wind, *On the Banks of the River*, and *Berceuse* were composed in 1961 when Chu was a junior student in the Central Conservatory of Music. During that period, Chairman Mao released the policy of “let a hundred flowers blossom, let a hundred schools of thought contend.” Chinese piano music experienced rapid growth. A large

¹⁰ Zhang Qian, “For developing Chinese Piano Music,” *The Central Conservatory of Music Journal* Vol. 1 (1982), 62.

corpus of piano music emerged, which included Ding Shan-De's *Xinjiang Dance No. 1* and *Children Suite Happy Holiday*, San Tong's *Seven Inner Mongolia Folk Songs*, Zhu Jian-Er's *Piano Prelude No. 1 & No. 2*, and Chen Pei-Xun's *Butterflies Theme and Variation*. Composers made significant advances in Chinese piano repertoire in terms of music style, harmonic language, and compositional technique.

Chu taught himself how to compose while studying in the piano department at the Central Conservatory. As a junior student, he wrote these three piano preludes, *Bamboo in the Wind*, *On the Banks of the River*, and *Berceuse*. According to the composer,

In the 1960s, the way I composed or transcribe[d] music is usually when I get inspiration, I choose the music materials first, plan how to construct the piece, and then try to play on the piano with improvisation, continue improving until it is done. In terms of harmony, I usually hear them first inside, then try out on piano; as for the texture, more commonly I improvise and compose on the piano.¹¹

Bamboo in the Wind is inspired by an ancient tune of Chinese traditional instrumental music. In this piece, Chu tried to imitate the sound of Chinese traditional instruments such as the *Zheng* and the *Xiao*. For example, at the end of the piece, Chu uses *glissandi* on the black keys of the piano to imitate the sliding effect of *Zheng*. *On the Banks of the River* is a short lyrical piece portraying a beautiful tone poem. It depicts the scene of two lovers pining for each other while they were separated by the Yangtze River. *Berceuse* depicts the composer's expressions of praise for the warmth and delicate sensibility of maternal love, and is also a metaphor for the composer's love of his motherland.

¹¹ Chu Wang-Hua, "Discussion on The Spring Mirrored the Moon," *Piano Artistry* Vol. 1(1999), 10.

The background of *Sound of Valley*, *Elegie*, and *Memorial*

Sound of Valley, *Elegie*, and *Memorial* were composed in 1979. With the end of the Chinese culture revolution in 1976, musicians regained their right to write to compose freely. Composers started to explore new compositional techniques and methods. Chu WangHua wrote these three preludes while he studied composition with Mr. Jiang Ding-Xian. These pieces exhibit Chu's experimentation with modulation, polytonality, counterpoint, and texture.

Sound of Valley was composed after Chu WangHua traveled back from visiting Lao Mountain in QingDao, China. He was inspired by the gorgeous natural landscape and used his creative imagination to portray the beautiful scenery of Chinese valleys, streams, and mountains. The materials of *Elegie* came from a poem's accompanying music; in this prelude, you will hear the theme of *The Internationale*. *Memorial* was based on the Monument to the People's Heroes in Tiananmen Square in Beijing and depicts the heroism and patriotism of Chinese people during the war; the piece ends with the Chinese national anthem.

CHAPTER III

MUSICAL ANALYSIS OF *SIX PRELUDES*

Six Preludes represents Chu WangHua's early compositional style, combined with Chinese traditional folk music and further explorations of the composer's distinctive "Chinese style." In this chapter, I will discuss address the following aspects of these pieces in detail: Chinese mode, tonality, harmonic language, formal structure, and texture.

TRADITIONAL CHINESE SCALES AND MODES

Traditional Chinese music was developed in its own music theory system and is built upon a pentatonic scale. There are five fundamental notes of the scale, called *Zhengyin*. These five fundamental notes have their special names as *gong* 宫, *shang* 商, *jue* 角, *zhi* 徵, *yu* 羽, corresponding to *do*, *re*, *mi*, *sol*, *la* of Western solfege (Figure 1). The other notes are called *Pianyin*, meaning deviating notes.

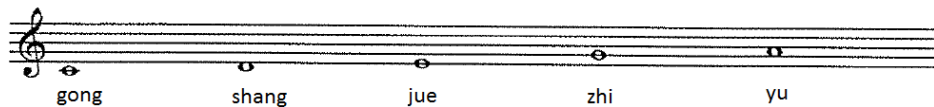


Figure 1: Fundamental notes of the Chinese pentatonic scale

Each of these five fundamental notes can be the tonic of a pentatonic mode. Therefore, there are five basic pentatonic modes: *gong* mode, *shang* mode, *jue* mode, *zhi* mode, and *yu* mode (Figure 2).

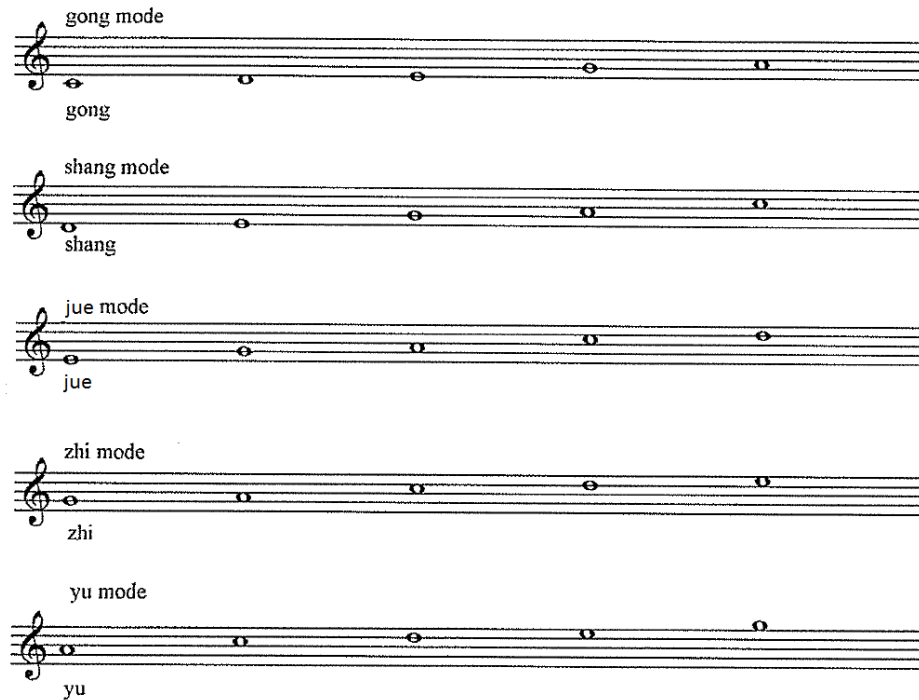


Figure 2: Five modes of the Chinese pentatonic scale

In addition, there are also hexatonic (six-note) and heptatonic (seven-note) scales in Chinese music. With one added note (*pianyin*), the pentatonic scale becomes a hexatonic scale. With two added notes (*pianyin*), it becomes a heptatonic scale. There are three common heptatonic scales: *Yayue* scale, *Qingyue* scale, *Yanyue* Scale. The *Yayue* scale includes the addition of a raised fourth scale degree (*bianzhi*) and seventh degree (*biangong*). The *Qingyue* scale includes an added fourth scale degree (*qingjiao*) and seventh degree (*biangong*). The *Yanyue* scale adds the fourth scale degree (*Qingjiao*) and a lowered seventh degree (*run*).¹² (See Figure 3).

¹² Ho Lu-Ting and Han Kuo-huang, "On Chinese Scales and National Modes," *Asian Music*, Vol. 14 No. 1 (1982), 134.

Yayue Scale

gong shang jue **bianzhi** zhi yu **biangong** gong

Qingyue Scale

gong shang jue **qingjiao** zhi yu **biangong** gong

Yanyue Scale

gong shang jue **qingjiao** zhi yu **run** gong

Figure 3: Hexatonic and heptatonic scales

*Bamboo in the Wind*¹³ was composed using traditional Chinese modes. The theme (mm. 1-12) was written in *Qingyue* scale and B-flat *jue* mode. Among them, F and C-flat are added notes; F is *biangong*, and C-flat is *qingjiao* (Example 1).

Andante grazioso ♩ = 60

mp

con ped.

8^{va}

p

Example 1: *Bamboo in the Wind*, mm. 1-13

¹³ Dao-Jing Tong and Wang Qing-Yan, eds., *Chu Wanghua Selected Works for the Piano*. (Shanghai: Shanghai Music Publisher, 2010), 24.

The transition after the main theme (mm. 13-23) was written using the *Yayue* scale.

The mode is B-flat *Yu* mode; G is *bianzhi*, and C is *biangong* (Example 2).

The image shows a musical score for 'Bamboo in the Wind' (Example 2), measures 13-23. The score is in B-flat major and 3/4 time. It features a piano accompaniment with parallel chords and a melodic line in the right hand. The melodic line includes a scale-like passage in the upper register, marked '8va'. The score includes dynamic markings such as 'mf', 'poco accel.', and 'poco rit.'

Example 2: *Bamboo in the Wind*, mm. 13-23

PARALLEL HARMONY

In *Six Preludes*, Chu WangHua frequently uses a parallel chord progression. The examples also can be found in Debussy's piano preludes. The progression of parallel chords (also referred to as 'planing') creates an open sound, which typically represents the characteristic, mysterious-sounding atmosphere of Chinese ancient music.

For instance, in Example 3 the entire coda of *Sound of Valley* contains parallel quintal chords with octave doubling.

The image displays a musical score for the coda of 'Sound of the Valley'. It consists of four systems of piano music, each with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The first system begins with a 'Tempo I' marking and a dynamic of 'pp'. The music features complex textures with parallel motion in both hands, often using sixteenth-note patterns. The second and third systems continue this texture with various melodic lines and harmonic support. The fourth system concludes the piece with a final cadence, marked with a double bar line and repeat dots.

Example 3: *Sound of the Valley*, coda

Similar compositional techniques appear in *Berceuse* in mm. 19-29, as can be seen in the passages of parallel fourths and fifths (Example 4).

Another significant feature in *Six Preludes* is the presence of ostinatos. *On the Banks of the River* is written based on a pattern of broken chords in thirty-second notes, which appears throughout the entire piece (Example 5). It symbolizes the running river that separates the two lovers.

Example 4: *Berceuse*, mm. 19-29

Example 4: *Berceuse*, mm. 19-29

Example 5: Ostinato pattern in *On the Banks of the River*

Example 5: Ostinato pattern in *On the Banks of the River*

Another example occurs in *Memorial*. In mm. 14-24 (Example 6), the repetitive patterns of the dotted thirty-second notes create a strong pulse. It embodies the drumbeat of the military march, which motivates the Chinese people to fight in the aggressive war.

The musical score for Example 6, *Memorial*, mm. 14-24, is presented in three systems. Each system consists of a grand staff with a treble clef on top and a bass clef on the bottom. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major or D minor), and the time signature is 4/4. The first system (mm. 14-16) shows a rhythmic pattern of dotted thirty-second notes in the bass line. The second system (mm. 17-19) includes dynamic markings such as *p*, *tre corda*, and *mf*, along with articulation marks like *m.d.* and *m.s.* The third system (mm. 20-24) features a forte (*f*) dynamic and continues the rhythmic pattern. The score is marked with various dynamics and articulations throughout.

Example 6: *Memorial*, mm. 14-24

A similar example appears in mm. 31-36 (Example 7). The repetitive pattern provides the strong rhythmic impulse propelling the entire piece to the dramatically climatic ending.



Example 7: Memorial, mm. 31-36

HARMONY AND COUNTERPOINT

Unlike Western music, Chinese music tends to be based on melody without harmony. The harmony and counterpoint of Western music do not occur in traditional Chinese music. Chu WangHua, however, effectively combines Western compositional techniques together with Chinese folk tunes to create his own musical style.

For example, in *On the Banks of the River*, in order to portray the scene of the two pining lovers separated by Yangtze River, Chu WangHua intentionally uses two contrapuntal lines, one in each hand, to represent the two lovers yearning for each other (Example 8).¹⁴ To strengthen the individuality of the musical characters, Chu deliberately chose a theme in d minor for one of the lovers in the right hand, while g minor in the left

¹⁴ Program notes by the composer for his concert tour in China, 2001.

Li, Vivian. *A Survey of Chu Wang-Hua's Piano Works*. DMA diss., University of Houston, 2005, 28.

hand represents the other. All the while, the ostinato resembles the running Yangtze River that keeps them apart.

Moderato ♩ = 100

m.d. p

ppp sempre

mp espr.

m.s. p

m.s. con ped.

p

m.d.

mp m.d.

Example 8: *On the Banks of the River*, mm. 1-11

Another example of contrapuntal writing occurs in *Bamboo in the Wind* (Example 9). The main theme appears in the left hand, representing the ancient instrument *Xiao*,

while another contrapuntal line in the inner voice of the right hand resembles the instrument *Zheng*.



Example 9: *Bamboo in the Wind*, mm. 1-8

FORMAL STRUCTURE

Six Preludes contains three classical forms: one-part form, binary form, and ternary form. *Sound of Valley*, *Berceuse*, *Elegie*, and *Memorial* are written in ternary form, *On the Banks of the River* is in one-part form, and *Bamboo in the Wind* is in binary form.

Bamboo in the Wind

A			Transition		B				Coda	
B-flat <i>Jue</i> Mode			B-flat <i>Yu</i> Mode		E-flat <i>Shang</i> Mode				E-flat <i>Shang</i> Mode	
a	b	c	a	b	a	b	c	d	a	b
1-4	5-9	10-12	13-22	23	24-27	28-31	32-36	37-41	42-48	49-55

Sound of Valley

A					B				A1			
F minor					C Minor – E-flat Minor –A-flat Major				F Minor			
Intro	a	b	a1	b1	a2	Transition	a3	b2	a	b	a1	b1
1-2	3	6	9	12	16	25-30	31-36	37-47	48	51-53	54-56	57
	-	-	-	-	-				-			-
	5	8	11	15	24				50			61

On the Banks of the River

Intro	a	b	a1
1-2	3-13	14-29	30-41
RH: D Minor LH: G Minor			

Berceuse

A			B		A1		
E Major			C Major – B-flat Major – E-flat Major		E Major		
Intro	a	a1	b		a	a1	code
1-2	3-6	7-10	11-18		19-22	23-26	27-32

Elegie

A								B					A1				
G-sharp Minor								D-sharp Minor – F-sharp Minor					G-sharp Minor				
a	a1	b	a2	a	a1	b	b2	a3	a4	b3	a5	Trans	a	a1	b	a2	co da
1	3	5	7	9	11	13	15	17	19	21	23	25	30	32	34	36	39
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2	4	6	8	10	12	14	16	18	20	22	24	29	31	33	35	38	41

Memorial

A					B	A1				
B-flat Major					G Minor	B-flat Major				
a	b	a	b1	trans	c	b2	b3	b4	coda	
1-2	3-4	5-6	7-11	12-13	14-24	25-26	27-28	29-30	31-40	

Figure 4: Formal analysis of the movements in *Six Preludes*

CHAPTER IV

THE “CHINESE STYLE” OF *SIX PRELUDES*

As Chu WangHua describes in the “Author’s Words” for his piano album, his compositions have been influenced by Chinese traditional culture and folk music. The “Chinese Style” is both the root and the ultimate goal of his piano works. In order to understand and truly express the Chinese Style, he believes pianists need to have a deep understanding of the following two aspects:

1. The relationship between Chinese piano music and Chinese history, as well as between the origin of Chinese traditional culture and Chinese modern society.
2. The influence on Chinese piano music of native folk songs, ancient and modern Chinese folk music compositions with traditional instruments, and Chinese opera and paintings.¹⁵

Six Preludes profoundly demonstrates the distinctive “Chinese Style” of Chu WangHua’s works. One of the most prominent features is the imitation of Chinese traditional instrumental music.

Bamboo in the Wind represents two ancient Chinese instruments, *Zheng* and *Xiao*. The *Zheng* is one of the oldest plucked instruments in China, and has been used in Chinese music for over 2,500 years. The *Zheng* belongs to the zither family and contains 21 strings and a movable bridge (Figure 5).

¹⁵ Dao-Jing Tong and Wang Qing-Yan, eds. *Chu Wanghua: Selected Works for the Piano* (Shanghai: Shanghai Music Publisher, 2010), 10.



Figure 5: *Zheng*¹⁶

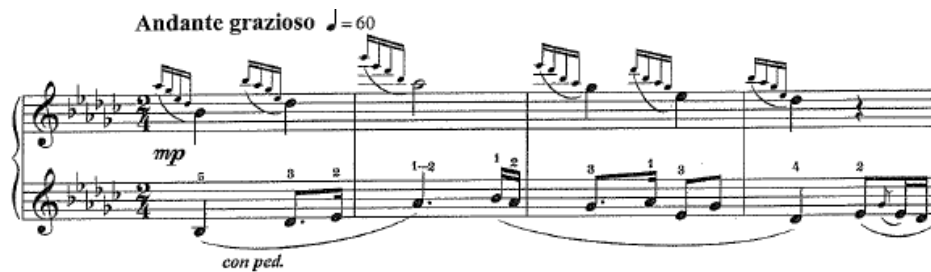
Xiao is an ancient vertical flute-like instrument, generally made from bamboo. It usually has six to eight finger holes with the blowing hole at the top end (Figure 6).



Figure 6: *Xiao*¹⁷

¹⁶ *Guzheng Baike*. <http://guzheng.baik.com/article-333355.html> (accessed May 1, 2015).

Chu Wanghua effectively chooses certain piano textures to imitate the sound of these two instruments. For example, the main theme of *Bamboo in the Wind* displays the typical ancient ensemble playing of *Zheng* and *Xiao*. As seen below in Figure 10, Chu uses the grace notes to imitate the sliding effect of *Zheng* in the right hand, and the theme of *Xiao* occurs in the left hand.



Example 10: *Bamboo in the Wind*, mm. 1-4

In the B Section of *Bamboo in the Wind*, Chu deliberately chooses a major-second appoggiatura to imitate the sound effect of the *Xiao*, which creates the characteristic sound of Chinese folk music (Example 11).



Example 11: *Bamboo in the Wind*, B section

¹⁷ *Music Unite US All*. <http://lingsiewwoei.in-action.info/mmb2014/1102700625/chinese.html> (accessed May 1, 2015).

Additionally, Chu Wanghua employs the rapid broken thirty-second notes in m. 23 and a black key *glissando* at the end of the piece to perfectly represent the sliding sound of the *Zheng* (Examples 12 and 13).

Lento poi accel.
Cadenza
(8^{va})

pp
una corda

Example 12: *Bamboo in the Wind*, m. 23

pp
gliss.
Black key
Black key

Example 13: *Bamboo in the Wind*, ending

Ancient Chinese instrumental music often aspires to create a calm and mysterious atmosphere, which is embodied in *Sound of Valley*. This piece portrays the beautiful scenery of an echoing valley, running streams, and mountains. Chu WangHua creatively uses parallel fourths, fifths, and octaves to depict the echo of the valley and its mystic-like mood (Example 14).

The image displays a musical score for the piece "Sound of the Valley" by Chu WangHua, specifically measures 46-57. The score is written for piano and consists of three systems of staves. The first system includes a grand staff with piano (p) and pianissimo (pp) dynamics, and a "Tempo I" marking. The second and third systems feature "8va" markings, indicating octave transpositions. The music is characterized by a complex texture of parallel intervals, including fourths, fifths, and octaves, which are used to create an echoing effect. The key signature has three flats, and the time signature is 3/4.

Example 14: *Sound of the Valley*, mm. 46-57

Chu WangHua also employs an extensive series of rapid sixteen notes to musically represent the running stream, which also can be related to the playing of the *Zheng* (Example 15).

Example 15: *Sound of the Valley*, mm. 16-18

PERFORMANCE PRACTICE

Performance practice is extremely significant when presenting Chinese piano compositions; as Chu Wanghua indicates,

We often give different interpretations to compositions depending on the era and the individual composers. For example, we have a different approach to Mozart's passages of scale-like singing and Debussy's passages of drift-like mobility. There is even more scope for variation when we perform China's piano compositions. In order to fully express the distinct Chinese qualities, pianists need to undergo a keen observation and special training of various aspects of touching skills such as depth and shallowness, emptiness and solidarity, specific fingering of pentatonic scales, as well as the

frequency of pedaling and the length and speed of ornamental notes.¹⁸

By closely examining the pieces in *Six Preludes*, it is apparent that there are many important issues in performance practice that merit further attention and discussion.

Bamboo in the Wind

This piece depicts the ensemble formed by two ancient Chinese instruments, the *Zheng* and the *Xiao*. The biggest challenge for performers is how to find the right sounds on the piano to imitate the sound effect of these two instruments. In mm. 1-12 (see Example 1, above), the ornaments in the right hand are the imitation of the sliding technique of *Zheng*. Therefore, the touch of those ornaments has to be shallow and the speed has to be fast without rushing. All these involve the correct use of the wrist, arm movement, and breath techniques. Above all, performers should focus on listening, and they must keep adjusting until they find the right sound in the piano. In this passage, another issue that needs close attention is the contrapuntal line. The main theme appears in the left hand representing the *Xiao*, while another melodic line occurs in the inner voice of the right hand. How to bring out this melodic line using the thumb without overpowering the main theme in the left hand will become the important practice focus for performers.

Another similar passage occurs in mm. 24-36 (Example 16). The harmonic appoggiaturas are imitations of the *Xiao*'s pitch-bending effect; the major seconds are meant to resemble the wide vibrato in the *Xiao*'s sound. Performers need to use their imaginations to create those musical images and hear the sounds before they try to create them on the piano.

¹⁸ Ibid., 14.

Tempo I

Example 16: *Bamboo in the Wind*, mm. 24-33

Sound of the Valley

This prelude depicts the beautiful nature surrounding Lao Mountain. In this piece there are a large number of passages with broken chords played in rapid sixteenth notes, which resemble the flowing water. In the passages shown in Examples 17 and 18, the primary concern for pianists is how to play these passages smoothly and evenly. As the theme is integrated within these running sixteenth notes, voicing and balancing will be another important aspect of performance practice.

più mosso $\text{♩} = 48$

Example 17: *Sound of the Valley*, mm. 16-17



Example 18: *Sound of the Valley*, mm. 37-38

Chu WangHua uses many open fourths, fifths, and octaves in mm. 1-15 and 48-61. For example, in mm. 48-61 (see Example 14, above), the parallel octave chords create an open and mysterious sound effect, which recalls the echo in the valley. Therefore, the touch of these chords has to be shallow and smooth in order to produce the overtone-like tranquil sound.

On the Banks of the River

This is a slow and lyrical piece with a three-voice texture. In mm. 1-13, with the prolonged chords and pedal, it is quite a challenge to bring out the contrapuntal line in the left hand. Chu WangHua indicates a staccato marking for each eighth note, which is intended to emphasize the melody, rather than to create an actual short staccato touch (see Example 8, above). Also, the syncopated rhythm between the hands accentuates the uneasiness of the two lovers.

Berceuse

The entire piece is based on the repetitive pattern of broken-chord sixteenth notes in the left hand, which resembles a mother rocking her baby in the cradle. The broken sixteenth notes must be played as smoothly as possible; in the meantime, the theme in the right hand (comprised of thirds and parallel fourths) represents the mother singing a lullaby (Example 19).

Example 19: *Berceuse*, mm. 3-6

In mm. 19-32, Chu Wanghua creatively included numerous open fourths, fifths, and sixths as *appoggiatura* and *Nachschlag*, which create an impressive overtone effect. The articulation of those ornaments has to be deliberately light and gently inclining toward a shallow touch. Also, the big leaps between intervals require the whole arm to properly control the movements (Example 20).

The image displays a musical score for a piece titled "Berceuse" (Example 20), spanning measures 21 to 28. The score is written for piano and consists of four systems, each with a treble and bass clef staff. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 3/4. The first system shows a melodic line in the treble and a bass line with fingerings (1, 2, 3, 4, 5). The second system features a treble line with chords and a bass line with a melodic line. The third system continues the melodic and harmonic development. The fourth system includes dynamic markings "mp" and "dim." and a "8va" marking above the treble staff.

Example 20: *Berceuse*, mm. 21-28

CONCLUSION

Chu WangHua, as a distinguished Chinese composer and pianist, has made a huge contribution to the development of Chinese piano music. His music demonstrates the richness of Chinese culture and heritage. His unique “Chinese style” enables him to stand out among other Chinese composers of his generation.

Six Preludes is representative of Chu WangHua’s early compositional period. It demonstrates both Chu’s originality and his distinctive “Chinese style.” These six preludes were based on traditional Chinese folk tunes and instrumental music, and were then integrated with Western compositional devices. *Bamboo in the Wind*, *Sound of the Valley*, and *On the Banks of the River* reveal the aesthetic significance of ancient Chinese poems and paintings, which emphasize the expression of feelings and the reflection of serene beauty. *Berceuse*, *Elegie*, and *Memorial* praise his motherland, China. *Elegie* and *Memorial* represent the patriotism and heroism of the Chinese people in the Sino-Japanese war.

Analyzing *Six Preludes* provides valuable insight into Chinese piano music and Chinese musical culture. Chu WangHua’s remarkable piano works, including *Six Preludes*, are a treasure for pianists to study and practice, and they are excellent representatives of Chinese piano music to share with the world.

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