

Two Chinese Contemporary piano works "Combination of Long and Short Meter" and  
"Thunder in a Drought"

By

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Yanan Wen

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"Thunder in a Drought"

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## **Abstract**

This paper will analyze two contrasting Chinese pieces written in the late twentieth century. The researcher will address related aspects of Chinese folk music and present a comprehensive analysis discussing how composers apply western composition techniques to Chinese folk music.

The “Combination of Long and Short Meter” is a three-movement work written in 1985. This work uses modern western composition techniques such as clusters, polyrhythm, bitonality, and pitch-class set. The composer combines these techniques with Chinese folk idioms resulting in an ingenious and well organized new work. The title "long and short" refers to one specific kind of Chinese folk music, which is highly influenced by Chao Xian ethnic music. Chao Xian music is characterized by using long and short rhythmic patterns. In this work, each movement has its own title, “Deng De Kong”, “Jin Yang Zhao” and “En Mao Li.” These titles indicate a different rhythmic pattern, tempo, meter, mood and style. This work has been well received and was chosen as the commission work for 1st China International piano competition in 1994. The “Combination of Long and Short Meter” is a popular work for advanced pianists demanding high level keyboard technique and musical ability. Many professional pianists and advanced students play this work in China.

"Thunder in a Drought" is a piece that is transcribed for piano from another Chinese instrument's music with the same title. There are many passages that imitate the sound of other Chinese instruments. This piece is from Guang Dong province in Southeast China. It has original tunes from Guang Dong and uses local musical idioms. The music depicts the festival scene of people celebrating the rain after a long drought. This piece is in intermediate level of keyboard technique and has been very popular especially for young pianists.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACCEPTANCE PAGE.....	ii
ABSTRACT.....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	v
Introduction .....	1
Chapter I. The Chao Xian music.....	2
Chapter II. The analysis of combination of long and short meter.....	5
Analysis of first movement.....	7
Analysis of second movement. ....	17
Analysis of third movement.....	23
Chapter III. Thunder in a Drought.....	30
Analysis of Thunder in a Drought.....	31
Conclusion.....	34
Bibliography.....	36

## Introduction

The two pieces that are the subject of this research represent different approaches to contemporary Chinese piano composition. The “Combination of Long and Short Meter” is a work for advanced pianists demanding high level keyboard technique and musical ability. Many professional pianists and advanced students play this work in China. The reason it is popular is because the composer combines modern Western compositional techniques with folk material and creates a fresh and appealing sound. The composer’s treatment of folk material is similar to some of the Western composers’ approach, such as Bartók, Stravinsky and others. The researcher will present a comprehensive analysis discussing the integration of Chinese folk music and modern Western composition technique in this piece.

The “Thunder in a Drought” is a more traditional Chinese contemporary piece. The composer transcribed the original version for piano, so it contains many folk idioms, such as the pentatonic harmony, original tunes and rhythm. This piece is in intermediate level of keyboard technique, and has been very popular especially for young pianists.

## Chapter I. The Chao Xian music

Contemporary Chinese composers incorporate folk elements into their music. They explore different aspects of the folk idiom and absorb these elements into their compositions. “Combination of Long and Short Meter” is a good representative of this new trend in Chinese contemporary music. In this “Combination of Long and Short Meter,” the composer experiments with different kinds of Chao Xian folk rhythmic patterns, while using twentieth-century compositional techniques. The listener will hear various Chao Xian rhythmic patterns and characters.

The Chao Xian nation is famous for their extraordinary musical heritage. The music is very melodic and rhythmic, and it has a strong folk flavor. Their music is warmly welcomed in China. After centuries of developing and evolving, Chao Xian composers gradually established their special composing system.

Chao Xian music follows the style named “long-short.” Long-short means the conception of a fixed rhythmic formulation; it is similar to the isorhythmic *talea* and *color* featured in Western medieval music. Each long-short not only has specific rhythm, note value and meters, but also has specific tempo, mood, tunes and other musical characteristics.<sup>1</sup> The long-short is usually applied in folk percussion instruments, such as in the *buk* (a barrel drum with a round wooden

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<sup>1</sup> Zhao, Qiao yue. “The influence of Bartok’s approach to keyboard compositions on contemporary Chinese solo piano music: A portfolio of recorded performances and exegesis.” The University of Adelaide, December 2012.

body that is covered on both ends by animal skin), the sogo (a small double-headed shallow drum with a wooden handle), the jing (a large, flat, lipped bronze gong), and other percussion instruments.<sup>2</sup> On the metric relations, the long-short is different from western strong-weak beat patterns.

In Chao Xian music, there are dozens of long-short patterns and each one is different. Each long-short has a fixed name. The length of a “long-short” could be one measure or more than one measure, and the same “long-short” could have different meters for different effects. The use of “long-short” depends on the genre and style of the composition. For example, the “Gu Ge Er long-short” is lively and light, the “Yin Shan Dao long-short” is vivid and vigorous, the “Sa Er Pu Li long-short” is flowing and beautiful, and the “En Mao Li long-short” is energetic. In one piece, a composer could use one kind of ‘long-short’ or a combination of different kinds of “long-shorts”.<sup>3</sup>

Chao Xian people favor triple meters, such as 3/4, 3/8, 6/8, 9/8 and other triple compound meters. However, sometimes duple meters are found especially in work songs. Other meters such as 5/8 or 7/8 are treated as variants of triple meters. This kind of meter is usually used with other triple meters together for a variety of

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<sup>2</sup> Tian, Lian Tao. *Chinese traditional folk music*. Minzu university of China press. 2001, October.

<sup>3</sup> Huang, Yue. “On Rhythmic characteristics of Korean music in the piano suite combination of long and short by Quan Jihao.” *Piano artistry* (August 2011,) 44-47.



pulses. Chao Xian people have a natural gift for triple meters even in musically untrained people. The duple meters are harder for even musical professionals to perform.

As Chao Xian music is famous for its distinct rhythm, it is very special and can be more colorful compared to other folk music in China. Many musicians and scholars are fascinated with Chao Xian music and have been exploring and conducting research on Chao Xian music for decades. The Chao Xian composer Ji Hao Quan is a scholar who has visited many Chao Xian folk performers and listened to their music. Quan's style in "Combination of Long and Short" is greatly influenced by this study and research.

Ji Hao Quan was born in TuMen city, Ji Ling Province in China. In 1983, he graduated from Yan Bian Art School with a major in composition. From 1983 to 1986, he attended Shanghai Conservatory and studied with Wang Jian Zhong, Yang Li Qin, and Xu Yuan Zhi. He has taught at Yan Bian Art School and Shenyang Conservatory. Since 2002, he has been a professor in China Conservatory and has been given many honors for his contributions.

Quan has composed a large number of compositions in different genres. He has written seven symphonies, three Chinese orchestral works, two concertos for Chinese instrument, seventeen chamber works, a symphonic poem, and many choral works. Many of his works have been performed in international music

festivals in Germany, America, France, Sweden, and other Asian countries. He has received many commissioned works from different institutions. Many of his compositions have received significant awards in China.

The “Combination of Long and Short” received first prizes in China’s National Composition Competition in 1985 and the Music Creative award for national instrumental composition in 1985. In 1994, this piece was chosen as the commissioned work of the first China Piano International Competition.

Quan wrote “Combination of Long and Short Meter” when he was a student studying at the Shanghai Conservatory in China. He had a strong desire to write something close to Chinese culture, especially related to the Chao Xian music. So Quan did considerable research and exploration before writing this composition. In this composition, the composer not only absorbed traditional Chao Xian folk music but also combined it with Western Twentieth-century composition techniques. As a result, this piece sounds very modern but full of folk flavor.

## **Chapter II — the analysis of combination of long and short meter.**

In this piece, Quan used three different kinds of “long-short” patterns: dancing, vocal and instrumental. They are excellent examples of Chao Xian music. The idea of using folk rhythm as the core of a composition is similar to Stravinsky

and Bartók, who use folk rhythm intensively in their works. In the first movement, the composer used “Deng De Kong long-short.” The example below shows the basic rhythm.



Example 1, Long and Short, Movement I, mm. 1 – 3

In this movement, the composer treats the piano as a percussion instrument to present the intense folk festival scene, which is similar to some Western composers’ approaches. For example, in the third movement of Prokofiev’s Piano Sonata No.7, the composer treats the piano as a percussion instrument to present the grand Russian scene.



Example 2, Prokofiev 7<sup>th</sup> sonata, 3<sup>rd</sup> movement mm.1-4.

In the second movement, the composer used “Jing Yang Zhao long-short.”

Example 2 shows the basic rhythm.



Example 3, movement II, mm. 1-2.

In the third movement, Quan used “En Mao Li long-short.” Example 3 shows the basic rhythm.



Example 4, movement III, mm. 1-5

The “Deng De Kong long-short” and “ En Mao Li long-short” are traditional dance long-shorts, which are lively and vivid. This kind of long-short is usually used for festivals and big feasts. The “Jing Yang Zhao long-short” is a slow and ancient long-short. This kind of long-short is usually used for voices and instruments.

## Analysis of Movement I

The first movement is organized in ternary form with a recapitulation. The first section, which goes from the beginning to measure 20, consists of three distinct motives; A, B, and C. The opening passage (mm 1-6) presents the motive A, which uses clusters in the “Deng De Kong” rhythm. The cluster is [0, 1, 2, 5, 6], accompanied by two different dyads, a major 7th and minor 9th in low voice. These 7th and 9th dyads also indicate the tonal center pitch F-natural. The pitch C-natural is serving as a dominant pitch to pitch F-natural. These 7th or 9th dyads are sounded when the clusters rest, which creates a syncopated rhythmic effect. In measure 5, three-voice clusters enter and are sustained in the middle-voice. This opening passage imitates the sounds of various folk percussion ensembles, which create a powerful and rugged atmosphere. Motive B enters in the middle voice in measure 7. The entire motive B lasts 5 measures and ends in measure 11. In the motive B the legato slurs appear over every two dotted quarter notes in the left hand. It imitates people dancing to instrumental accompaniment. The melodic shape zigzags up and down around the tonal center F and dominant pitch C. These melodic dyads mostly are in diminished 5th or augmented 4th intervals under clusters and create a very dissonant sonority.



Example 5: Motive B, mm. 7- 9.

Starting in measure 9, the harmony of the cluster changes every measure until the end of the whole motive B. In measure 9, it is an F major-minor seventh chord with added 4th note; in measure 10, it changes to a G half diminished ninth chord. In measure 11, it changes to an F minor triad with added raised 4th note and an F minor-major seventh chord with added raised 4th note on the tonic pedal F. In measure 11, there is a cadence in the low voice to confirm the tonal center F. This quasi-cadence idea appears in several structural points in this piece and assists the unity of the structure.

In measure 12, the vivid motive C enters. It is an arpeggiated version of the previous clusters, mainly using quavers with contrasting articulation. The top voice first states the motive C beginning on the dominant pitch C. The low voice imitates after two dotted quarter notes on the tonic pitch F. The motive C and its imitation lasts two measures until the clusters return in measure 14.



Example 6, motive C. mm. 12

Motive B returns in measure 16. The melody, doubled by octave, appears in

the top voice, and the clusters are switched to the low voice. The first section ends in measure 20. There is no clear cadence to confirm tonic F here, the composer simply sounds the pitch F on the downbeat in the melody. There is a short two-measure transition starting in measure 20 using the idea from motive C. This transition prepares for the new tonal center of C-natural in the development section. In this transition, there is an emphasis on the pitch B, which is originally from the added raised 4th notes of the previous tonic F clusters. Now, the B is serving as a pivot pitch — the leading tone to pitch C. The new tonal center C is also the dominant pitch of the previous tonic pitch F. Quan uses this kind of modulation very often in the development section.

The development section, which starts in measure 22, further develops motives A and C. Quan develops the material using sequence techniques. The modulation is also occurring along with the sequential activity. The modulation follows the circle of ascending 5ths. Beginning on F then moving to C, G, D, (skips A), E, and B, the development reaches the climax in measure 38. The phrase from measure 22 to measure 26 becomes the model phrase for the following sequences. Motive A is used first and fills two measures. Both clusters and dyads appear in the low register in forte. The dyads tonicize the new tonic center C natural. The dyads alternate between the C and F sharp. The F sharp will become the leading tone to the new tonic G. The clusters use the 2nd inversion of a G

major-minor seventh chord with a lowered 5th note, and the G-natural is sounding on top.

In measure 24, motive C is used. The top voice states the melody beginning on the dominant pitch G-natural, and the other voice imitates after two dotted quarter notes on the beginning of pitch F-sharp. The vivid arising eighth notes idea uses many seconds and tritones. Unlike the first time when the imitation of motive C lasted for two measures, here the imitation lasts for three measures and becomes a more strict imitation. The second and third measure's imitation becomes gradually descending every two dotted quarter notes. In measure 26, the meter changes to 9/8. Compared to the previous passage, the regular four dotted quarter notes are cut by one dotted quarter note, which creates an irregular rhythmic effect. The tonal center is also gradually modulating to G-natural, the leading tone F-sharp frequently appears, and the seconds in the melody are built around the new dominant pitch D natural or the new tonic G natural.

In measure 27, the sequence phrase starts in the new tonic G natural. The length and content is the same as its model phrase. The motive A still uses *forte* in low register; the cluster changes to second inversion of the D major seventh chord with lowered 6th note, and the pitch D is sounding on the top. On the bottom, the dyads keep the alternation between the tonic G and its tritone related C-sharp; the C sharp will also be the leading tone to the next new tonic. The motive C comes in



as expected after the two measure's motive A. The top voice states the vivid melody from the dominant pitch D and the low voice imitates the top voice after two dotted quarter notes on pitch C-sharp. The imitation keeps previous characters, such as a three-measure length, same articulation and a sudden change of meter. The frequently appearing pitch D-natural and its leading tone C-sharps help the modulation to the new tonal center.

Starting from measure 32, the composer uses fragmentation and acceleration techniques to develop the sequence. The phrase is reduced to two measures using short fragments from motive A and motive C. In measure 32, motive A lasts only half a measure. The clusters are the second inversion of an A major seventh chord with lowered 5th note. The only dyad is the D octave in the bass establishing the new tonic. Motive C, the vivid eighth notes idea, comes in the second half of measure 32 in the top voice starting on the dominant pitch A-natural. The composer keeps the sudden shift of the meter of motive C in measure 33. Instead of imitating the top voice melody, the low voice simply accompanies the melody in this passage. Moreover, the modulation doesn't follow the circle of 5th to A-natural as expected. Surprisingly it moves to E, which is the dominant of pitch A-natural, or the secondary dominant of the previous tonic pitch D natural. This quasi-cadence idea only occurred once in part A measure 11.

In measure 34, motive A comes back in the upper voice. This two-measure

(34 to 35) is a sequence of the previous fragmented sequence (32 to 33). In this passage, the cluster becomes the second inversion of the B major seventh chord with a raised 5th note; the new dominant pitch B-natural is on top. Motive C also comes back in the second half of measure 34; the vivid eighth note idea is in top voice starting from pitch B-natural. Again, the low voice does not imitate the melody but keeps the sudden change of meter and other characters in the previous sequences. The pitch center here is ambiguous because there is neither a leading tone nor a cadence note. After the cadence on pitch E-natural (34), the pitch moves away quickly. Instead, the frequently appeared pitch B-natural on strong beat may imply that the tonic center temporarily resides in B-natural, which still follows the circle of 5th relation modulation. In fact, this sequence (mm 34-35) is a whole tone relation from last sequence (mm 32-33), which is one major second higher than the previous phrase. That is the reason the composer deliberately breaks the circle of 5th relation modulation and makes these two measures tonally ambiguous. This new modulation will be the new way of modulation for the following sequence.

In measure 36, the sequence is further fragmented, which creates an effect of acceleration. The composer took previous fragments from motive C as the model phrase to develop the sequences. In measure 36, only the vivid eighth-notes idea from motive C is used. The sequence (m 36 to m 37) is one major second higher than its model phrase (second half of m 34 to m 35), which follows the new

modulation. Measure 37 repeats measure 36 one octave higher with the addition of a third voice to the chromatic thirds in the left hand. All of these intense activities are building up to the climax.



Example 7, modulation, mm. 35-38

Starting in measure 38, the composer uses fast parallel chords and intense rhythmic activity to achieve a fiery sonority. Quan aims to create an exciting scene of people celebrating and dancing. In measure 38, the top voice uses parallel minor sevenths moving back and forth in chromatically, while the low voice uses clusters in syncopation with the top voice. Measure 38 keeps the same pattern, but each seventh dyad in top voice is doubled by an octave, and the register is in one octave higher. In measure 40 and 41, both voices use fast descending scales from the peak of the keyboard to the bottom. The right hand plays only the white keys, and the left hand plays only the black keys.



Example 8, parallel passages in climax mm. 39-41.

In this climax, Quan’s use of the combinational parallel idea is similar to Debussy’s approach. For example, in Debussy’s prelude “Fireworks,” Debussy applies the combinational parallel idea in the climax.



Example 9: Debussy prelude No.12 book II, m.87

This combinational eighth note figuration covers two measures, and is leading to the return of the cluster chords in measure mm. 42-44, which becomes the final peak of the climax. In these three measures, a low C octave indicates the “standing on dominant” for the return of tonal center pitch F-natural. Above the C pedal, the clusters are a G major seventh chord with a lowered 5th note and its inversions in different registers, which imitates the playing of different drum ensembles.

The recapitulation starts in measure 45, and is similar to part A. The motive A returns first; the composer adds a rolling cluster on the downbeat in motive A to create a mysterious effect. The motive A lasts two measures, and the harmony and rhythms keep the same as the opening. The motive B comes back in measure 47,

the melodic phrase appears in the top voice this time. In the low voice, the accompaniment passage draws characters from motive C, such as the vivid eighth notes and articulations until measure 49.



Example 10, return of motive B in recap, m 47

In measure 49, the clusters come back in the left hand as accompaniment to the melody of motive B. The harmony keeps the same progression as it was in part A, and tonally it's tonicizing pitch F natural by the pedal point and cadencial figuration in measure 51.



Example 11: mm 48-50.

In measure 52 motive C returns. The composer keeps the music identical for two measures, and then adds another rolling cluster above the original passage. The change starts in measure 56 when the motive B juxtaposes with motive C's variant. The variant of motive C consists of vivid eighth notes in different shapes with larger intervals. This variant of motive C is in the highest register of this

movement. It creates a shining crispy sound which contrasts with the melodic motive B in the lower voice. From measure 58 to 60, it is also different than it was in part A. In the top voice, the chordal melody has more chromatic elements and uses new harmonies.

Measures 61 to 62 are a two-measure interpolation. This interpolation consists of parallel chords moving chromatically and clusters sounding the “Deng De Kong” rhythm in the top voice. The transition comes in measure 63 over the tonic pedal pitch F natural. The contour is ascending rather than descending in part A, and the composer adds a few dyads to differentiate the harmony. The motive A comes back in the last four measures, which confirms the tonality and the “Deng De Kong” long-short. However, the composer adds a sudden change of dynamics to keep the intensity. The cadencial figuration also occurs in the last measure, which keeps the unity of structure. Quan uses a very forceful and surprising *fortissimo* to close the first movement.



Example 12, ending, mm. 66-68.

## **Analysis of Movement II.**

The second movement is constructed in ternary form with a return of the first part. The first and last sections are slow and lyrical; the middle section is fast and vivid. The whole second movement depicts a Chao Xian outdoor scene. In order to present this image, the composer explores different sounds to imitate nature and life. A long expressive melody is used to imitate human singing. There is also a short chromatic motive to imitate the bird calls. In the second movement, the meter also changes frequently to capture the pulse of different activities.

The idea of depicting folk nature is similar to Bartok's approach. For example, in Bartok's "Night Music" from "*Out of Doors*," there are also many passages imitating the Hungarian outdoor scene.

The Lento part A begins with a fixed melodic pattern that appears intensively. The pitch material is different than the cluster in the first movement. Quan uses a new harmony (0, 1, 2, 6, 7) in the second movement.



Example 13, Mov II mm.1-2

The fixed melodic pattern is dominant in part A and part C. It is two measures' long and consists of two voices. The upper voice uses syncopations. It starts with syncopation in 16ths and 8ths on the downbeat quarter note, followed

by a half note. The bottom voice is a tonic pedal and consists of B natural in different registers. The composer creates a spacious effect by using two layers of sound in the fixed melodic pattern. The second measure of the fixed melodic pattern is almost the same as the first measure, except for the addition of a tiny ornament in the upper voice. In measure 3, the tempo changes to 5/4 from 4/4. Quan also introduces the bird call motive for the first time, which is a fast repetition of seconds in staccato. The bird call motive starts very loud, then suddenly becomes eight times faster and gradually disappears.



Example 14, Mov II, m.3

In measure 5, the composer introduces an eight-measure theme. A slow, lyrical melody appears above the fixed melodic pattern; its purpose is to imitate Chao Xian people's singing. The first four measures are ascending in contour, while the next four measures are descending. Tonally, this lyrical passage is in B minor.





Example 15, Mov II, m 5-8.

The bird call motive appears again in measure 13. After that, the eight-measure melody comes back with variation in measure 14. The register is one octave higher, and the composer uses more rolling chords instead of single pitches. The fixed melodic pattern also changes as it becomes an imitation of the top melody in measures 15, 17, and 19. The second appearance of the theme is more expressive and colorful.



Example 16, Mov II, mm. 14-16.

From measure 22 to measure 23, there is a transition. In measure 23, the composer uses a new pitch set (0, 1, 2, 6, 8). Moreover, the clusters reappear as an accompaniment to the upper birdcall motive. In the birdcall motive, a trill of seconds substitute for previous repeated seconds. Then, the birdcall suddenly changes to repeating clusters. The meters here are obscure, and the composer wrote *ad lib.* to suggest a free and improvisatory atmosphere.

The middle part **B** starts in measure 24; the tempo and meter change to *Allegro* in 2/4. The whole section is vivid and rhythmic. The composer is trying to imitate the birds having various activities, such as playing, calling and responding.

The whole section uses different pitch sets and considerable chromatics. Quan writes the upper voice either a 7th or 9th apart with the lower voice for each vertical dyad. The first phrase is from measure 24 to measure 29, followed by a three-measure transition. This six-measure birdcall phrase has many indications. In order to capture the varied sounds of birds, the composer marked a specific touch and articulation for each note.



Example 17, Mov II, middle section, mm 24-29.

This six-measure phrase is subdivided into two smaller units, and the composer puts a comma after the first three measures. The first three measures have a slightly rising contour, while the second three measures are descending. The whole phrase is imitating the birds' questioning and answering. Harmonically, each measure used either one or two clusters vertically. For example, measure 24 used two clusters. The first cluster (0, 2, 4, 5, 6) is on the down beat, and the second cluster (0, 1, 2, 4, 7) is on the second beat. In measure 25, the composer only used one cluster (0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5). In the descending part measure 27, Quan used cluster (0, 2, 4, 5, 6) and another cluster (0, 2, 3, 5, 7). After the six-measure phrase, the three-measure transition comes in measure 30. The composer draws the

idea from the first movement's transition passage, but the composer uses an new Augmented 6<sup>th</sup> chord in this transition. In measure 33, the birdcall phrase appears again, but the composer only brings back a part rather than the full six measures. Harmonically, the composer keeps the pitch sets (0, 2, 4, 5, 6) and (0, 1, 2, 4, 7) but on different actual pitches. Starting in measure 37, the composer uses the alternation of seconds between two voices for two measures to imitate the intense arguments and dialogue between the birds. Quan continues this figuration for the next five measures.

Starting from measure 44, the composer reuses the three-measure descending part from the birdcall phrase, followed by a one-measure transition. The pitch sets and harmony remain the same as it is in the birdcall phrase, such as (0, 2, 4, 5, 6) and (0, 2, 3, 5, 7). The following four measures repeat the previous four measures but vary in harmony and pitch sets.

The return of part A comes in measure 52; the tempo is back to *lento* and the *b* minor tonality. In contrast to the original part A, in this return the composer combines the slow, lyrical melody with fast birdcall idea together above the fixed melodic pattern. For example in measure 53 and measure 57, the birdcall idea comes in the top voice in the new three-voice texture, while the melody in the



middle voice is a long held note.

Example 18.

After the eight-measure vocal phrase, there is a quick transition to the dramatic ending. In the last measure, the composer uses cluster (0, 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8) which contains many dissonant seconds. The composer tries to imitate the birds suddenly flying away after the human's attractive singing.

### **Analysis of third movement**

The third movement Allegro is an energetic and passionate movement in a compound ternary form with a return of part A. Quan tries to present a grand scene of people celebrating at the feast. In that scene, there are different kinds of dancing, instrumental playing, and humans' singing. Rhythmically, the composer uses the "En Mao Li" long- short and other long-shorts. The meter frequently alternates between 5/8, 3/8 and 6/8. It showcases a variety of pulses and accents, which bring out the different characters of folk dances.

This movement could be divided into three large parts A, B, A'. Part A has three sub-sections: a b a'. The a section has two phrases; the second phrase is

restating the first theme with variations. The first theme starts in 5/8, but the rhythm frequently alternates between 2+3 and 3+2. The main theme is in the standard period theme type, which contains antecedent and consequent theme type because of the clear return of the basic idea in measure five<sup>4</sup>. This main theme is twelve-measures long, and the consequent theme has an extra four-measure extension. In order to give the impression of folk dances, the composer wrote many articulations. Every note is marked with specific touches to imitate different movements of dance, such as leaping and landing.



Example 19, Mov III, mm. 1-5

Harmonically, Quan applies combinational bitonality in the a section. The upper voice is in D minor, and the lower voice is in C sharp minor. The first theme uses pitches D natural and C sharp as bitonal centers, while the 2nd phrase is using their dominant pitches A natural and G sharp as bitonal centers. As a result, every vertical dyad is a minor second.

Quan's use of combinational bitonality and irregular metric is similar to Ligeti's approach. For example, Ligeti uses the combinational bitonality and

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<sup>4</sup> William, E. Caplin. Classical form. Oxford University press. 1998. p.49.

irregular metrics in the whole etude “Disorder.”

Molto vivace, vigoroso, molto ritmico,  $\text{♩} = 63$

György Ligeti

The image shows a musical score for the first four measures of Ligeti's Etude No. 1. It is written for piano in 2/4 time with a tempo of 63. The score is in a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The music is characterized by irregular metrics and chromatic progressions. The first measure starts with a forte (f) dynamic, followed by piano (p) dynamics. The second measure has a forte (f) dynamic, followed by piano (p) dynamics. The third measure has a forte (f) dynamic, followed by piano (p) dynamics. The fourth measure has a forte (f) dynamic, followed by piano (p) dynamics. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

Example 20:

Ligeti Etude, No.1, mm. 1-4.

Starting in measure 8, the composer uses pitch set (0, 1, 8) for downbeat notes. The expansion part of the consequent phrase starts in measure 9, in which the composer uses chromatic progression and fragmental sequences in both voices to build tension. The second eleven-measure phrase repeats the first theme with variations. The composer uses octave and chords to double previous dyads. The thicker texture suggests a more exciting festival atmosphere. From measure 20, there is a four-measure transition using descending chromatics in decrescendo, which marks the end of the opening dances.

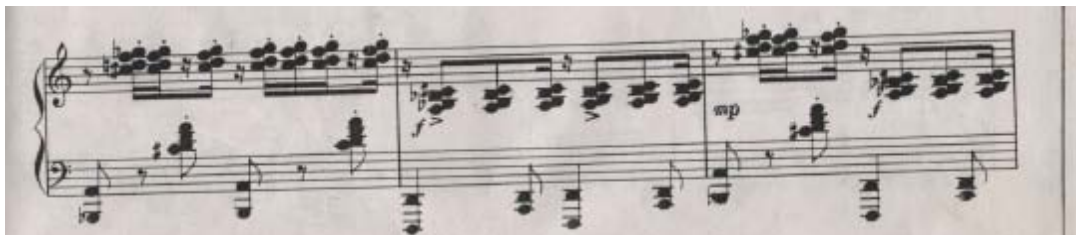
After a one-measure silence, the b section begins in measure 24. This section draws some ideas from the first movement, such as the use of clusters and “Deng De Kong” long-short. This section imitates the interaction among various folk percussion instruments such as drums, luos, and gangs. This b section also consists of two long phrases. The first phrase has eight measures and is organized in

Sentence theme type<sup>5</sup>. The basic idea uses pitch set (0, 1, 4, 5, 8, 9) and a syncopated rhythm between the two voices.



Example 21, Mov III, mm. 24-25.

The second phrase starts in measure 32 and consists of eleven measures. This phrase is still in the sentence theme type with an expansion. The composer continues to use the pitch sets (0, 1, 4, 5, 8, 9) but on different actual pitches. In the continuation phrase from measure 36 to measure 41, the composer uses faster repeating clusters to imitate the percussive sound of the folk drums. There are two kinds of percussion ensembles:—one is represented by fast staccato 16th notes and the other with contrasting slower 8ths in stronger dynamic.



Example 22, Mov III, mm. 36-41

These two “ensembles” interact intensively until measure 42 when a dramatic short climax in fortissimo sweeps down from the high to low pitches on the keyboard.

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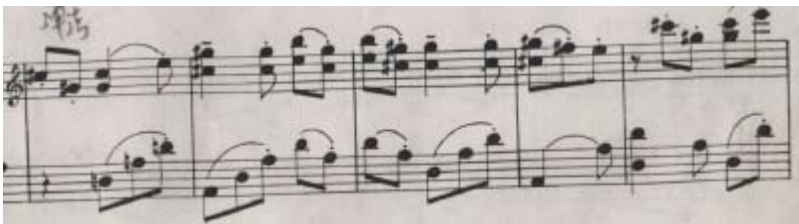
<sup>5</sup> William, E. Caplin. Classical form. Oxford University press. 1998. p.35.

Then, there is a four-measure transition follow up before the section a' comes in.



Example 23. Mov III, short climax, m 42.

The a' section starts in measure 47. Generally, it restates the material with variations from the a section. In the upper melody, the composer embellishes the melodies with double notes such as fourths and fifths, which give this passage more color. The bitonality voices are switched. The upper voice is now in C sharp natural minor, and the lower voice is in D natural minor. The phrase structure and pitch sets remain the same as they were in section a.



Example 24. Mov III, mm. 47-51.

In measure 64 and measure 70, the composer adds a fast hands alternation figuration. Then, the climax comes in measure 72 when the upper voice uses fast chromatic scales, and the lower voice uses whole tone scales. Consequently, each vertical onbeat dyad is still in a second interval.





Example 25, Mov III, mm. 72-76.

The tempo of middle part B. which starts in measure 79, is *Andante con moto*. It has a beautiful theme, which imitates human singing. This theme is followed by a repeat of the theme and a fast transition before part A' comes back. The melody is exquisite and highly ornamented. Quan uses short slurs to articulate the phrases.



Example 26, Mov III, mm.79-83.

The theme is ten measures long and constructed in the sentence theme type. The basic idea from measure 79 to 81 uses two clusters (0,1,4,5,7,8) and (0,1,4,5,7,9). The basic idea is repeated from measure 82 to 84. It keeps the two clusters' pitch sets but varies the specific pitches. Moreover, each note is one second higher than it was in the basic idea. The continuation phrase starts in measure 85. The composer keeps only the cluster (0, 1, 4, 5, 7, 8) and uses a large number of chromatics in the rest of the continuation phrase. The second phrase

starts in measure 89 and restates the theme but in a perfect fourth higher than its first appearance. Harmonically, the composer keeps the same two clusters and uses more chromatics towards the end of continuation. This is followed by an eight-measure transition that starts in measure 96. Harmonically, the composer introduces new pitch sets together with the previous clusters to create an obscure tonal atmosphere. Quan concludes part B with virtuosic figurations such as fast arpeggios up and down and fast hands crossing technique to prepare for the upcoming strong end of part A'.

The part A' starts in measure 104 and keeps the material of part A. The entire section is intense and passionate. The composer uses more chords and octaves to double melodies to create a more dramatic effect. The brilliant climax is achieved by a virtuoso interlocking octave passage and a few different long-short patterns presented quickly.



Example 27. Mov III.

Finally, the piece ends in the cluster (0, 1, 5, 6).

### **Chapter III. Thunder in a Drought**

Chen Pei Xun's "Thunder in a Drought" successfully explores the perspectives of Chinese Guang Dong music by incorporating folk music idioms with western musical language. In this piece, the "Cantonese tune" is used throughout and many passages imitate Chinese folk instrument's sounds.

Guang Dong music is also called Cantonese music. It is a style of traditional Chinese instrumental music in Guangzhou area around Pearl River Delta of Guang Dong Province on the southern coast of China. Guang Dong music is not the only music of the whole Guang Dong area. In Guang Dong, there are numerous traditional genres of music. The name of Guang Dong music originated in the 1920s and 1930s when the music was popular in Shanghai ballrooms in the form of "Spiritual Music." Since the performers were almost entirely from Guang Dong, Shanghai people generalized the form of music as Guang Dong music. Musically, most compositions are based on tunes derived from "Cantonese opera. Some pieces have influences from Western music, such as using syncopation, triple time, and collaborating with instruments like the saxophone, violin, guitar, piano, drum set, and xylophone. After 1949, many composers used Guang Dong music as sources to transcribe or recompose for piano. The "Thunder in a Drought" is a good representative in this category.

“Thunder in a Drought” was originally a piece for Chinese instrument “Yang qin”. “Yang qin” is a Chinese hammered dulcimer instrument traditionally fitted with bronze strings, and the strings are struck with two lightweight bamboo hammers with rubber tips. The “Yang qin” is a chromatic instrument with a range of slightly over four octaves. The sound of “Yang qin” is bright.

The original “Thunder in a Drought” has strong rhythms, leaps, syncopation, techniques and figurations particularly for “Yang qin.” The piece depicts nature and expresses people’s happiness when the rain comes after a long drought. The tunes and melodies are lively and light. Chen Pei Xun recomposed the “Thunder in a Drought” in 1959. In music, he kept its organic elements, such as tonality, rhythm, leaps and folk tune. Based on that, he combined using Western techniques and adapted this piece to piano language.

### **Analysis of “Thunder in a Drought”**

This lively and flowing piece uses many characters from its “Yang qin” version. The composer keeps the original melody throughout but reharmonizes it by using western harmonic idioms. In order to capture the Guang Dong folk spirit, the composer uses the pentatonic scale and resulting harmony. The phrase structure is flexible rather than tight knit and consists of many short phrases which change

very often. In structure, this piece is in a small ternary with a short return of the first part. Part A starts from the beginning to measure 17. The opening four sixteenth-note slur is the “thunder motive” which appears throughout this piece.



Example 28, mm. 1-3.

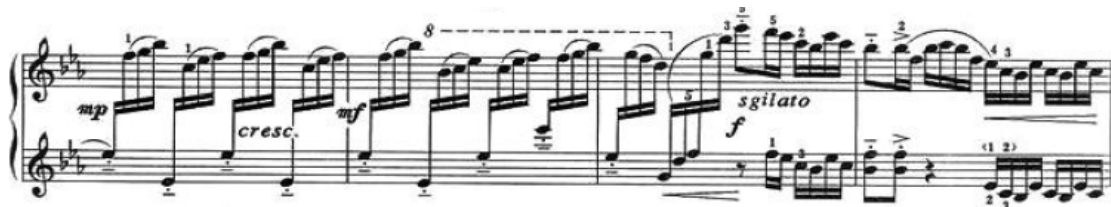
The first part **A** is in B flat major, and the B flat pedal is dominant in part A. The character of Part A is light and playful. The vigorous melody is short and fragmented. Starting from measure 6 and 13, the composer uses fast chords alternation between voices to imitate the percussive sounds of “Yang qin”. In measure 15, the composer used parallel fourths in both voices to enhance the excitement.

The middle part **B** starts in measure 18. It goes to E-flat major and suddenly becomes lyrical. The melody is expressive and the composer uses a few different harmonies for color, such as the B-flat minor chord.



Example 29 m 18-19.

Starting from measure 22, the piece goes back to the previous lively mood. In measure 27, the composer brings the strong percussive sound back to imitate people's passionate dancing. There are also many figurations imitating the Chinese instrument "Yang qin." For example, from measure 31 to measure 38, the composer wrote continuous 16th notes smoothly running between voices.



Example 30, mm.32-36.

Harmonically, the composer uses the pentatonic scale to enhance the oriental flavor. For example in measure 45, the composer uses (0, 2, 4, 7, 9).

The last part A' comes back in measure 49. The four 16th notes' "thunder motive" is restated shortly before a long arpeggio passage comes in. The climax comes in measure 56, and the composer wrote accented dyads in melody. The fortissimo melody in lower voice imitates people's celebration for the rain. At the same time, the fast arpeggio is running in the top voice to imitate the heavy rain.



Example 31, m 56-57

From measure 56 to the end, the tempo and harmony change very frequently to create the celebrating scene. In the end, the piece does not resolve to tonic E flat but ends in pitch B flat instead.



Example 32, end.

## Conclusion

These two Chinese contemporary pieces exhibit new approaches to piano compositions. The “Combination of Long and Short Meter” holds a prominent position in the realm of Chinese contemporary music, with its elaborate integration of traditional Chao Xian folk music and modern Western pitch material. As we can see, the composer borrows many advanced modern composition approaches from Western composers, such as Bartok, Ligeti and others. In the “Combination of

Long and Short Meter “, Quan not only shows his genius and creativity in the treatment of folk material, but also presents the various aspects of Chao Xian music to large audiences.

The “Thunder in a Drought” is a classic piece among numerous Chinese piano transcriptions use of folk music over decades. It maintained many folk characters from its original version while using western composition techniques. Both of these works contributed greatly to the development and repertoire of new Chinese piano compositions.



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**Appendix A**, pictures of Buk, Sogo, Jing.



1: Buk



2: Sogo



3: Jing

**Appendix B**, a picture of Yang qin

