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Yellow River Piano Concerto: A Synthesis of Western and Chinese Characteristics

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YELLOW RIVER PIANO CONCERTO:
A SYNTHESIS OF WESTERN AND CHINESE CHARACTERISTICS

by

Jiahe Liu

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School,
the College of Arts and Sciences
and the School of Music
at The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Musical Arts

Approved by:

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ABSTRACT

The *Yellow River Piano Concerto* is a valuable addition to the piano concerto repertoire for both historical and theoretical reasons. It has been performed frequently by Chinese pianists on many important occasions, such as National Day Concerts, New Year Concerts, and Spring Festival Galas. The Concerto is not only standard repertoire on Chinese stages, but it is also performed and recorded by leading international orchestras, such as the Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra, Philadelphia Orchestra, and New Zealand Symphony Orchestra. One of the possible reasons that made this Concerto successful is that it combines characteristics of Chinese and Western cultures. The primary purpose of this study is to address its Western cultural influences, its Chinese nationalistic traits, and how traditional Chinese aesthetics shaped the work.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
LIST OF MUSICAL EXAMPLES	vi
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	vii
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER I – POLITICAL AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND	11
1.1 Maoist Political Ideology	11
1.2 Xian Xinghai’s <i>Yellow River Cantata</i>	17
1.3 The Birth of the <i>Yellow River Piano Concerto</i>	21
CHAPTER II – CHINESE TRADITIONAL MUSICAL AESTHETICS	29
2.1 The Influences from Confucianism	29
2.2 The Use of the Yellow River as Symbolism	33
2.3 The Chinese Concept of Program Music	38
CHAPTER III – A SYNTHESIS OF CHINESE AND WESTERN MUSICAL CHARACTERISTICS	43
3.1 The First Movement, “Yellow River Boatmen’s Song”	43
3.2 The Second Movement, “Ode to the Yellow River”	47
3.3 The Third Movement, “Wrath of the Yellow River”	50
3.4 The Fourth Movement, “Defend the Yellow River”	54

CONCLUSION.....	59
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	61

LIST OF MUSICAL EXAMPLES

Musical Example 1 <i>Yellow River Cantata</i> , first movement, mm. 7-11.	37
Musical Example 2 <i>Yellow River Cantata</i> , first movement, mm. 61-64.	37
Musical Example 3 <i>Yellow River Piano Concerto</i> , first movement, mm. 1-3.	44
Musical Example 4 <i>Yellow River Piano Concerto</i> , first movement, mm. 7-11.	45
Musical Example 5 <i>Yellow River Piano Concerto</i> , first movement, mm. 51-58.	46
Musical Example 6 <i>March of the Volunteers</i> , mm. 1-4.	47
Musical Example 7 <i>Yellow River Piano Concerto</i> , second movement, mm. 61-64.	48
Musical Example 8 <i>Yellow River Piano Concerto</i> , second movement, mm. 15-18.	49
Musical Example 9 <i>Yellow River Piano Concerto</i> , second movement, mm. 49-50.	49
Musical Example 10 <i>Yellow River Piano Concerto</i> , third movement, m. 1.	50
Musical Example 11 <i>Yellow River Piano Concerto</i> , third movement, m. 1.	51
Musical Example 12 <i>Yellow River Piano Concerto</i> , third movement, mm. 2-5.	52
Musical Example 13 <i>Yellow River Piano Concerto</i> , third movement, mm. 64-68.	53
Musical Example 14 <i>The East is Red</i> , mm. 1-17.	54
Musical Example 15 <i>Yellow River Cantata</i> , fourth movement, mm. 126-132.	56
Musical Example 16 <i>Yellow River Piano Concerto</i> , fourth movement, mm. 133-140. ...	56
Musical Example 17 <i>Yellow River Piano Concerto</i> , fourth movement, mm. 361-367. ...	58

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CCP

Chinese Communist Party

INTRODUCTION

Virtually all of the major ideologies in early China emphasized the importance of music, and Confucianism served as the most influential system of thought.¹ Since about two thousand five hundred years ago, during the so-called Spring and Autumn periods (770-476 BCE), Confucianism began to exert a significant influence on Chinese music, and continued to for centuries.² Confucius considered music to be a crucial aspect of culture, which functioned to enlighten people's minds and harmonize society.³ Many Chinese instruments were invented and advanced at that time, and the Bayin classification system⁴ was used to classify instruments based upon the materials used for their construction.⁵

With the development of technology and the arrival of the Age of Discovery, the European powers began to have an effect on Chinese culture and economy.⁶ The history of Western music in China can be traced back hundreds of years. The first documented instance is the Christian missionary, Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), who introduced sacred music and gifted a harpsichord to the Chinese Emperor, Wan Li, as early as the 1600s.⁷

¹ Jenny F. So, ed., *Music in the Age of Confucius* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000), 13.

² Frederick Lau, *Music in China: Experiencing Music, Experiencing Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 118.

³ Ibid.

⁴ According to *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, the Bayin classification system is an ancient Chinese system of instrumental organization which classified Chinese instruments into eight kinds of materials used in their construction. They are stone, earth (pottery), bamboo, metal, skin, silk, wood, and gourd.

⁵ Jin Jie, *Chinese Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 1.

⁶ Lynn Pan, *Sons of the Yellow Emperor: The History of the Overseas Chinese* (London: Martin Secker and Warburg Limited, 1990), 23.

⁷ Richard Curt, *Pianos and Politics in China: Middle-Class Ambitions and the Struggle Over Western*

Even though European missionaries continued to disseminate-Christian hymns and instruments in the subsequent Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties, ordinary people rarely experienced them due to their limited use in China.⁸

Western music did not flourish widely in China until Western countries invaded China in the nineteenth century, which resulted in the fall of the Qing dynasty in the early twentieth century. During the Opium War (1839-1842), the British sold addictive drugs in China. Meanwhile, missionaries came to China with pianos. Both activities greatly affected Chinese commercial and cultural activities.⁹ Following the war, the military bands brought by British diplomats played an important role in introducing Western musical traditions and instruments. Yuan Shikai established the first Chinese modern military bands between 1896 and 1898, consisting of sixteen Western brass and percussion instruments.¹⁰ The Shanghai Municipal Orchestra established in 1919, was the first symphony orchestra in China, and initially employed only Russian and Italian musicians.¹¹ The first Chinese conservatory was founded in 1927, later named the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. Its founder, Xiao Yaomei (1884-1940), graduated from the Leipzig Conservatory with a doctorate in music in 1909 and returned to China, bringing with him his Western musical training and model. After the People's Republic of China was established in 1949, several conservatories were founded throughout China.

Music (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 4.

⁸ Ching-chih Liu, *A Critical History of New Music in China*, trans. Caroline Mason (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2010), 23.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹¹ Kraus, 5.

All used the Shanghai Conservatory model, and continued focusing on Western musical training and appreciation.¹² As a result, the curriculum of music education in China was based on this Western model. Chinese composers began to explore the fusion of traditional Chinese music and Western music.¹³

After the collapse of the Qing dynasty in 1911, and the Anti-Japanese War (1937-1945), numerous rebellions, movements, and reforms broke out throughout the country, which stimulated the growth of literature and the arts. Mass singing of military music with anti-Japanese themes was the main musical activity at the time. Xian Xinghai, Nie Er, and other composers created thousands of mass songs which featured quick rhythms, narrow ranges, memorable tunes, and passionate lyrics that are still popular in China today.¹⁴ Mao Zedong's "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art"¹⁵ in 1942 stated that music should be used as a revolutionary army to unite Chinese people in order to defeat the invader. His belief was that literature and art were subordinate to politics, and there is no art that is detached or independent of politics.¹⁶

For the Chinese people, the joy of victory in the Anti-Japanese War was short-lived. A civil war between the Nationalist Party and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) immediately broke out in 1946, and lasted for more than four years.¹⁷ It was difficult to

¹² Lau, 35.

¹³ Jie, 2.

¹⁴ Kraus, 49.

¹⁵ Hereafter referred to as 1942 "Talks."

¹⁶ Mao Zedong, *Selected Works, Vol. 4* (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1960), 31.

¹⁷ Liu, 287.

develop music during this period of cultural, political, and economic chaos. The Anti-Japanese themes were replaced with songs opposing the Civil War, and music still largely concentrated on mass singing activities without further evolution.¹⁸ Finally, the Communist Party won the Civil War and announced the founding of the People's Republic of China with its capital at Beijing on October 1, 1949. The Nationalist Party was forced to retreat from the mainland of China to the island of Taiwan. The Chinese people now had several years of peace.

An increasing number of people devoted themselves to the career of music creation and performance. By 1959, large numbers of musicians were fostered by eight conservatories, eleven college music departments, and fifteen music high schools and elementary schools, as well as hundreds of opera houses, orchestras, and troupes.¹⁹ Many pianists, such as Yin Chengzong, Gu Shengying, Liu Shikun, and Fu Cong, won international piano competitions in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Chinese music compositions were not limited to mass songs only. A great deal of instrumental works were composed for piano, string, woodwind, or brass instruments. Composers actively explored the possibilities of combining Chinese and Western musical languages and instruments into their works. New-style Chinese opera flourished during this time, which employed European forms and structures associated with Chinese plots, characters, and tunes.²⁰

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 303.

²⁰ Ibid., 342.

In 1961, Wu Han composed a new-style Peking Opera, *Hai Rui baguan* [*Hai Rui dismissed from office*],²¹ based on Chinese historical plots and characters. Hai Rui was a Ming Dynasty official who was arrested for criticizing Emperor Jiajing. After its premiere, critics began to interpret the opera's plot as a metaphor for Peng Dehuai's criticism of Chairman Mao at a 1959 Party conference at Lushan, Jiangxi province.²² Marshall Peng was one of the most important military leaders in the Communist Party, who had served as a commander in the Anti-Japanese War, Civil War, and Korean War. He had written a letter to Mao in 1959 criticizing the mistakes and problems of Mao's instructions in the Great Leap Forward²³. As a result, Peng Dehuai was dismissed from all of his positions, and expelled from the Party.²⁴

On November 10, 1965, Shanghai's main daily newspaper *Wenhui bao*, published an article entitled "On the New Historical Opera *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office*," blaming the opera and its author for its political incorrectness. The publication of the article was the catalyst for the Cultural Revolution, which began in 1966 and ended in 1976. Wu Han became one of the first victims of this bloody political upheaval, and died in prison in 1969.

²¹ All Chinese translations in this document are by the author.

²² Paul Clark, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 20.

²³ According to *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, the Great Leap Forward was an economic plan executed by Mao Zedong and the CCP in 1958. The goal of this plan was to achieve agricultural collectivization and rural industrialization. Private farming was abolished, and people experienced forced labor, which resulted in millions of deaths due to famine, forced labor, and economic and environmental destruction.

²⁴ Clark, 20.

The Cultural Revolution years are the most turbulent and dark period of Chinese history. Traditional customs and ideas were banned for the sake of this revolution, and all Western influences were denounced due to the different political system. As a result, a great deal of Chinese historical art, architecture, and books were destroyed; thousands of people were exiled, imprisoned, or murdered for no justifiable reason, including Western-trained musicians. The violist Tan Shuzhen of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music recalled in the video “The Gentleman from Shanghai,” “when the Cultural Revolution came, we thought it was a minor movement. We didn’t expect it would take ten years, and so seriously. We never thought some people would die, many people would die.”²⁵ In the first few years of the Cultural Revolution, seventeen professors, their spouses, and students from the Shanghai Conservatory of Music were forced to commit suicide. The only options for these Chinese musicians who supported Western musical ideals was imprisonment or execution, so many of them unfortunately took matters into their own hands. Some people died in prison, or due to the hardships of forced labor, while others died because they were detained and refused treatment for serious illness.²⁶

The purpose of this revolution was not simply to destroy China’s cultural heritage or to let people suffer, but also to create a new culture to align with and serve the new political system. Jiang Qing²⁷ played an important role during the revolution. She executed Mao’s intentions in the involvement of art and cultural reforms. Peking opera,

²⁵ Tan Shuzhen, “The Gentleman from Shanghai,” (video), produced by Walter Scheuer, Hopewell Foundation, 1999, 14:22, https://youtu.be/wVgHywku_m4.

²⁶ Sheila Melvin and Jindong Cai, *Rhapsody in Red: How Western Classical Music Became Chinese* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2004), 234.

²⁷ Jiang Qing, also known as Madame Mao, married Chairman Mao in 1938. She became a professional actress in 1935, and used the stage name Lan Ping.

ballet, songs, symphonies, and all art forms were transformed. She even attended rehearsals, provided specific instructions, and involved herself with the smallest details, such as instructions on the makeup of performers.²⁸

Jiang attended the Experimental Art Academy in Jinan, and had some limited training in music. She was introduced to piano lessons and some Western music for a period of a few months.²⁹ As the reforms progressed, Jiang realized that Western instruments could sometimes serve the music better than Chinese traditional instruments due to their greater volume, which made a wider range of dynamics and expression possible.³⁰ Jiang created the slogan, “Make the old serve the new; foreign things to serve China.”³¹ Therefore, she concluded that Western instruments do not need to be banned completely, as long as they were adapted for Chinese use. Also, the Western-trained Chinese musicians could survive as long as they were willing to contribute to the revolution. The *Yellow River Piano Concerto* was born under these circumstances.

This work was composed during a tumultuous period, therefore it is necessary to study its historical and political context in order to understand the aesthetics and value of its music. This historical backdrop has been documented in books like Paul Clark’s *The Chinese Cultural Revolution: A History*, which examines the full range of cultural activities among opera, film, dance, music, literature, and even architecture. Similarly, Ching-chih Liu provides commentary of new musical activities and compositions in

²⁸ Melvin and Cai, 251.

²⁹ Ross Terrill, *Madame Mao: The White-Boned Demon* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 27.

³⁰ Melvin and Cai, 255.

³¹ Jiang Qing, *Jiang Qing tongzhi lunwen ji* [Jiang Qing’s collection of essays] (Taipei: Zhonghua mingguo guoji guanxi yanjiusuo, 1974), 66.

twentieth-century China in *A Critical History of New Music in China*. In both of these writings, the authors find creativity and innovation in the cultural production of music and art, and provide a relatively comprehensive and objective commentary of this history. Barbara Mittler's book *Dangerous Tunes* also examines the Western influences upon contemporary Chinese music. Mittler compares the political dynamics which shaped the musical cultures of mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan during the twentieth century.

Sheila Melvin and Jindong Cai discuss the development of Western classical music in China using several key composers, performers, and events in their book, *Rhapsody in Red: How Western Classical Music Became Chinese*. Interviews with living Chinese musicians are also included. Similarly, Richard Curt Kraus presents case studies of four important Chinese musicians—Xian Xinghai, Fu Cong, Yin Chengzong, and Liu Shikun—in the book *Piano and Politics*. The careers of these four musicians embody the contradictions of Western culture and Chinese politics.

Scholars like Arnold Perris and Benjamin Curtis interpret music as a form of political or national expression, especially in nineteenth-century Europe and twentieth-century China in their writings. Perris's *Music as Propaganda* draws parallels between the musical world in Germany, Russia, and China under the governments of Hitler, Stalin, and Mao, and also discusses how nationalism led to the use of folk elements in the music of Smetana, Dvořák, and Glinka. The articles written by Sue Tuohy, Wai-Chung Ho, and Lei Ouyang Bryant also focus on musical nationalism in modern China, and examine the inspiration behind the composition of nationalistic music, and how a nation realizes its musical identity. Another important collection of essays is Jenny F. So's

Music in the Age of Confucius, which provides an introduction of Chinese traditional music and instruments under the influence of Confucius from the late Bronze Age to modern times.

Alex Preston Wise's dissertation "The Rise of the Chinese Concerto: A Look into the Development of Chinese Traditional Instrument Concerti with Western Orchestra," compares five Chinese concerti in regard to their instrumentation, cultural factors, and compositional techniques.³² Both dissertations by Gloria Jung Eian and Chun-ya Chang emphasize the socio-political context and the influence of socialist realism on the *Yellow River Piano Concerto*, exploring similarities in music and politics between China and the Soviet Union. Shing-lih Chen's dissertation, "The *Yellow River Piano Concerto*: Politics, Culture, and Style," examines the political and cultural background of the work, analyzes its nationalism, folk elements, and motives, and provides insights on performance practice issues. Chen relates this *Concerto* to Chopin's works by comparing the similarities of figuration.³³ Bai Shan's thesis, "The Historical Development and a Structural Analysis of the *Yellow River Piano Concerto*," compares the evolution of musical materials between the *Yellow River Cantata* and the *Concerto*.³⁴

The above dissertations and thesis examine the historical, musical, and ideological background of the creation of the *Yellow River Concerto*. However, the existing analysis of this *Concerto* has not been subjected to a discussion of its Western cultural influences,

³² Alex Preston Wise, "The Rise of the Chinese Concerto: A Look into the Development of Chinese Traditional Instrument Concerti with Western Orchestra" (DMA diss., University of South Carolina, 2018).

³³ Shing-lih Chen, "The *Yellow River Piano Concerto*: Politics, Culture, and Style" (DMA diss., University of British Columbia, 1995), 68.

³⁴ Shan Bai, "The Historical Development and a Structural Analysis of the *Yellow River Piano Concerto*" (master's thesis, University of Pretoria, 2006).

its nationalism, and how traditional Chinese aesthetics shaped the work. This dissertation will explore these issues by establishing an analytical framework that combines musical content with political and ideological context.

The first chapter discusses the political and cultural background of the *Concerto*. Traces of Western influences in a Chinese musical world, Maoist politics and music, and the adaptation of the *Yellow River Cantata* will be examined in detail. The second chapter explores the perspective of traditional Chinese aesthetic ideology in the work. For example, the use of the Yellow River as a cultural and spiritual symbol in the *Concerto* came from Chinese traditions. Also, the fondness for giving titles and program notes to music is another expression of aesthetic ideology in China, and is found in this work. The third chapter analyzes the use of Chinese folk tunes, along with revolutionary themes, as well as the role of Chinese instruments in the *Concerto*, in order to explore how these Chinese musical elements interact with Western musical idioms.

CHAPTER I – POLITICAL AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND

1.1 Maoist Political Ideology

The Qing dynasty was defeated by European forces during the Opium Wars in the mid-nineteenth century and forced to grant territory, tariffs, and other rights. China's social structure gradually evolved from a feudal society to a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society. The Chinese people opposed the invasion of European forces and the rule of the feudal dynasty, and tried to find a new path by studying various modern Western ideological systems.³⁵ As the result of the victory of the October 1917 Revolution in Soviet Russia, Marxism-Leninism widely spread throughout China, which laid the ideological foundation for the establishment of the Communist Party. In July 1921, with the advice and support of the Far Eastern Bureau of the Russian Communist Party and the Communist International, the first national congress announced the official establishment of the CCP. However, the Nationalist Party under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek refused to collaborate with the Communist Party, and encircled and suppressed the troops of CCP to prevent its growth.³⁶

In October 1934, after the failure of the fifth anti-encirclement campaign, the Red Army, the main force of the CCP, no longer had the ability to occupy the central base in Jiangxi province. The CCP was forced to retreat from Jiangxi to the north and west, having trekked over 9000 kilometers in 370 days, thus called the Long March.³⁷ The

³⁵ Yoshihiro Ishikawa, *The Formation of the Chinese Communist Party*, trans. Joshua A. Fogel (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 17.

³⁶ Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990), 370.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 405.

route passed through fourteen provinces and very difficult terrain to Yan'an, Shaanxi. It is worth noting that Yan'an was an important location for both the development of the Party and in Mao's life. During the Long March, Mao gave speeches on military strategy and planning in several conferences held in Yan'an, and gained increasing influence and support among members of the Party.³⁸ Following the arrival of the Red Army in Shaanxi, Yan'an became the headquarters for training of army troops and launching of revolutions for thirteen years.

Lu Xun Academy for Arts and Literature was founded in Yan'an in the spring of 1938. The purpose of this academy was to train students in art, literature, music, and drama, and to foster the creation of a new Chinese art. Initially the academy had only 300 students and a few staff, but the number of students expanded rapidly over the next seven years.³⁹ Jiang Qing, who was formerly an actress, worked in the drama department as an instructor, directing rehearsals of the performance troupe.⁴⁰ In the same year, Mao and Jiang Qing got married in Yan'an, however, many of Mao's colleagues did not support this marriage. Even though Mao agreed not to let Jiang Qing participate in politics, by the early 1960s, she began to involve herself in that area.⁴¹

³⁸ Thomas Kampen, *Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai and the Evolution of the Chinese Communist Leadership* (Copenhagen: NIAS, 2000), 76.

³⁹ David Holm, *Art and Ideology in Revolutionary China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 45.

⁴⁰ Hua-min Chung and Arthur C. Miller, *Madame Mao: A Profile of Chiang Ch'ing* (Hong Kong: Union Research Institute, 1968), 39.

⁴¹ Melvin and Cai, 226.

Starting in 1938, the Party had collective leadership without an official chairman. It was not until March 1943 that the Politburo promoted Mao to be chairman in Yan'an.⁴² In the following months, the Party began preparations for the publication of the first edition of the *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*. The five-volume edition was published in the summer of 1944.⁴³ Among them, Mao's 1942 "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art"⁴⁴ had a profound impact on music creation and performance over the next forty years or more.⁴⁵

In Mao's 1942 "Talks," he emphasized that music should be used as an army to unite Chinese people in order to defeat the Japanese invader and all other enemies. The enemy he was referring to included "anyone who opposes communism and the people."⁴⁶ Mao outlined the Party's policy on "mass culture"⁴⁷ by quoting Lenin's 1905 saying that art and literature should "serve the millions upon millions of working people."⁴⁸ At that time, ninety percent of the Chinese population consisted of workers, peasants, soldiers, and laboring people. In order to win the final victory, Mao asserted that the Party must unite these four groups of people because they constituted the vast majority of the Chinese nation and were consequently the mass of the people.⁴⁹ Therefore, the art and

⁴² Holm, 104.

⁴³ Ibid., 108.

⁴⁴ Hereafter referred to as 1942 "Talks."

⁴⁵ Liu, 286.

⁴⁶ Mao, 3.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 11.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 14.

literature should serve the workers, peasants, and soldiers because the Communist Party was relying on these people in order to win power. Mao stated:

So our art and literature are first of all for the workers, the class which leads the revolution. Secondly, they are for the peasants, the most numerous and steadfast allies in the revolution. Thirdly, they are for the armed workers and peasants, the Eighth Route and New Fourth Armies and other people's armed forces, which are the main forces of the revolutionary war. Fourthly, they are for the working people and the intelligentsia of the urban petty bourgeoisie who are also our allies in the revolution and are capable of lasting co-operation with us.⁵⁰

According to Mao, in order to better serve the masses, the first duty of musicians is to know and understand the masses thoroughly. Furthermore, many of the writers and artists were unfamiliar with the "people's language,"⁵¹ and had not fused their ideas and feelings with the masses. Therefore, Mao declared the following: "If you want to be understood by and identified with the people, you must make up your mind to undergo a long and even painful process of remoulding."⁵² He elaborated further by stating the following:

They [all revolutionary artists and writers of China] must temper themselves in the flames of struggle and go to the only, the broadest and richest source to observe, learn, study, and analyse various persons, various classes, and various communities, all the vivid patterns of life and struggle and all the raw material of art and literature before they can proceed to creative work.⁵³

As a result, millions of educated urban people were forced out of the cities and settled in the most rural areas to receive re-education from the poor and lower-middle

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., 7.

⁵² Ibid., 7.

⁵³ Ibid., 22.

peasants. From the 1950s to the end of the 1970s, the total number of re-educated people was estimated to be twenty million, including a large number of artists and educators.⁵⁴

Mao also emphasized that literature and art are subordinate to politics, and there is no art that is detached or independent of politics.⁵⁵ From Mao's 1942 "Talks" we can deduce that music needs to serve the masses and to be allied with political ideology. Any musicians or composers who opposed these political ideas would face the possibility of being re-educated. In order to strengthen the emotional bond between the Party and the mass people, and ultimately prompt the people to actively participate in the socialist revolution, Mao called on musicians to learn traditional Chinese folk songs and folk tales.⁵⁶

His emphasis on folk music is predictable. In 1939, he directed the Lu Xun Academy to found a Folk Music Research Society, which sent students to collect songs all over China, in particular from Shaanxi, Gansu, and Suiyuan. By 1943, two thousand folk tunes were collected, and a number of songbooks were published.⁵⁷ Music composition was dominated by songwriting at that time, since lyrics can express political ideas more clearly, and folk tunes can more easily gain the empathy and appreciation of the masses. Xian Xinghai served as the Lu Xun Academy's spokesman for music.⁵⁸ He

⁵⁴ Karen Laura Thornber, *Ecoambiguity: Environmental Crises and East Asian Literatures* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012), 147.

⁵⁵ Mao, 30.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁵⁷ Hung Chang-Tai, "The Politics of Songs: Myths and Symbols in the Chinese Communist War Music, 1937-1949," *Modern Asian Studies* 30, no. 4 (1996): 908.

⁵⁸ Holm, 60.

expressed a deep and abiding interest in folk songs, and composed a large quantity of vocal music with folk-like elements.

Furthermore, Mao asserted that musicians should inherit both the fine traditions of Chinese culture, and also learn from the foreign art and literature, even though it was considered to be feudal and imperial. The new nationalistic art forms could be created by combining Chinese musical traditions with Western ideals, thereby serving the Chinese people and revolution.⁵⁹ This follows the same premise as Jiang Qing's slogan, "Make the old serve the new; foreign things to serve China."⁶⁰

In regard to his thoughts about Western music, Mao expressed more detailed views in his 1956 "Talk with Music Workers." Mao acknowledged that the Western instruments, educational system, and its development were more advanced and modernized than Chinese traditional methods. Therefore, he concluded that Western models must be studied and assimilated, and that foreign instruments should be used in Chinese musical compositions. As he stated, "China and the West should embrace one another, and be combined into an organic whole, but Chinese characteristics must be retained."⁶¹ Therefore, many of the music compositions at this time contain both Chinese and Western characteristics, including European musical forms, harmony, polyphony, and instrumentation.

⁵⁹ Mao, 14.

⁶⁰ Jiang Qing, 66.

⁶¹ Mao Zedong, "Tong yinyue gongzuozhe de tanhua" [Talk with music workers], *People's Publishing Press* 9 (1979): 1.

1.2 Xian Xinghai's *Yellow River Cantata*

Xian Xinghai was already a prolific composer before he came to Yan'an. Xian was an alumnus of the Shanghai Conservatory, having graduated in 1928. He later spent more than five years studying composition with Vincent D'Indy (1851-1931) and Paul Dukas (1865-1935) in the Paris Conservatory. In 1935, Xian returned to China and immediately joined the Shanghai Songwriters Association and participated in the anti-Japanese cultural activities.⁶² He wrote a great number of national salvation songs as a powerful weapon to protest the occupation during the Sino-Japanese War. Along with Xian, other members in the association, like Tan Xiaolin, He Lüting, Ma Sicong, and Lü Ji, created numerous anti-Japanese songs and Chinese art songs, which were full of patriotic fervor. In the three years since he returned to China from Paris, Xian composed a total of 120 works, including nineteen cantatas, ninety-three songs, two choruses, and five duets for singers.⁶³

In 1938, Xian was invited to serve as music director in the Music Department at the Lu Xun Arts Academy. Until that time, he had no contact with the Communist Party, so he was hesitant to work directly with an unfamiliar organization and its politics. When he was guaranteed by the Academy that he would have the freedom to create and the freedom to leave if he desired, he decided to accept the offer.⁶⁴

⁶² Liu, 206.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 210.

⁶⁴ Xian Xinghai, *Wo xuexi yinyue de guocheng* [My music learning experience] (Beijing: China People's Music, 1980), 14.

According to Xian, there were not a lot of musicians in Yan'an, and the facilities were relatively poor, but even given these circumstances, he felt fulfilled, and had a lot of time to concentrate on composing.⁶⁵ During his time in Yan'an, Xian composed eight cantatas, two choruses, two operas, and many songs. He appreciated the folk materials that were collected by the Folk Music Research Society, and derived creative inspiration from them. Folk elements permeate his works, and one of the most influential works that he composed during this time is the *Yellow River Cantata*. Xian immediately joined the Communist Party of China after his arrival in Yan'an on June 14, 1939. He became one of the two great model musicians of the Party, along with Nie Er, and became known as a Proletarian musician and a people's musician.⁶⁶

Prior to Mao's 1942 "Talks," Xian put forward a series of specific suggestions for developing new music in the 1939 essay "Lun zhongguo yinyue shang de minzu xingshi," [On national form in Chinese music]. The views he expressed can be summarized as follows: firstly, a combination of Chinese and Western musical instruments would form a more magnificent new Chinese national color. Secondly, the lack of harmony in Chinese music is a sign of backwardness. It is necessary to discover and utilize the harmony, polyphony, and theory of the West. Thirdly, the traditional modes (*diao*) and pitches (*li*) should also be employed. Fourthly, the most advanced Western forms of instrumental music should be used to carry out the reform of Chinese music in order to establish the new Chinese musical identity.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Xian, 16.

⁶⁶ Liu, 209.

⁶⁷ Xian Xinghai, "Lun zhongguo yinyue shang de minzu xingshi" [On national form in Chinese music],

It is not difficult to find many similarities in both Mao's 1942 "Talks" and Xian's 1939 essay. Xian's opinions regarding the future development of music are basically consistent with Mao's cultural policies. Arnold Perris raised the following question in his article, "Music as Propaganda: Art at the Command of Doctrine in the People's Republic of China": "can an artistic mind function fully if bound to strictures of a political ideology?"⁶⁸ When an artist's mind concurs with the official ideology, artistic will becomes the cultural expression of political ideas. Before his arrival in Yan'an, Xian had already created many anti-Japanese songs to express patriotism, and they were widely sung by the masses. The content of his compositions was left to his free choice, and his ideas coincided with Mao's, therefore, it can be shown that Xian's artistic mind functioned fully during his musical creation.

One of Xian's most outstanding compositions is the *Yellow River Cantata*. Its anti-Japanese themes, revolutionary spirit, folk flavor, and mass singing made the *Cantata* popular after its successful premiere in the Shanbei Gongxue Hall, located in Yan'an, in 1939. The *Cantata* was inspired by the poem, "Yellow River," written by Guang Weiran (1913-2002) earlier that same year. Guang had crossed the Yellow River with the Communist troops to Yan'an, and was motivated by the singing of the boatmen as they were fighting the raging current of the river.⁶⁹ His poem inspired the Chinese people to unite and fight the Japanese invasion. Xian adapted Guang Weiran's lyrics in

Wenyi zhanxian 1:5 (1939): 1.

⁶⁸ Arnold Perris, "Music as Propaganda: Art at the Command of Doctrine in the People's Republic of China," *Ethnomusicology* 27, no. 1 (1983): 1.

⁶⁹ Shan Bai, 16.

the *Cantata*, and created programmatic titles for each of its eight movements to describe and summarize the contents. They include “Yellow River Boatmen’s Song,” “Ode to the Yellow River,” “The Yellow River Descends from Heaven,” “Yellow River Ballad,” “Conversational Song on the River Bank,” “Yellow River Resentment,” “Defend the Yellow River,” and “Rave! Yellow River.”

This cantata embodies folk boatmen melodies and the Chinese model of conversational song, evoking the patriotic and nationalistic emotions of Chinese people during wartime. The structure is modelled on European oratorios, opening with an orchestra prelude, followed by solos, duets, and choruses. Each song is preceded by a poem recitation, which was an innovation in the art form. Later, in 1941, Xian revised the first, fourth, sixth, and eighth movements by re-orchestrating them, increasing the vocal numbers, and adding more complex modulations.⁷⁰ Xian expressed a strong interest in Chinese percussion instruments, and called them “a source of special musical color.”⁷¹ Besides other Chinese traditional instruments, the *Cantata* embraced mainly Chinese percussion instruments such as brass percussion instruments (the *da bo*, *xiao bo*, and *luo*), native drums, and *zhu ban* (bamboo clappers), and combined them with Western string, brass, woodwind, and percussion instruments. Western harmonization was utilized in all movements. Xian even employed canonic writing in the seventh movement. Even though it is not complicated counterpoint, it effectively conveys lyrics and patriotic emotions.

Xian was a leading figure during the revolutionary era. He constantly adapted Western art to the needs of Chinese politics, and was happy to do so. He was described as

⁷⁰ Liu, 216.

⁷¹ Xian, “On national form in Chinese music,” 1.

a “composer who played a decisive role in the history of new music in China,”⁷² and his works were considered as “documents of great value to Chinese musical culture.”⁷³ After his death in 1945, Xian was honored by the Communist music leadership who wanted all composers to follow the example of Xian and Nie Er.

During the Cultural Revolution, Jiang Qing put forth a call to adapt the *Cantata* into a piano concerto, and appointed this task to a committee of musicians in 1969. The primary members include Yin Chengzong, Chu Wanghua, Sheng Lihong, and Liu Zhuang.⁷⁴ As a successor of the *Cantata*, *Yellow River Piano Concerto* inherited its nationalistic idioms, revolutionary themes, and folk materials, and fused this into a Western classical music model. The third, fifth, and eighth movements of the *Cantata* are omitted, but the other movements from the *Cantata* are adapted in the *Concerto*.

1.3 The Birth of the Yellow River Piano Concerto

The development of the Cultural Revolution was not purely accidental. Mao’s 1942 “Talks” clearly stated his political standards for art and literary works. After the Communist Party came into power in 1949, it continued to emphasize that art and literature should serve the Party and serve the workers, peasants, and soldiers. In May of 1967, to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of Mao’s 1942 “Talks,” the *People’s Daily* newspaper highly praised the speech as an important historical milestone, and it was also

⁷² Liu, 221.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Chu Wanghua, “Huanghe gangqin xiezouqu shi zenyang danshengde” [The birth of the Yellow River Piano Concerto], *Renmin yinyue*, vol. 351 (1995): 3.

stated that musicians and composers should use the revolutionary musical works as a model.⁷⁵

As the Cultural Revolution began to commence, Jiang Qing took advantage of this situation in order to seize control of cultural affairs. In the summer of 1964, the National Modern Peking Opera Performance Conference was held in Beijing. It lasted five weeks, and nearly 200,000 audience members watched thirty-five different operas. Jiang Qing and five other leaders delivered speeches during the conference. In the following year, similar conferences were held in six other major regions, and many new operas emerged. The success of the national conference gave Jiang Qing great impetus for the opera modernization project.⁷⁶ With a large audience base in China, Peking Opera was undoubtedly the center of future cultural development. Jiang Qing's leadership of the Cultural Revolution began with the reform of Peking Opera.

Jiang's first reform project was the opera, *The Red Lantern*. Its anti-Japanese story and heroic characters made the opera successful. The term *yangban* (model)⁷⁷ was very often used to describe *The Red Lantern*. For example, a Peking Opera actor, Tan Yuanshou, referred to it as a *yangban*. One month later, two articles in the *Theatre Journal* described this opera as "an outstanding model"⁷⁸ of revolutionary modern Peking Opera. The national newspaper *Guangming Daily* published an article entitled "A Model

⁷⁵ Liu, 379.

⁷⁶ Clark, 17.

⁷⁷ Tan Yuanshou, "Shajiabang xiugai guocheng zhong yixie tihui" [Some lessons from the process of revising Shajiabang], *Xiji bao* 7 (1965): 37.

⁷⁸ Clark, 59.

That Keeps Improving” in reference to this reformed opera.⁷⁹ In 1965, Shanghai’s newspaper *Liberation Daily* stated: “*Shajiabang*, performed by the Beijing Peking Opera Company and the China Peking Opera Academy’s *The Red Lantern*, are the same: they are both models of the revolutionizing of Peking Opera.”⁸⁰

On December 26, 1966, the article “The Glorious Model for Implementing Chairman Mao’s Literary and Artistic Line” was published by *People’s Daily*. The article made reference to five Peking Operas including *The Red Lantern*, *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, *Shajiabang*, *Raid on the White-Tiger Regiment*, and *On the Docks*, two ballets including *Red Detachment of Women* and *The White-Haired Girl*, and one symphony, *Shajiabang*. They were praised as “Revolutionary Modern Model Works,”⁸¹ cultivated by Jiang Qing. On May 31, 1967, the article “Excellent Model of Revolutionary Literature and Art” in the editorial of *People’s Daily* officially proposed the term “model performances”⁸² (*yangbanxi*). Jiang’s political status had greatly improved because of these performances. *Yangbanxi* were performed everywhere, and became the heart of culture during the Cultural Revolution. The second group of *yangbanxi* proposed by the newspaper *Hongqi* in the early 1970s included two musical

⁷⁹ Dai Jiafang, *Yangbanxi de fengfengyuyu: Jiang Qing, yangbanxi ji neimu* [The trials and hardships of the model performances: Jiang Qing, the model performances and the inside story] (Beijing: Zhishi Press, 1995), 25.

⁸⁰ Clark, 59.

⁸¹ Shen Guofan, ““Hongdengji chengwei yangbanxi neimu” [The story of the Red Lantern became a model opera], *Jinan Daily* (2010): 1.

⁸² *Ibid.*

performances—*The Red Lantern with Piano Accompaniment* and the *Yellow River Piano Concerto*. Both works were organized by Yin Chengzong.⁸³

Yin's career path had not been as smooth as he originally expected. He was a gifted pianist and was born into a Christian family. He joined the preparatory school of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music at the age of twelve. In 1959, Yin won the first prize in the Piano Competition of the Seventh World Youth Festival in Vienna. He soon left China to study at the Leningrad Conservatory, where he won the second prize in the Tchaikovsky Competition in 1962. The first place that year was shared by the pianists Vladimir Ashkenazy and John Ogdon. After winning the second prize, Yin gave nearly sixty concerts in the Soviet Union and made his name as a virtuoso pianist.⁸⁴ After his return to China the following year, Yin taught at the Central Conservatory in Beijing, and then he was assigned to work as Principal Pianist in the Central Philharmonic.

Yin was one of the thousands of people who were sent to the countryside due to the re-education efforts of the Cultural Revolution. He was forced to experience the peasants' life and to adopt the politics of the CCP. He was severely criticized at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, not only because he was a pianist, but also because of his family's Christian religion.⁸⁵ Even so, Yin's living condition was not as distressing when compared to what happened to other pianists.

Liu Shikun, the third-prize winner of the Liszt Competition in 1956, and the second-prize winner of the Tchaikovsky Piano Competition in 1958, was imprisoned in

⁸³ Clark, 176.

⁸⁴ Kraus, 132.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 141.

the Beijing Taicheng prison in 1966.⁸⁶ Gu Shengying, the most outstanding female pianist at the time, won the second prize of the Chopin Competition in 1958. In 1967, at the age of 30, she committed suicide along with her mother and brother in order to escape the political pressure. Her father didn't know of their death until he was allowed to return home from exile a few years later.⁸⁷ Fu Cong (Fou Ts'ong) was the third-prize winner of the Chopin Competition in 1955, in addition to receiving a special Chopin Mazurka award. His father was known in China as a writer and translator of French literature, and had suffered criticism and abuse as early as 1957. Therefore, when Fu Cong graduated from the Warsaw Conservatory the following year, he decided not to return to China, but went to London to seek political asylum.⁸⁸ His parents committed suicide during the beginning of the Cultural Revolution.⁸⁹ Given Liu Shikun's arrest, Gu Shengying's suicide, and Fu Cong's exile, Yin decided to venture out bravely to save the status of the piano and restore his own reputation.

In response to the high demand for opera music, Yin began to write a piano solo reduction of *Shangjiabang* and a piano/vocal reduction of *The Red Lantern*. Yin made recordings of the two works and sent them to Jiang Qing. He expressed his intentions in a letter to her. He posed the following questions: "Is it possible to make the piano serve the workers, peasants, and soldiers? We looked at it this way: The piano was created by

⁸⁶ Ibid., 162.

⁸⁷ Melvin and Cai, 240.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 234.

⁸⁹ Unfortunately, on December 28, 2020, Fu Cong died of COVID-19 in London at the age 86. "Renowned Chinese pianist Fou Ts'ong dies of Covid-19" *BBC News*, December 29, 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-55471813>.

working people. Why can't it serve the working people, proletarian politics, and socialism?"⁹⁰ The premiere of *The Red Lantern with Piano Accompaniment* in Beijing was successful, and was attended by 10,000 people, including Mao, Jiang, and other Communist leaders.

Before the Cultural Revolution, Jiang Qing had mentioned that "the *Yellow River Cantata* is powerful and can be written into a piano concerto."⁹¹ After hearing about this, and after the newfound success of *The Red Lantern with Piano Accompaniment*, Yin wrote a letter to Jiang Qing to express his willingness to adapt the *Cantata* into a piano concerto and hoped for her appointment.⁹² In 1969, after Jiang's approval and under her guidance, Yin and several other musicians formed a team to compose the *Yellow River Piano Concerto*. As mentioned earlier, they included Yin Chengzong, Chu Wanghua, Sheng Lihong, and Liu Zhuang.

Chu Wanghua joined the preparatory school of the Central Conservatory of Music in 1952 at the age of eleven. At first he studied piano, but four years later his interests shifted to composition. He was admitted by the composition department of the conservatory and graduated in 1963. Because of his piano and composition background, he was invited by Yin to offer suggestions for the *Concerto*, and to perform the orchestral reduction at the second piano.⁹³

⁹⁰ Melvin and Cai, 262.

⁹¹ Chu, 2.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid., 3.

Sheng Lihong was a teacher in the composition department of the Central Conservatory at the time, and he was invited to take charge of writing the orchestration of the *Concerto*. Others who assisted in the creation of the work included Xu Feixing and Shi Shucheng. Xu Feixing was a student of Yin, and worked as a collaborative pianist in the Central Philharmonic. He was responsible for assisting in some transactional affairs such as writing letters to Jiang Qing regarding the team's progress. Shi Shucheng was a piano student in the Central Conservatory, and sometimes assisted the team by playing the piano solo part during rehearsals of the work. Neither Xu or Shi were involved in the actual composition of the work, but they did offer some pianistic suggestions.⁹⁴

After the first draft of the *Concerto* was completed, Yin invited Liu Zhuang to assist Sheng with the orchestration. Liu Zhuang was born into a musical family, and she studied piano with her father as a child. She started her composition studies at the Shanghai Conservatory in 1950. After her graduation, she joined the Central Conservatory for graduate studies, and was appointed to the faculty there in 1960.⁹⁵

The *Concerto* premiered on New Year's Day in 1970 and was performed in the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, featuring the Central Philharmonic, conducted by Li Delun. Yin served as the soloist during the premier. Fortunately, the video of the performance was recorded and is available online.⁹⁶ The *Yellow River Piano Concerto* immediately achieved great success, which promoted the development of the piano

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Yin Chengzong, "Yellow River Piano Concerto," (video), recorded January 1, 1970, in Beijing. <https://haokan.baidu.com/v?pd=wisenatural&vid=6818245202814226101>.

during this special era and also protected Yin's livelihood. After the death of Mao in 1976, Jiang and her three closest followers were arrested. In a major redirection of China's cultural policy, the *Concerto* experienced a radical repression, and Yin's career collapsed because he was considered politically related to Jiang. As China became more politically open and economically prosperous in the 1980s, the work experienced a revival, and gradually began to rebuild its reputation of reflecting the great Chinese nationalistic spirit. This *Concerto* is the only one of the many models under Jiang's leadership that still remains in the standard repertoire in China.

CHAPTER II – CHINESE TRADITIONAL MUSICAL AESTHETICS

2.1 *The Influences from Confucianism*

Confucianism is widely considered as the foundation of Chinese thought for over twenty-five centuries until the present day. Even though Confucianism is attributed to the Chinese philosopher Kong Fuzi, commonly known as Confucius, Confucian thought first came into being twenty-five centuries earlier.⁹⁷ Confucius absorbed and reorganized the rich cultural traditions from previous dynasties, developing them into a profound new system of moral and political philosophy applicable to individuals, families, societies, and governments.⁹⁸ His disciples recorded and compiled his sayings and ideas into the *Analects*, which has been passed down from one generation to the next. Throughout Chinese history, Confucian philosophy has been constantly interpreted and reinterpreted by his believers over thousands of years, and it continues to evolve even to this day.⁹⁹

The basis of Confucianism is the individual's moral advancement, which was the foundation of a good society and governance. Because of its moral expectation on governance, Confucianism became a state ideology until the late Qing dynasty in the twentieth century. In 1949, when the CCP attempted to establish a new society and culture, Confucianism still influenced people's behavior and thinking. As the writer Thomas H. C. Lee stated, Chinese educational tradition is "formulated and shaped almost

⁹⁷ Chi Yun Chang, *Confucianism: A Modern Interpretation*, trans. Orient Lee (Hangzhou: Zhejiang University Press, 2012), 1.

⁹⁸ Xiufeng Liu and Wen Ma, ed., *Confucianism Reconsidered: Insights for American and Chinese Education in the Twenty-First Century* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2018), 4.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

entirely by Confucian ideology. The staying power and pervasiveness of the influence of Confucianism on Chinese education can scarcely be exaggerated.”¹⁰⁰

Confucius considered music to be a manifestation of virtue, and that one of its functions was to coordinate social and ethical order as a crucial aspect of culture.¹⁰¹ Confucius said, “If a man be without the virtues proper to humanity, what has he to do with the rites of propriety? If a man be without the virtues proper to humanity, what has he to do with music?”¹⁰² In ancient China, the notion of rites and music were inseparable, and music positively contributed to one’s spiritual enlightenment.¹⁰³ Mencius, one of Confucius’s followers, stated in his writings that rites and music also play an important role in governance—“by seeing the rites of a ruler, we may know the character of his government. By hearing his music, we may know the character his virtue.”¹⁰⁴

The educational function of rites and music was also highly stressed in these writings. It was believed that rites and music served as a way to civilize the people through governmental discipline and self-discipline and to safeguard the stability of society. Another Confucian philosopher, Xunzi further stated, “music could deeply touch the hearts of people and play its educational role quickly.”¹⁰⁵ And the *Yue Ji* (Record of music, ca. third-second century BC) states that when ancient governments instituted rites

¹⁰⁰ Thomas H. C. Lee, *Education in Traditional China: A History* (Boston: Brill, 2000), 29.

¹⁰¹ Jie, 39.

¹⁰² Confucius, *The Analects of Confucius*, trans. James Legge (Auckland: The Floating Press, 2010), 19.

¹⁰³ So, 24.

¹⁰⁴ Mencius, *Mencius*, trans. Irene Bloom (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 32.

¹⁰⁵ Jie, 42.

and music, they intended to “...teach the people to regulate their likes and dislikes, and to turn them back to the normal course of humanity. Therefore the early kings instituted rites and music to regulate human conduct.”¹⁰⁶

We can understand the importance of music in ancient China from these writings and in particular about its social and political functions. Since ancient times, rites and music were used to promote good behavior and a willingness to obey social regulations. In this manner, the relationship between people and the government would be in harmony.

There are many similarities between Confucianism and Maoist ideology. Mao also emphasized the importance of music and its educational function as a vehicle to promote ideas. Various art forms were reformed during the Cultural Revolution in order to regulate the way people think and live.

Confucius also established the concepts of *yayue* (elegant/proper music), and *suyue* (vernacular music). According to Confucius, proper music benefits the good and stable governance, and vernacular music does the opposite. However, Confucius did not mention specific methods or systems to define what is proper and what is not. Instead, he left this open for interpretation to each ruler or government. He believed the ruler should ensure that proper music is performed throughout the nation, and that individuals should perform and compose proper music in order to achieve harmony in social relations.¹⁰⁷

Therefore, political forces played a crucial role in reforming music both before, during,

¹⁰⁶ Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, trans. Derk Bodde (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), 342.

¹⁰⁷ Lau, 119.

and after the Cultural Revolution, and interfered in the lives of the Chinese people. Communist leaders emphasized more than once that music should be used as a tool to suit their political needs. One of the reasons for launching the Cultural Revolution was to ensure that proper music was performed throughout the nation. Also, Mao and Jiang expressed that both Western and traditional music could be utilized, as long as it promoted the revolution and served the masses. The CCP sought to draw parallels with the ideas of Confucius, by declaring that music was considered proper if it promoted social change. Any music that had the opposite affect would be banned by the CCP. As one of the many Chinese models, the *Yellow River Piano Concerto* was certainly in line with the CCP's interpretation of proper music.

Confucianism also promotes appreciation of the beauty of nature, and the idea that music is an expression of harmony between human beings and nature.¹⁰⁸ Ancient Chinese philosophers believed that music should be an “integration of humans and nature.”¹⁰⁹ For this reason, Chinese music adopted nature as its primary theme, especially in music written for the *qin*. *Qin* or *guqin* is a seven-stringed plucked zither and is tuned to the pentatonic scale. *Qin* music is greatly influenced by Confucian ideas. Confucius was described as an active performer of the *qin*, and he believed playing music on this instrument would purify and cultivate one's spirit.¹¹⁰ As a result, music for this instrument became increasingly popular among the literati and its music was well-

¹⁰⁸ Jie, 39.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 43.

¹¹⁰ So, 31.

documented in many treatises and books.¹¹¹ *Qin* music, like almost all Chinese music, uses programmatic titles. Ancient music such as “Lofty Mountains and Flowing Water,” “Snow on a Sunny Day,” “Wild Geese Flock to Sandy Shores,” “Autumn Moon at the Han Palace,” “Three Lakes Mirroring the Moon,” and “Three Variations on ‘Plum Blossom,’” are excellent examples for illustrating the harmony between human beings and nature. A legendary *qin* performer, Bo Ya, is associated with performing the work “Lofty Mountains and Flowing Water.” He considered himself to be one with the mountains and water when performing the piece. As the author Jin Jie explained, “since humans are in harmony with nature, they have become a part of nature, rather than a detached spectator or observer.”¹¹² This attempt to simulate nature and become a part of it is different from Western conventions. With this in mind, it is not difficult to understand why Chinese people give the Yellow River a special status and frequently use it as a symbol of national identity in their literature and art.

2.2 *The Use of the Yellow River as Symbolism*

The Yellow River is the second longest river in China. It originates in the Tibetan Plateau and flows about 5,500 kilometers through northern China and finally empties into the Bohai Sea, draining an area of about 753,000 square kilometers.¹¹³ Cultural relics of the Stone Age have been widely discovered in the Yellow River Basin, the earliest of which can be traced back one million years ago.¹¹⁴ The plains around the middle of the

¹¹¹ Lau, 123.

¹¹² Jie, 38.

¹¹³ Dawen Yang and Hiroshi Ishidaira, “Profile of the Yellow River Basin,” in *The Yellow River: Water and Life*, ed. Tetsuya Kusuda (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 2009), 5.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

Yellow River are where Chinese civilization mainly originated around 4,000 years ago, during what historians call the Xia dynasty. During the long history of China, the river has been bestowed with cultural and spiritual symbolism. Its dragon-like shape inspired the Chinese national identity based on this mythical creature. Chinese ancestors took the dragon as a symbol of themselves, and the people refer to themselves as descendants of the dragon and the Yellow Emperor.¹¹⁵

The Yellow River has been called “mother river,”¹¹⁶ and is linked with China’s political, cultural, and economic development. The main crops produced in the Yellow River Basin include wheat, corn, and cotton, which play an important role in food production.¹¹⁷ The Yellow River has been a great economic contributor in the areas of shipping and industrial production. However, the river also has been called “China’s sorrow”¹¹⁸ because of the frequent and violent flooding which often destroys lives and crops.¹¹⁹ According to records, water management of the Yellow River began as early as twentieth century BC.¹²⁰ Large numbers of dams and dikes were constructed for generating power and storing and delivering irrigation water. During the Anti-Japanese War, the Nationalist Party breached a major Yellow River dike in Henan Province in a desperate attempt to use the flood to slow down the Japanese attacks. Although the route

¹¹⁵ Kevin Sinclair, *The Yellow River: A 5000 Year Journey Through China* (Los Angeles: Knapp Press, 1987), 14.

¹¹⁶ Yang and Ishidaira, 16.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Mei Chengrui and Harold E. Dregne, “Silt and the Future Development of China’s Yellow River,” *The Geographical Journal* 167, no.1 (2001): 7.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Yang and Ishidaira, 17.

of the Japanese army was indeed forced to change, it also killed over 800,000 people, and turned millions of Chinese farmers into refugees, resulting in three million deaths during the Henan Famine of 1942-1943.¹²¹

The Yellow River basin is referred to as the cradle of Chinese culture,¹²² and is a place for cultural identification and for inspiring artistic imagination. As early as the eighth century, the most prominent Chinese poet of the Tang dynasty, Li Bai, beautifully expressed the magnificent views of the Yellow River, as well as its challenges of water management:

黄河西来决昆仑，咆哮万里触龙门。
波涛天，尧咨嗟。
大禹理百川，儿啼不窥家。
杀湍湮洪水，九州始蚕麻。¹²³

[The Yellow River came from the west, it rushed towards Kunlun Mountain; roared thousands of miles, and hit the dragon gate. The huge waves swallowed countless lives; Emperor Yao sighed. Yu the Great worked hard to managed the flood; unable to take care of his crying children at home].

As in the Chinese traditional literature, the Yellow River is also endowed with cultural and spiritual symbolism in the folk songs that it has inspired, such as the *haozi*. *Haozi* is an important type of Chinese folk song associated with manual labor.¹²⁴ The

¹²¹ Kathryn Edgerton-Tarpley, "Between War and Water: Farmer, City, and State in China's Yellow River Flood of 1938-1947," *Agricultural History* 90, no. 1 (2016): 95.

¹²² Yang and Ishidaira, 10.

¹²³ Li Bai, "Gong Wu Du He" [Don't cross the river], in *The Poetry of Li Bai* (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2011), 174.

¹²⁴ Han Kuo-Huang, "Folk Songs of the Han Chinese: Characteristics and Classification," *Asian Music* 20, no. 2 (1989): 113.

Chinese name *haozi* translates to “crying” or “shouting.” It evolved from the shouts which came naturally while working, with one lead voice answered by a chorus of voices.¹²⁵ Victor H. Mair and Mark Bender describe the style of *haozi* as “the antiphonal style, in which two or more singers ‘talk’ back and forth in song..., the basic call-and-response dynamic is consistent.”¹²⁶

In the example of a boatmen’s *haozi*, the leading boatman does not enjoy a higher status or salary in comparison to the other boatmen. On the contrary, he is the person with excellent vocal ability who can lead or inspire others to sing the *haozi*, therefore earning him the lead position within the crew.¹²⁷ The function of this type of song is to coordinate the rhythm of the work by singing together with unified rhythmic patterns. Also, the exchanging calls between the leading voice and answering voices is a form of helpful communication, especially given the demanding, physical work required of this position. Additionally, the short statements and jokes typically sung by the lead voice help to relieve the hardship and stress of the boatmen.¹²⁸

The first movement of the *Yellow River Cantata*, “Yellow River Boatmen’s Song” is a musical portrayal of boatmen who navigated the vessel of the librettist Guang Weiran when he crossed the Yellow River in 1938. Xian Xinghai was inspired to adapt Guang’s lyrics in the *Cantata*, and borrowed characteristics from *haozi* including shorter phrases,

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Victor H. Mair and Mark Bender, ed., *The Columbia Anthology of Chinese Folk and Popular Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 91.

¹²⁷ Igor Iwo Chabrowski, *Singing on the River: Sichuan Boatmen and Their Work Songs, 1880-1930s* (Boston: Brill, 2015), 115.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

steady rhythms, and simple melodic materials, depicting the tension of the boatmen at work. The lyrics also employed exclamations (Musical Example 1)—the nonsensical words such as *heyou* are the most common utterance of *haozi*.¹²⁹ The laughter heard later in the *Cantata* depicts the cheerfulness of the boatmen as they safely reach the opposite bank of the river (Musical Example 2).

Musical score for Musical Example 1, *Yellow River Cantata*, first movement, mm. 7-11. The score is for Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. It features a 3/4 time signature and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The lyrics include "嗨呦! Hei you!" and "划呦, 划呦, 划呦! Hua you, Hua you, Hua you!".

Musical Example 1 *Yellow River Cantata*, first movement, mm. 7-11.

Musical score for Musical Example 2, *Yellow River Cantata*, first movement, mm. 61-64. The score is for Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. It features a 3/4 time signature and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The lyrics include "嗨呦! Hei you!" and "哈哈哈哈哈哈哈哈哈哈哈哈哈哈哈 Ha ha ha Ha ha ha Ha ha ha Ha ha ha Ha".

Musical Example 2 *Yellow River Cantata*, first movement, mm. 61-64.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 116.

When the Yellow River team of composers later adapted the *Cantata* into a piano concerto, they maintained Xian's usage of boatmen's *haozi* to depict their struggle and victory over nature. This will be discussed in the next chapter. It is not only a musical depiction of struggle between the boatmen and the Yellow River, but also an expression of the people's misery during wartime and their confidence that they would ultimately triumph. Both the first movements of the *Cantata* and the *Concerto* present the Yellow River as a symbol of endless suffering and pain, inspiring the heroism and patriotism of the Chinese people.

The Yellow River can also be seen as a symbol of the successful colonization of Chinese society and a means of cultural identification. In the second movement of the *Cantata*, "Ode to the Yellow River," its lyrical melody, flowing phrases, and use of long note values in the accompaniment depict the majestic river as sung by the broad voice of a tenor. This movement praises the river, and expresses the hope that the Chinese nation will be as great and strong as the river. The words of the poem passionately express this emotion—"Ah! My friends! The heroic spirit of the Yellow River dominates the plains of Asia, representing the spirit of our nation: mighty and noble! Here, we are singing our hymn towards the Yellow River." The *Concerto* also maintains this movement as its second movement. The lyrical and romantic characteristics heard in both the *Cantata* and the *Concerto* serve to represent the heroic spirit of the river and Chinese ethnicity.

2.3 The Chinese Concept of Program Music

Chinese musical works have a long history of employing poetic and descriptive titles. The earliest existing record of Chinese programmatic composition begins with *qin* music. Playing the *qin* became a way of connecting with literature, music, and Confucian

philosophy. As a convention of literati culture, *qin* music is well documented in many sources. Written nearly two thousand years ago, *Qin cao* is the oldest surviving handbook of *qin* music. It was written by Cai Yong during the Han dynasty (206 BC-220 AD) and contained forty-seven pieces.¹³⁰ The author provides a detailed description for each piece, as well as historical background and programmatic interpretation. Later, historians also discovered other books for *qin* and other solo instruments which employed titles and program notes.¹³¹ Since ancient times, the Chinese people have shown a preference for music containing extra-musical ideas. As the ethnomusicologist Han Kuo-Huang states in “The Chinese Concept of Program Music,” “it is uncommon to find Chinese instrumental pieces without some sort of descriptive or suggestive title.”¹³² Typically, there are five main categories of titles in Chinese instrumental music—the title can summarize the content of the story, indicate the structure of the piece, describe the performance features, suggest the length, or describe the musical mode being used.¹³³

Long before music notation appeared during sixth century China, early music was transmitted orally. This meant that there was much regional variation even of the same musical content, and many pieces were lost. Therefore, descriptive notes and titles play an important role in retaining those details. The earliest form of notation is known as *wenzipu*, which is a prose description of music. The pitches, fingering, and order of

¹³⁰ Han Kuo-Huang, “Titles and Program Notes in Chinese Musical Repertoires,” *The World of Music* 27, no. 1 (1985): 68.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² Han Kuo-Huang, “The Chinese Concept of Program Music,” *Asian Music* 10, no. 1 (1978): 18.

¹³³ Gao Houyong, *Minzu qiyue gailun* [Introduction to national instrumental music] (Nanjing: Jiangsu People’s Publishing, 1981), 207.

strings are recorded, however, the rhythm is not indicated systematically. Therefore, a proficient understanding of descriptive words and titles is essential for a proper interpretation of this music.

Additionally, composers enjoyed associating music with literary works or with historical characters, and created various titles and program notes.¹³⁴ Most titles were related to the views of nature and important historical events. According to Han Kuo-Huang, the Chinese people love giving titles not only to music, but also to literature, architecture, and even recipes.¹³⁵ Understanding the implied meaning of the title allows the player to grasp the style and content of the piece.

Han classifies three major types of program music: psychological, descriptive, and imitative.¹³⁶ The general mood of a piece is suggested in the title if it belongs to the psychological type of program music. Various moods can be found through the following examples: the feeling of happiness may be evoked in “Blooming Flowers and the Full Moon;” tranquility in the folk tune “Autumn Moon Over the Calm Lake;” and enthusiasm in “Wild Dance of the Golden Snake.” The second type of program music usually relates to a historical event, such as the pipa music of “Ambush from Ten Sides,” and “The King Doffs His Armor,” which are both related to stories of the tragic hero Xiang Yu. The third type of program music, imitative, uses titles which suggest sounds in nature, including bird calls, galloping horses, blowing wind, or the sounds of raining or water.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 204.

¹³⁵ Han, “The Chinese Concept of Program Music,” 20.

¹³⁶ Han, “Titles and Program Notes in Chinese Musical Repertoires,” 72.

Xian Xinghai gave titles to each of the eight movements in the *Yellow River Cantata*, and most of them are descriptive. Since the *Yellow River Piano Concerto* was adapted from the programmatic cantata, it inherited this programmatic element. The *Concerto* consists of four movements, which not only inherit the literary titles from the *Cantata*, but also relate to the Chinese traditional rhetorical structure, *qi-cheng-zhuan-he*. This structure is commonly used in Chinese literature and art forms, and was first introduced in the writings of Confucius.¹³⁷

Qi means the beginning. In a piece of literature or music, this is where the main characters and conflicts are introduced. In the first movement of the *Concerto*, “Yellow River Boatmen’s Song,” the music imitates the call and response singing of the boatmen who eventually arrive safely at the opposite bank of the river. The boatmen and their struggles are depicted in the first movement, which further represents the brave spirit of the Chinese people and their ability to overcome hardships.

Cheng translates to continuation, where the characters and their emotions are further developed. The second movement of the *Concerto* uses the Yellow River as a symbol of great nationalistic spirit, in order to express the appreciation of the river. The composers of the *Cantata* and *Concerto* endowed the river with a heroic spirit and further recognized it as the Chinese spirit. Instead of simply being an observer of the Yellow River, the composers committed themselves to being one with nature and to sharing its spirit. They employed programmatic music in these works not just as a way of depicting

¹³⁷ Andy Kirkpatrick, “Traditional Chinese Text Structures and their Influence on the Writing in Chinese and English of Contemporary Mainland Chinese Students,” *Journal of Second Language Writing* 6 (1997): 224.

the majestic views of the river, but more importantly, as a way of achieving harmony between human beings and nature.

Zhuan is the transition or turning point, and presents the maximum conflict of the literary or musical work. The title of the third movement, “Wrath of the Yellow River,” suggests the mood of this movement which belongs to the psychological type of program music. The wrath of the river represents the people’s grievance against the invaders. The music changes from a bright and cheerful tone, to a grieving and angry mood during the course of this movement.

He is the conclusion, a final statement to describe the author’s desire. In the original score of the *Concerto*, there are two pages of program notes which describe the extra-musical meaning of each movement. Even in the score, there are Chinese inscriptions above certain passages to illustrate the moods, images, and literary relationships. The inscription at the beginning of the fourth movement, “Defend the Yellow River,” states “Chairman Mao and the Communist Party mobilize revolution.”¹³⁸ The entire movement displays an energetic and powerful sound, indicating the determination of the Chinese people to defeat the invaders, and a strong will to protect their river and nation.

¹³⁸ Yin Chengzong, Sheng Lihong, Chu Wanghua, and Liu Zhuang, *Yellow River Piano Concerto* (Beijing: People’s Literature Publishing House, 1973), 60.

CHAPTER III – A SYNTHESIS OF CHINESE AND WESTERN MUSICAL
CHARACTERISTICS

3.1 The First Movement, “Yellow River Boatmen’s Song”

The Yellow River team traveled to Yan’an and lived there to observe the local people, who lived along the river. Yin recalled “we spent several weeks among the people who lived along the river. We interviewed many of them and learned of the struggle they endured at the hands of the invading Japanese army, how they had to defend themselves with limited arms, and how so many of their people were slaughtered.”¹³⁹ The team collected the folk tunes and rhythms that they heard as they observed the people, as well as the story of the boatmen’s work song, and brought together those elements in the *Concerto*. This led to the composition of the first movement, the “Yellow River Boatmen’s Song,” which depicts the tumultuous power of the river and the boatmen’s struggle with the forces of nature.

The instrumentation in this movement uses Western conventions, except for the use of a Chinese flute which mostly doubles the flute part. This movement opens with a descending whole step from F# to E in the orchestra, imitating the call of the boatmen.¹⁴⁰ This short motive appears throughout the first movement in both the orchestra and piano, and is always followed by a series of ascending and descending chromatic scales. These scales symbolize the boatmen fighting against the turbulent river, accompanied by tremolos in the strings and an ascending glissando in the harp (Musical Example 3).

¹³⁹ Roberta Hershenson, “Pianist’s Long Struggle for a Belief in Art,” *New York Times* 12 (1990): 21, <https://www.nytimes.com/1990/10/28/nyregion/pianist-s-long-struggle-for-a-belief-in-art.html>.

¹⁴⁰ Chen, 35.

Musical Example 3 *Yellow River Piano Concerto*, first movement, mm. 1-3.

With the dynamics of forte and fortissimo and the use of *crescendi* and *decrescendi*, these scale and tremolo figurations embody the obvious influences of Rachmaninoff and Tchaikovsky.¹⁴¹ These figures repeat three times, leading to a fiery cadence, with a tremolo figure that *crescendos* in the entire orchestra. Using melodic and rhythmic devices to build a natural *crescendo* and intense musical frenzy also reminds the listener of a Rossini *crescendo*. The piano solo immediately takes over this fiery orchestral opening with a cadenza-like passage that recalls nineteenth-century virtuosic writing. The main theme is then stated in the piano, beginning in measure seventeen. This strategy of delaying the introduction of the main theme with cadenza-like figuration can also be heard in the first movements of Moszkowski's *Piano Concerto No. 2, Op. 59*, and Saint Sæens's *Piano Concerto No. 2, Op. 22*.

The main theme features a repetitive rhythmic pattern and strong accents in duple meter. The first appearance of this strong and repetitive rhythmic pattern is in measure 6,

¹⁴¹ Wolfgang Birtel, "Preface," in *Yellow River Piano Concerto*, trans. Stewart Spencer (London: Ernst Eulenburg Ltd., 2009), IV.

performed by strings in unison. This rhythmic pattern is characterized by two shorter-note values followed by a longer-note value, and appears throughout the entire first movement (Musical Example 4). This simple but powerful rhythmic pattern in unison in the strings indicates the Chinese folk style of *haozi*, and signifies the shouts of boatmen as they worked to unify their pace and concentrate their efforts.¹⁴²

Musical Example 4 *Yellow River Piano Concerto*, first movement, mm. 7-11.

The second theme begins at measure 51, and the short-short-long rhythm in the piano part leads to a dialogue between soloist and orchestra (Musical Example 5). This passage is also inspired by the call and response style of *haozi*. As mentioned previously, the *haozi* style features a solo singer who leads the folk singing while the boatmen respond in unison as they work. The *Yellow River Piano Concerto* is influenced by this style, and the listener can observe the conversation between piano solo and orchestra tutti, which resembles the interactions between the solo singer and the energetic responses of the boatmen.

¹⁴² Han, “Folk Songs of the Han Chinese: Characteristics and Classification,” 113.



Musical Example 5 *Yellow River Piano Concerto*, first movement, mm. 51-58.

Before the third theme enters, the transition from measures 75 to 83 showcases a typical nineteenth-century virtuosic piano writing style through the use of rapid arpeggios, and a cadenza which features octaves, thick chords, tremolos, and arpeggiated figures which alternate between the hands and use the extreme registers of the piano. This virtuosic passage simulates the lyrics in the *Yellow River Cantata*—“Do you remember the scene of the boatmen struggling for their lives, fighting against the frightful, raging waves? If you have forgotten, then listen!”¹⁴³ These passages are not necessarily meant to showcase the skills of the pianist, but to programmatically mimic the furious waves of the river. Also, the descending octave grace notes, heard at the beginning of measures 75, 77, 79, 80, and 81 resemble the shouting of boatmen. The simple, repetitive short-short-long rhythmic pattern indicates their unison pacing and fighting spirit. These grace notes and short-short-long rhythmic pattern represent the actions of boatmen and alternate with the virtuosic passages that evoke the raging water, depicting a vivid image of boatmen struggling with the river.

¹⁴³ Xian Xinghai and Guang Weiran, *Yellow River Cantata* (Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company, 1949).

The depiction of the boatmen, the working class, was in accord with the musical values promoted during the Cultural Revolution. In the *Cantata*, the boatmen successfully crossing the river expresses the confidence that the Chinese people will eventually defeat the invaders, while the *Concerto*, conveys the wishes that the emerging regime will solve the nation's difficulties.

3.2 The Second Movement, "Ode to the Yellow River"

The second movement, "Ode to the Yellow River," is set in a slow tempo, *Adagio maestoso*, which shows a Western influence. The melodic content is borrowed from the *Cantata*, which is dominated by pentatonic writing. However, throughout the movement, the B-flat major triadic accompaniment is deeply rooted in Western harmonic tradition. The most striking moment in this movement is a quotation from "March of the Volunteers" by Nie Er, which is the national anthem of the People's Republic of China (Musical Example 6).



Musical Example 6 *March of the Volunteers*, mm. 1-4.

Nie Er devoted himself to the Communist revolution as early as the 1930s, and composed a great deal of anti-Japanese music. This anthem reflects his revolutionary spirit, and features a narrow melodic range, pentatonic scales, accented downbeats, and driving triplet rhythmic patterns. Its heroic and patriotic qualities, powerful sound, and tuneful quality made the song immediately popular after its composition in 1935. The second movement of the *Concerto* quotes the tune near the end of the movement, in

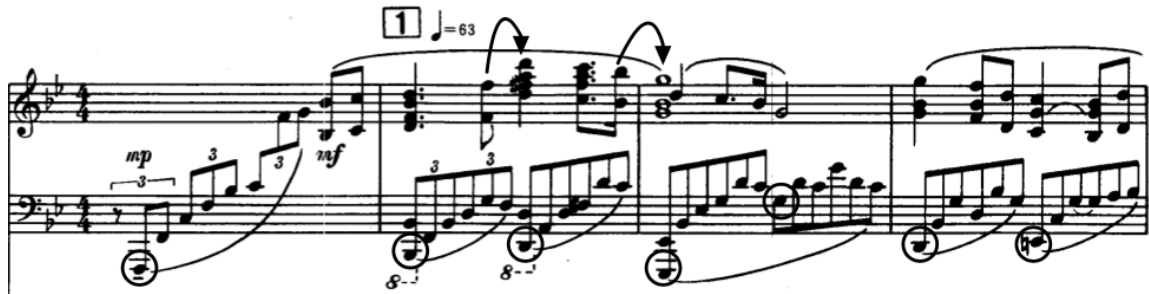
measures 61 through 64—the horn and trumpet play this quotation twice in melodic sequence (Musical Example 7).

The image shows three staves of musical notation in 4/4 time, representing measures 61 through 64. The top staff (Horn) begins with a quarter rest, followed by a dotted quarter note G4, an eighth note F#4, and a quarter note E4. The middle staff (Trumpet) begins with a quarter rest, followed by a dotted quarter note G4, an eighth note F#4, and a quarter note E4. The bottom staff (Piano) begins with a quarter rest, followed by a dotted quarter note G4, an eighth note F#4, and a quarter note E4. The music continues with various chordal and melodic patterns, including a measure with a fermata over a chord in the second measure of each staff.

Musical Example 7 *Yellow River Piano Concerto*, second movement, mm. 61-64.

In regard to the form, the entire movement can be divided into six small sections, and features rhythmic and melodic motives which I will further describe below. Due to this movement's shorter length, it can also be considered to be a through-composed form, which is often used in Chinese vocal music, as well as a rhapsodic style which shows a Western influence.

The first section is heard in measures 1 through 34. After an orchestra introduction, the piano enters in measure fifteen with an arpeggio figuration in the left hand, and this continues for the entire first section. The downbeat of each arpeggio always starts in the lower register of the piano, followed by a leap to the next note. The melody in the right hand also contains leaps, especially between shorter note values and longer note values (Musical Example 8).



Musical Example 8 *Yellow River Piano Concerto*, second movement, mm. 15-18.

The second section (mm. 35-48) retains some of the leaps heard in the first section. A series of fast sixteenth notes in the left hand begins each measure—sometimes groups of four sixteenths, quintuplets, or sextuplets are used, and always begin with a leap. In the third (mm. 49-53) and fifth sections (mm. 59-65), the texture in the piano part becomes thicker through the frequent use of chords and octaves. Here, the team of composers attempted to explore the entire range of the instrument and thicker chordal effects, in order to depict the spectacular views of the Yellow River. As in the first section, the left hand always emphasizes the downbeat in the lower register, followed by successive fast-moving chords (Musical Example 9).




Musical Example 9 *Yellow River Piano Concerto*, second movement, mm. 49-50.

This use of virtuosic octaves and thick chords is commonly used by Western composers, such as Liszt and Rachmaninoff. Even though it is not an innovative style of

writing, it effectively evokes the Chinese people’s patriotic emotions and heroic spirit. The emotional impact of the music is clear through the quote of the national anthem and the fact that the movement ends in pentatonic mode, moments which are indeed powerful when understood through the ears of the Chinese listener.

3.3 The Third Movement, “Wrath of the Yellow River”

The third movement, “Wrath of the Yellow River,” is a combination of two movements from the *Cantata*, “Yellow River Ballad” and “Yellow River Resentment.” This third movement starts with an orchestral introduction featuring an impromptu passage marked *ad lib.* (*ad libitum*). It features a pentatonic scale on E-flat performed by the *dizi*, a traditional Chinese flute made from bamboo. The *dizi* is an important wind instrument in Chinese folk music. With its bright and clear timbre, *dizi* is often used to express lively and energetic emotions. The relevance of the use of this instrument is made clear in the inscription of the music which reads, “Sunshine in the revolutionary headquarters.”¹⁴⁴ The solo *dizi* opens the movement in a free manner with high pitches, perhaps depicting the vast and peaceful Yellow River scenery (Musical Example 10).



The musical notation shows a Dizi part on a single staff in treble clef with one flat. It begins with a whole rest, followed by a series of notes forming a pentatonic scale. The first few notes are marked *ad lib.* and the subsequent notes are marked *mf*. The notation includes various ornaments and trills, and the piece concludes with a final note and a fermata.

革命根据地阳光普照
Sunshine in the revolutionary headquarters

Musical Example 10 *Yellow River Piano Concerto*, third movement, m. 1.

The distinctive timbre of this instrument, coupled with its traditional use of trills and other ornaments immediately draws the attention of the listener. The piano continues

¹⁴⁴ Yin Chengzong, Sheng Lihong, Chu Wanghua, and Liu Zhuang, 35.

to draw inspiration from this *dizi* melody and follows its improvisatory features and use of the pentatonic scale from the previous phrase. In addition, the piano solo imitates the sounds and idiomatic gestures of *zheng*, the Chinese plucked-boxed zither, through the use of impromptu, sweeping, arpeggiated gestures.

With a broad range and beautiful timbre, *zheng* is known as the “Oriental Piano”¹⁴⁵ and was first popular in Shaanxi Province.¹⁴⁶ Glissando is one of the most important *zheng* techniques, also known as *huazou*. There are generally two different types of glissandi in Chinese music compositions—a decorative glissando and a melodic glissando.¹⁴⁷ The piano writing here imitates the melodic glissandi of *zheng*, and features ascending and descending sweeping gestures within a pentatonic scale, suggesting the flowing river and providing a cheerful mood (Musical Example 11).

Musical Example 11 *Yellow River Piano Concerto*, third movement, m. 1.

¹⁴⁵ Jie, 64.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Samuel Wong Sheng, *Qi: An Instrumental Guide to the Chinese Orchestra*, ed. Lim Yangzheng and Yang Jiwei (Singapore: Teng, 2005), 76.

The A section of the third movement (mm. 2-53) adapts techniques of *pipa*, another Chinese plucked string instrument. Compared with *zheng*, *pipa* has a more crisp and bright timbre. The second type of glissando, decorative, dominates this section, and can be heard in the thirty-second note ornaments of the melodic line. Similar to Western conventions, such glissandos are usually short and fast, spanning over a small range of notes.¹⁴⁸ However, the addition of E-flat pentatonic scales, irregular phrasing, and disjunct melodic shapes enhance the Chinese folk flavor, creating a joyful and lively mood (Musical Example 12).



Musical Example 12 *Yellow River Piano Concerto*, third movement, mm. 2-5.

The B section begins at measure 54, and features thick chords and octaves marked with accents and *tenutos*. This section is marked *Patetico*, and the lightness from the previous section dramatically changes to a bitter mood, indicating the suffering of the Chinese people due to the Japanese invasion and war. In measures 64 to 72, the use of rapid, delicate, repeat notes in the high register of the piano imitate the tremolo figures of *yangqin*, a Chinese hammered dulcimer. The *yangqin* is placed on a wooden stand, and the strings of the instrument are struck with two small, lightweight bamboo sticks, causing them to vibrate, and resulting in a short and quick tremolo. The composers's

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

creative use of the *yangqin* tremolo is a technical challenge for pianists to simulate (Musical Example 13).



Musical Example 13 *Yellow River Piano Concerto*, third movement, mm. 64-68.

The next section beginning in measure 82 is marked *Agitato*. The mood becomes more resentful, and the piano writing is more virtuosic here. Through the use of fast octaves, chromatic runs, thick chords in both hands, arpeggiated figures, and cadenza writing in the piano, this section evokes the painful feelings of the Chinese people during the Sino-Japanese war. In an effort to express the energetic and powerful mood, the team of composers once again borrowed from the Western conventions of the nineteenth-century virtuosic style of piano writing. There is even a section in measures 89 through 91 that is reminiscent of Chopin. Measures 133 and 134 feature rapid, contrary motion chords with scalar octaves, and an unstable harmony. The music then returns to the use of E-flat pentatonic scales beginning in measure 135, as previously heard in the A section. These uninterrupted, fast-moving scales are in both hands, and sustain for fourteen bars, with an indication of *fortissimo*. As the inscription states here, “The Yellow River is rolling with fury,”¹⁴⁹ and these fast-moving scales embody the anger of the river and the anger of the Chinese people toward their invaders.

¹⁴⁹ Yin Chengzong, Sheng Lihong, Chu Wanghua, and Liu Zhuang, 55.

In this movement, the composers not only simulate the techniques of Chinese instruments in the piano writing, but also include Chinese instruments, *dizi* and *pipa*, into the orchestra, in order to highlight Chinese nationalism. In addition to the influence of these Chinese instrumental idioms, the music reveals the influences of Western compositional techniques, including virtuosic nineteenth-style piano writing.

3.4 The Fourth Movement, “Defend the Yellow River”

In contrast to the previous movement, the main purpose of the last movement, “Defend the Yellow River,” is to stimulate the Chinese people’s revolutionary enthusiasm and patriotism. This movement opens with an orchestral introduction featuring brass instruments, and a majestic melody that borrows from the “The East is Red” folk tune (Musical Example 14).

东方红，太阳升。中国出了个毛泽东。他为
The east is red, the sun is rising. From China, appears Mao Zedong. He strives

10
人民谋幸福，呼儿嗨哟，他是人民大救星。
for the people's happiness, Hurrah, he is the people's savior.

Musical Example 14 *The East is Red*, mm. 1-17.

This folk tune was popularized in northern Shaanxi province during the Sino-Japanese war. The lyrics expressed the people’s deep appreciation for Mao and his leadership. The tune symbolized Chairman Mao, and a corresponding inscription is indicated at the beginning of the movement—“Chairman Mao and the Communist Party

mobilize revolution.”¹⁵⁰ The piano enters at measure 8, and features a virtuosic cadenza passage, reflecting the Chinese peoples’ response to the chairman’s call.

After this introduction, the A theme is introduced in the piano, beginning in measure 19. This theme is adapted from the seventh movement of the *Cantata*, and the composers utilized theme and variation form. The first statement of the theme is marked *Animoso*, and uses two-measure phrases, large leaps in the right hand, and descending four-note ostinato octaves in the left hand. Even though the right-hand theme is a replication of the Chinese folk tune, the octave left-hand accompaniment reflects influences of Western romanticism.

In the eight variations that follow, the texture, rhythmic patterns, character, tempo, and key are varied, which is typical of Western theme and variation form. The movement not only adapts the melodic content from the *Cantata*, but also keeps its canonic texture. For example, in the *Concerto*, the imitation between piano and strings in the third variation begins in measure 94. Another example can be seen in the canon between the piano and trombone which begins in measure 133 of the fourth variation.

Please compare musical examples 15 and 16. Musical Example 15 is taken from the seventh movement of the *Cantata* which exhibits an imitative four-voice choral texture. Musical Example 16 is taken from measures 133 to 140 of the *Concerto*, and shows the influence of the *Cantata* texture through canonic imitation of piano and trombone.

¹⁵⁰ Yin Chengzong, Sheng Lihong, Chu Wanghua, and Liu Zhuang, 60.

S. 全 中国! 风 在 吼,

A. 华 北! 保 卫 全 中 国! 风 在 吼, (龙 格 龙 格)

T. 保 卫 全 中 国! 风 在 吼, (龙 格 龙 格 龙 格 龙 格)

B. 风 在 吼, (龙 格 龙 格 龙 格 龙 格 龙 格 龙)

Musical Example 15 *Yellow River Cantata*, fourth movement, mm. 126-132.

Marziale ♩ = 152

Trombone

Piano

Musical Example 16 *Yellow River Piano Concerto*, fourth movement, mm. 133-140.

In measures 179 through 180, two measures of ascending glissandos in the harp transition the music to the rapid, driving chords played by the *pipa* beginning in measure 181. Once again, the composers utilized the crisp timbre of *pipa* in order to imitate the sounds of galloping horses and to create an intense atmosphere of war. The fifth variation is stated in augmentation by the horns in measures 191 through 196, and is accompanied by ascending and descending chromatic scales played by the flutes. These scales recall the moment that the boatmen were fighting against the turbulent river in the first movement. Also, the short conversation between piano and orchestra in measures 238 through 243 are reminiscent of the call-and-response style of *haozi* heard in the first movement.

As with all of the other movements, the pitch and contour of the “East is Red” folk tune has barely been altered, however, the theme is restated eight times using different techniques.¹⁵¹ From measures 263 through 302, the final statement of the theme is heard, and the chordal tremolos, rapid arpeggios, and successive octaves of the piano part continue to build to a tense and fiery mood. Finally, at measure 303, the music reaches an emotional climax at the *molto meno mosso*, in which the Chinese revolutionary folk tune, “The East is Red” is introduced again and performed in tutti.

The team of composers adapted this revolutionary tune and placed much emphasis on it in this movement because of its political importance. With the start of the Cultural Revolution, the musical attention of the people was drawn to this tune, which recalls Mao as the people’s savior in its lyrics.¹⁵² Setting “The East is Red” as the climax of the entire movement or even the whole *Concerto*, was a way of reinforcing the political enthusiasm and to applaud the heroism of the people as well as Mao.

Despite its strong Chinese revolutionary color, the figuration is very pianistic. The *Concerto*’s use of repeated chords and octaves, large leaps, and tremolos also illustrate its Western influence. The coda (mm. 320-381) blends the “The East is Red” folk tune, heard in the piano, with the anthem “Internationale,” heard in the horns, as a way of bridging the East and West (Musical Example 17). The “Internationale” is a French song

¹⁵¹ Chen, 75.

¹⁵² Kraus, 119.

and has been adopted by many Soviet and communist groups, and was used as the official Soviet national anthem from 1918 to 1944.¹⁵³

The image shows a musical score for Horn and Piano. The Horn part is written for four players (I, II, III, IV) in a 2/2 time signature with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The Piano part is written for both hands in the same time signature and key signature. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. Red lines are drawn under the piano accompaniment in the lower staves, and green lines connect notes across the Horn staves, highlighting specific melodic or harmonic elements.

Musical Example 17 *Yellow River Piano Concerto*, fourth movement, mm. 361-367.

These measures clearly demonstrate the revolutionary nature of the music and its impact from Western culture. If the third movement portrays the Chinese people's arduous struggle in war, this movement evokes the joy of a grand victory and the promise of a bright future for a new country.

¹⁵³ *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, Oxford University Press, s.v., "Internationale, n.", <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/98073>.

CONCLUSION

The use of the piano, an obviously Western instrument, to pursue the new music of China was an unexpected choice. Yin Chengzong, Chu Wanghua, Sheng Lihong, and Liu Zhuang made great efforts to use the piano to contribute to the revolution. Also, the piano was declared a “revolutionary instrument,”¹⁵⁴ which conformed to Mao’s ideology that foreign and Western technologies could be used for Chinese purposes. The concept of the piano and its relation to Western culture, modernization, and industrialization, was also in line with China’s pursuit of wealth and power.

Since the history of the piano in China is a short one, and all of its musicians were trained in the Western tradition, composition for this instrument was inevitably influenced by Western theory. The solo piano writing in the *Concerto* resounds with the echoes of nineteenth-century romanticism, through the use of grand gestures, appealing passagework, powerful sounds, and octaves and thick chords which permeate the work. However, the committee of composers intelligently employed themes of a Chinese cantata, and fused other folk tunes to enhance the work’s nationalistic elements. These melodic materials provide the framework of the *Concerto*, and made the work memorable and easier to be appreciated by the masses. The blending of folk tunes into the *Concerto* can be understood as a vehicle for promoting national identity. Another creative compositional practice is the use of the piano to imitate the sounds and performing techniques of Chinese traditional instruments. The unique timbre of Chinese instruments combines with compositional techniques borrowed from Western music, effectively blending two styles into an organic whole.

¹⁵⁴ Clark, 184.

Furthermore, the use of Yellow River as symbolism combined with the traditional rhetorical structure, *qi-cheng-zhuan-he*, represents the deep influences of Chinese traditional artistic aesthetics. By employing the title of Yellow River, adapting choral singing and folk tunes that relate to the location of northern Shaanxi, the revolutionary enthusiasm and cultural empathy of the people were immediately stimulated.

Even though its historical background may carry heavy political connotations, and the music received mixed reviews from critics, it cannot be denied that this is a special work linking Eastern and Western musical characteristics. Especially during the Cultural Revolution, this *Concerto* introduced Western music to millions of workers, peasants, soldiers, and laborers, many of whom might not have been exposed to piano music. As the only one of the model symphonic works created under Jiang Qing's leadership that is still performed on Chinese stages, its virtuosic, sentimental style, and patriotic spirit still make the *Concerto* appealing to Chinese ears.

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