

The Third of March (2018), an Opera by Lu Pei:

A Performer's Guide to Selected Arias with
the Composer's Perspectives

by

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ABSTRACT

Lu Pei (b. 1956) is a celebrated Chinese American composer who currently serves as a composition professor at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. His work is known for its varied use of Chinese folk tunes. He lived in the United States a long time, which cultivated within him abundant Western musical influences. The sound of multi-ethnic elements is greatly reflected in his own music. Writing an opera has always been his ultimate dream as a composer, and after many years of work, the opera *The Third of March* was completed and premiered in 2018 in Guangxi.¹ It has received wide acclaim and has been a favorite of younger listeners. Lu Pei aims to bring young people to modern music and the Chinese opera, not only using traditional Chinese musical elements, but also adopts “reinvented” modern Western musical styles, giving a new identity to the Chinese opera is the main foci of *The Third of March*.

To prepare for my performer’s guide to *The Third of March*, I will discuss Lu Pei’s inspirations from the Guangxi Song Fairs, and the music and culture of the Zhuang people surrounding the date in the Chinese lunar calendar, March Third. For Westerners unfamiliar with Lu Pei’s music, I will briefly introduce the compositional blending of Western and Chinese musical styles with a section about Chinese composers active in the United States, Chen Yi (b. 1953), and Tan Dun (b. 1957). I will also include a brief outline of the history of Chinese opera development, and Lu Pei’s compositional concepts and the background of the opera *The Third of March* will be discussed.

My performer’s guide, the primary focus of this project, will begin by stressing Lu Pei’s adoption of different Chinese folk songs and Western compositional elements.

¹ Lu Pei, Bio materials via email to author, October 11, 2018.

These techniques clearly gave the piece a unique stylistic identity. I will give a brief overview of the Chinese language diction in International Phonetic Alphabet. Finally, the qualities of the main arias in the opera, and some of the Chinese operatic techniques for singers, and their special effects, will be explored.

As Chinese composers are receiving increasing attention worldwide, I hope my paper will provide readers more information about Lu Pei and his opera, Chinese Opera more broadly, and Asian music in general.

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CHAPTER 1

Literature Review

Zhuang Culture and Zhuang Music

China contains fifty-six ethnicities and has more than 5,000 years of history. Han is the major Chinese ethnic group, while the remaining fifty-five minority ethnicities are distributed among the remainder of the population. Among them, Zhuang is the largest minority, which includes more than 18 million people. Most of the Zhuang live in the Guangxi province of Southern China, known as the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. The word “Guang,” from the name “Guangxi,” means expansive and wide. Due to its plentiful natural resources, Guangxi is home to other minorities such as the Yao, Miao, Dong, Hui, Yi, Shui, Jing, and others. While most of the Zhuang people live in the Guangxi Province, many of the remaining Zhuang live in the Yunnan, Guizhou, Hunan, and Guangdong provinces.

The Guangxi province has its own significant culture and art, which has formed unique cultural characteristics. For example, instruments such as the bronze drums of Zhuang and the Huashan cliff-side frescoes are known worldwide, while their folk songs are also famous throughout the country.

Many mountains, grottoes, and rivers surround Guangxi, and Guilin, a popular tourist destination in Guangxi, attracts many visitors annually because of its marvelous landscapes, bamboo boat rafting is one of the famous activities in the tours. As the saying goes: “From the East to West, the scenery at Guilin is the best.”

Figure 1. A geographic map of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region.²



Although the Zhuang people have no unified religion, they do believe in polytheism. They worship nature through the gods of heaven, thunder, trees, water, land, and others. During the Wei and Jin dynasties, Taoism and Buddhism were introduced to the Zhuang region and temples were built for visitors. Zhuang has beautiful rice terrace fields and is famous for its agricultural techniques.³ Rice and corn are primary foods in the Zhuang diet—five-colored glutinous rice wrapped in leaves is a special treat at festivals.⁴ The clothing style of the Zhuang is different when compared with the Han. For example, women usually wear an embroidered jacket with loose and wide pants, or

² “Pictures,” map-china.com, accessed January 8, 2020.

³ “The Guangxi Zhuang Region of China,” image 15, last modified October, 12, 2011, https://www.upi.com/News_Photos/Features/The-Guangxi-Zhuang-region-of-China/5743/ph14/.

⁴ The five-colors of the sticky rice are purple, black, red, yellow and white, and are all extracted from healthy vegetables and herbs.

printed pleated skirts. Silver accessories are common, along with embroidered aprons, and scarves.⁵

The Zhuang language divides into twelve dialects which originate from the Tibetan and Thai families. The Zhuang culture has been changing, reflecting a mix of other minorities including Han. Today, with increasing Han influences in the Guangxi area, most Zhuang people speak Mandarin, the official language of China. In Zhuang, martial arts and sports which contain unique traditions have a long history. For instance, “scramble for firecracker” (*Qiang Hua Pao*) is a popular traditional athletic competition between males in which they “bravely compete to grab a firecracker after it flies up and has fallen down to the ground.”⁶ On one hand, these competitions show the strong, ethnic spirit of the Zhuang, who have a great motivation, willpower, and an integrated ability to pursue a better life. On the other hand, these competitions are good for entertainment, enriching cultural influence, strengthening people’s physique, and national unity. Local people believe that whoever gets the firecracker will be lucky in the following year.

Music is a universal language that speaks without boundaries such that everyone can understand some part of its message. Because of different cultural, dialects, and customs, the music of Zhuang is rich and colorful. Their musical culture consists of folk songs, speaking and singing music, ritual dance, and Zhuang opera (*Xiqu*), all of which are accompanied by traditional folk instruments. Zhuang folk songs usually relate to life:

⁵ “Beautiful Guangxi Ethnic Zhuang Autonomous Region, China,” Pakistan Defence, accessed April 10, 2020, <https://defence.pk/pdf/threads/beautiful-guangxi-ethnic-zhuang-autonomous-region-china.660403/>.

⁶ “Qiang Hua Pao,” Baidu, accessed April 9, 2020, <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E6%8A%A2%E8%8A%B1%E7%82%AE/2784450>.

work, politics, love, happiness, sadness, or historical events. Almost every Zhuang person can sing, as singing is one of the most important parts of their lives.

Zhuang songs are often sung impromptu in the mountains, *a cappella*. “The themes of the songs are mostly love, beauty, and nature. Generally, the male starts the singing and gradually changes his style to improvisation.”⁷ This is a good way to communicate when people have different knowledge and cultural backgrounds. Zhuang folk song singing style is frequently associated with witty texts. Sometimes the melody of songs will repeat again and again, but the subjects will change every time. Lyrics could be the primary elements in Zhuang music: “a song tune without Zhuang language lyrics loses much of its meaning to a traditional singer.”⁸ Since most singing occurs in a mountainous environment, the vocal timbre of these singers is bright, loud, and pure in order to produce a sound which will project. They like to sing freely, using the same melody and changing various subjects, texts, and tunes. Wherever one goes, the sweetest songs and narrating melodies can be heard in their community. The melodies are often simple, expressive, easy to understand, and infectious.

In addition to folk songs, Zhuang opera is very common amongst locals. Zhuang opera is divided into three types: South Zhuang opera, North Zhuang opera and Shigong opera. Zhuang opera is mostly written in Zhuang dialects and incorporates Zhuang literature, folk music, recitative, dance, acrobatics and a small band. According to

⁷ James Standifer, “Everyday Music in a Chinese Province,” *Music Educators Journal* 73, (November 1986): 39.

⁸ John Widman, “Music and Language in the Strophic Singing of the Zhuang Minority in Southern China,” (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2019), 3.

different areas and dialects, the acting, staging props, and costumes are presented in different styles.

In local Zhuang, popular instruments include the *suona* (Chinese trumpet), bronze drum, *sheng* (Chinese windpipe), *dizi* (Chinese flute), *maguhu*⁹, and *tianqin*¹⁰ (Chinese guitar). The bronze drum is a special relic in minority groups and is not only a practical instrument, but also an exquisite and comprehensive artwork. It reflects the superb craftsmanship and artistic language of the Zhuang.

It used both in sacrifice and festivals, delivers a special culture of the Zhuang ethnic minority. On the top and sides of the drums, the sun, frogs, dragon, dancing women and other patterns are decorated... Nowadays, the bronze drum has become an indispensable musical instrument for the festivals.¹¹

Engravings in bronze drums show the pictures of what life it is in the Zhuang past. Some people believe that bronze drums are just instruments for music, but others argue they symbolize health and power through religion. Whether its religious powers are true or not, Zhuang has a very long history of using this instrument in their music.

Song Fairs and Dance Forms

The Song Fair, *Gexu* in Chinese, is a unique cultural singing festival and social custom in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. The third day of March in the Chinese lunar calendar is the most popular singing festival in the Zhuang and is called the

⁹ Ibid, 8. “Which is a small, two-stringed, bowed spike lute that uses a hollowed-out horse femur for a resonator. In both academic and popular literature, the *Maguhu* is commonly referred to as a uniquely Zhuang instrument played in instrumental ensembles and Zhuang opera.”

¹⁰ *Tianqin* is another famous local instrument in the Zhuang, it is the oldest plucked instrument with three strings and a history of few thousand years. “*Tian*” means sky, and “*Qin*” means stringed instrument. *Tianqin* has been used in Lu Pei’s opera, *The Third of March*, act IV.

¹¹ “Chinese Culture, Zhuang Nationality,” Travel China Guide, last modified September 27, 2018, <https://www.travelchinaguide.com/intro/nationality/zhuang/>.

March Third festival.¹² This date is recognized in both academic and literary sources in Zhuang history. In the March Third festival, people from other parts of Southwestern China wear their finest costumes and gather in the plaza to sing and dance jubilantly, welcoming and entertaining their families and friends.

The March Third festival consists of several major events: some celebrate and pray for the harvest, some prepare for singing competitions, and some honor the *Third Sister Liu*, one of the most famous singers in Guangxi. It is also the chance to bring an informal way to help young couples through a song for a marriage. Zhuang people are known for being very friendly and hospitable, especially since singing is the most important activity in their traditions. In their daily lives, people sing folk songs in parks or on mountains for hours without a notated songbook, and younger generations are challenged to inherit all the music by memory.

John Widman and Qin Jindun reviewed two Song Fairs of the Zhuang minority in Guangxi Province. The essay illustrates folksongs performed in Song Fairs that use many solo, antiphonal,¹³ and multiphonic singing practices and techniques. From the musical content to the folksong structure, songs of the Zhuang include ritual songs, labor songs (sung in fields with percussion), love songs (lyric songs based on common knowledge of romantic love), mountain songs (*Shange*),¹⁴ and narrative-singing style songs. It is

¹² Shaohua Wang, "A Brief Introduction to Zhuang March 3rd," *Oeeee*, April 18, 2018, accessed March 7, 2020, <http://www.oeeee.com/html/201804/18/606705.html>.

¹³ Tianrui Miao, Liankang Ji, and Naian Guo, ed. *Dictionary of Chinese Music*, (Beijing: People's Music Press, 1984), 116. "In the antiphonal singing, distinct groups or individuals make up texts on the spot in the style of antithetical couplets (pairs of balanced verses), the singers of both sides compete with each other by showing off their wits and singing talents."

¹⁴ Chunli Xu, "Early Solo Works for the Piano by Three Contemporary Chinese -American Composers: Performance Analysis and Pedagogical Perspectives," (DMA diss., Temple University, 2007), 44. *Shange*, "Extemporaneous melodies are supported by charming lyrics that cleverly use metaphors, riddles and witty dialogues. The vocal range of these mountain songs tends to be in higher registers, and the singing style is

commonly known that the Zhuang culture earned the “Ocean of Songs” reputation and these Song Fairs certainly reflect the Zhuang culture and lifestyle.

This article also refers to the popular annual Song Fair, March Third. The traditional form of a Song Fair song is based on legendary folklore in an antiphonal singing style and usually presents a romantic gesture. Song fairs easily show the personalities of the Zhuang people and their “folksong”¹⁵ style. As mentioned above, “the Song Fair attracts many patrons, cultural enthusiasts, and scholars who are interested, in addition to a wider dissemination and understanding of Zhuang culture.”¹⁶

Jessica Turner explains the influence of geographical location that lead to such a musical style in Zhuang culture. The article also discusses ethnic minority students and Han students at tourism institutes and art schools learning the minority’s performance styles. It shows how tourists in Guangxi are integrated into cultural practice. More importantly, Turner states that March Third is known as a Zhuang ethnic festival in Guangxi and other parts of Southwestern China.

Per traditional Zhuang custom, boys and girls meet together and sing to each other in flirtatious competitions. The girls will sing riddles to which the boys must answer correctly...the popular folk songs had additional lyrics to celebrate the natural scenery.¹⁷

often declamatory at the opening of a song, later developing into long, expressive phrases. Numerous mountain song festivals, called *Ge xu* (songfest) are held regularly.”

¹⁵ Jones Stephen, “Reading Between the Lines: Reflections on the Massive Anthology of Folk Music of the Chinese Peoples,” *Ethnomusicology* 47, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 316. “Folksong is conventionally discussed under the broad categories *haozi* “work songs,” *shan’ge* “mountain songs, the most graphic” and *xiaodiao* “lesser melodies” (Schimmelpenninck 1997:17-21), but boundaries are fluid, and Chinese and Western scholars are equally aware of the pitfalls.”

¹⁶ John Widman and Jindun Qin, “A Tale of Two Song Fairs: Considering Tourism and Tradition in China’s Guangxi Province,” *Ethnomusicology Review*, no. 17 (2012), 14.

¹⁷ Jessica Turner, “Cultural Performances in the Guangxi Tourism Commons: A Study of Music, Place, and Ethnicity in Southern China,” (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2010), 134.

Performances are in a variety of singing styles, while texts are used to depict the natural beauty and convey the grandeur of Guangxi's landscape. The Guangxi people are fond of using characteristics of their geographical settings in songs.

Some performers sing of clear waters, green hills, and misty mountains; some reference the Zhuang musical practice of antiphonal singing between two mountains; . . . some reference a nostalgic sense of place through the performance of cinematic songs from the famous 1960 film *Third Sister Liu (Liu San Jie)* that was set in Guangxi; Some of the most powerful, and often ambiguous, place markers in performance are the myriad references to Guangxi's "mountains and water" (*Shanshui*) that define the region and conjure images and emotions of locals and visitors alike.¹⁸

Below is an image of Guangxi's scenery, where people live in a wonderland near mountains and rivers. Their music, sung by the Zhuang people who work on the river, echoes back and forth through the mountains. This combination of setting plus singing is one of the main ways that Guangxi has inspired so many talented folksong singers. This experience helps them project the voice in the distance.

Figure 2. Guilin mountains and rivers.¹⁹



¹⁸ Jessica Turner, "Cultural Performances in the Guangxi Tourism Commons: A Study of Music, Place, and Ethnicity in Southern China," (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2010), 73.

¹⁹ Photo by author, Guilin, Guangxi, May 5, 2002.

As noted earlier, there are pictures carved into the Huashan cliffs showing traditional dance rituals, and the Guangxi people's love for dancing seems to be depicted in these pictures. The dances are similar to songs in that the themes are about life experiences, love, and nature. These dances can be categorized into labor dances, religious dances, love dances, and animal dances. Some of the common dances include the bronze-drum dance (*Tonggu*), the bamboo-pole dance (*Zhugan*), the tea-picking dance (*Caicha*), the silk-ball dance (*Xiuqiu*)²⁰, and the shrimp-catching dance (*Laoxia*). Among these, the bamboo-pole dance has become the standard dance in the region. These dances all vividly describe the Zhuang daily lifestyle and work customs. The bronze-drum dance is most popular among the Zhuang culture and is usually performed in traditional Zhuang festivals.

Travelers to Guangxi, can hear and see the Zhuang people singing and dancing everywhere. They are also welcome to join their antiphonal singing during the dance activities such as the bamboo-stick dance, throwing embroidered balls, and a traditional costumes exhibition that usually involves the engagement of tourists. Since the Zhuang share many festivals with the Han, an innovative form of cultural performance is fostered.

These performances consist of a variety of minority dances set to a pre-recorded soundtrack of minority and popular music. The use of popular music to display ethnic minority cultural heritage illustrates the many complex ideas being performed. In these tourist spaces, Chinese traditional classical music, minority folk songs, film

²⁰ Gavin Van Hinsbergh, "Chinese Culture — Zhuang Ethnic Minority," *China Highlights*, last modified March 25, 2019, <https://www.chinahighlights.com/travelguide/nationality/zhuang.htm>.

"Each petal of Xiuqiu represents a month and has an image of birds, flowers, fortune, plants, and safe on it." *Xiuqiu*, was a weapon in ancient time, originally *Xiuqiu* was a romantic gift, now making *Xiuqiu* is a traditional handicraft. With the development of society, *Xiuqiu* has gradually used today for entertainment, convey love and happiness.

arrangements, revolutionary music, and pop music come together in a complex musical portrayal of local and national musical culture.²¹

This individual cultural background together with contemporary music, shows the diversity of the Zhuang musical style, which blends with other cross-border ethnic groups' performances. Furthermore, the performances are not only educational to the public, but also contribute to the preservation of their traditions. Additionally, performances help connect the audience with the performers, therefore increasing the interest in and impression of the performances.

In short, the meaning of performance in Guangxi is not only for the singer and composer's expression within the Zhuang local community, but also for the larger groups of tourists and society as a whole. Due to different customs, dialects, and traditions of culture, Zhuang people sing anytime, anywhere, and singing is an essential part of their daily life. "One local saying goes like this: people tell stories by singing, express love by singing, celebrate festivals by singing, taking singing as food and tea."²² Characteristics of Zhuang folksong and dance stand out in the music and performing arts fields.

Other Chinese American Composers' and the Cross-Cultural Styles in Music

Chinese composers and other artists were forbidden to compose music or other arts until the Cultural Revolution ended. Since this time, there have been several Chinese

²¹ Jessica Turner, "Cultural Performances in the Guangxi Tourism Commons: A Study of Music, Place, and Ethnicity in Southern China," (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2010), 61.

²² "The Zhuang Minority Music," last modified December 10, 2008, <http://english.cri.cn/4026/2008/12/10/1261s431381.htm>.

composers who integrate both Eastern and Western compositional techniques, as they were allowed to travel to Western countries. Due to their upbringing in China, and their experiences studying abroad, music created by these established composers presents a new and innovative style. Composers like Chen Yi (b. 1953), Bright Sheng (b. 1955), and Tan Dun (b. 1957), are excellent examples of this new generation. All are students of Chou Wen-Chung (1923-2019), who moved to the United States in 1946. He was the first important Chinese composer to become a professor in the United States, and who combines Chinese and Western music. Chinese composers absorbed the essence of Western music theory after studying in the United States, and attempted to modify the old form of compositional technique in Chinese music. This method of combining cross-cultural musical content and practice is a driving tendency for new music in China. Some examples of composers during this period will be presented, showing how their compositional techniques absorbed both cultures, and how Lu Pei displays his unique compositional perspectives in the new opera *The Third of March*.

The first composer, Chen Yi, maintains her Eastern cultural identity while using Western compositional languages. Chen Yi was trained to collect and use Chinese folk song music elements in school. She was inspired by the Hungarian composer Bartók who was famous for “collecting folk music and adapting folk elements into his works.”²³ Chen Yi has written works for solo piano, voice, mixed Western and Chinese instruments, chamber ensembles, and choral ensembles. Chen is “the first Chinese woman to receive a Master of Arts in music composition from the Central Conservatory of Music in

²³ Michelle Harper, “An Interview with Bright Sheng,” *The Journal of the International Institute* 7, no. 1 (1999), 5.

Beijing.”²⁴ The ten years Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), it did not prevent Chen Yi continued to practice music, on the contrary, she used her time to learn and collect Chinese folk tunes while laboring in the countryside.

In Hsien-Fang’s paper, “The Influences of Eastern and Western Music in Chen Yi’s Percussion Concerto,” he discusses Chen’s percussion concerto that was influenced by ideas from the two sides of the globe, and how the music reflects the composer’s indigenous educational experiences and life background. Fang also wrote “in terms of the Eastern influences, Chen Yi was inspired by Beijing Opera while composing her concerto.”²⁵ In 1970, Chen returned to Guangzhou and began working with the Beijing opera troupe as the concertmaster, and this precious experience indeed extended her views and tastes as a composer.

The experience of collecting folk songs and listening to the Beijing Opera during the Cultural Revolution, as well as her systematic training in the conservatory, learning all the important Chinese music, have provided her with an array of new resources and techniques that were eventually integrated into her compositional style.²⁶

This percussion concerto is very interesting because percussion is not the first instrument for which a Western-born composer might choose to write, it is the essential and dominant instrument in the music of Beijing opera, which uses diverse percussion instrument sounds to imitate vocal timbre colors and other instruments.

Chen Yi has infused the spirit of Chinese traditional music into her style, while also transforming it by using Western musical characteristics, including musical forms, orchestral acoustic applications, and Western instruments. Moreover, Chen

²⁴ Last fm, “Chen Yi,” last modified December 2, 2014, <https://www.last.fm/music/Chen+Yi/+wiki>.

²⁵ Hsieh Hsien-Fang, “The Influences of Eastern and Western Music in Chen Yi’s Percussion Concerto,” (PhD diss., University of Miami, 2016), 6.

²⁶ Law, Po Kwan, “The A Cappella Choral Music of Chen Yi: 1985-2010,” (DMA diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 7.

Yi also added Chinese folksongs to this concerto, while including Western harmony.²⁷

Chen loved Chinese literature and poetry in her youth and as a result many of her pieces are inspired by Chinese calligraphy, philosophy, and traditional instrumental music. Chen Yi's music, apart from adopting the Beijing opera singing writing manner, is commonly set to ancient Chinese poetry. The poetry provides underlying backgrounds to the music and greatly enhances the characters flexibility of that could naturally develop the creativities in music.

I believe that language can be translated into music and that because I speak out naturally in my mother tongue, there is Chinese blood, Chinese philosophy, and Chinese customs in my music. However, because music is a universal language, I hope to capture the essence of both Eastern and Western cultures, and to write more compositions that embody my own temperament as well as the spirit of this brave new epoch. I hope ...people from different parts of the world.²⁸

Chinese culture and philosophy have also greatly impacted the music of Tan Dun, who is known for his great versatility of genres within works that cover concert music, chamber music, opera, orchestra, film music and media production. He says, "It is impossible for me to write music without visual feelings, I still practice calligraphy and paint a lot, and I unconsciously pit melodies against images, so the color can be heard."²⁹

In 1977, Tan Dun began studies at Central Conservatory of Music. When cultural exchange became more welcomed between China and Western countries in 1980s, several eminent composers including Chou Wen-chung, Toru Takemitsu, Isang Yun, and

²⁷ Hsieh Hsien-Fang, 20.

²⁸ Ching-Chih Liu, *A Critical History of New Music in China* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2010), 744.

²⁹ Richard McGregor, "Mapping a Chinese Journey: MUSIC: Richard McGregor Meets the Composer Tan Dun as His Latest, very Personal, Work is Premiered in Shanghai," *Financial Times*, no.10, (November 2003): 2.

Alexander Goehr visited China to give lectures about contemporary 20th century music composition, which deeply influenced Tan's compositional style. Tan Dun's works include what he calls organic music, which uses non-traditional instruments such as paper, water, and stone. "He drew inspiration from nature, Chinese philosophy and his childhood memories and discovered a wide range of formerly suppressed twentieth-century music."³⁰

Tan Dun's *Eight Memories in Watercolor* deeply expresses a nostalgic and spiritual feeling. The first four pieces are based on the traditional folksong pentatonic melodies from the Hunan Province. The absence of semitones in the pentatonic scale produces a mystical, floating sound and Tan uses these pentatonic, quartertones, and folk tunes to compose the other four pieces as well. Qian claims that, "in his music, everything has life. Water can talk with birds; stone can talk with wind; all things could have conversations with each other."³¹

Chen Yi, Tan Dun, and Lu Pei are some representatives of the so-called "New Wave" composers. During the Cultural Revolution in China, it was impossible for musicians to play, compose, or participate in musical activities. Musicians were sent to work in the countryside, and as a result, they collected folk music first-hand from there. After the Cultural Revolution when the country opened up, the New-Wave composers went to Japan, Russia, United States, Germany, and France, further broadening their studies and life experiences. Western contemporary music, which seemed to these

³⁰ Xin Guo, "Chinese Musical Language Interpreted by Western Idioms: Fusion Process in the Instrumental Works by Chen Yi," (PhD diss., Florida State University, 2002), 64.

³¹ Qian Xu, "Chinese Elements and Influence in Tan Dun's *Eight Memories in Watercolor*," (DMA diss., West Virginia University, 2018), 32.

composers to be very unconventional, and the rich musical resources and diverse cultures, attracted these artists, allowing them to write in a new dynamic music style.

To conclude, early works by this generation of Chinese composers have acted as a transitional stage of new Chinese music. By reforming and connecting the different compositional styles found in Eastern and Western music, these composers have promoted the development of Chinese music and opened a new chapter.

Chapter 2

BACKGROUND ON OPERATIC HISTORY AND

LU PEI'S LIFE TO DATE

Brief Introduction to the Development of Opera History in China

Traditional Chinese Opera

Chinese Opera, a highly recognized genre in Chinese culture, is a very specialized field with hundreds of regional operatic forms. These forms can be “characterized by a set of highly stylized and particular symbols, gestures, languages, and colors.”³²

The origins of traditional Chinese Opera began during the Song dynasty. In Chinese language, it is called “*Xiqu*,” which means “dramas with songs.” The earliest forms of Chinese Opera are comprised of various art forms such as singing, speaking, dance, acrobatics, martial arts, and choreography. However, some regions in China used different names for opera that give specific reference to the provincial origin. These variations, for instance those used in Beijing Opera, Yu Opera, Cantonese Opera, Huangmei Opera, Hu Opera, and Shaoxing Opera, make it easier for people to tell where the opera comes from. Each of these forms contributed vastly to Chinese National Opera Literature.

Among these opera forms, “Beijing Opera is regarded as one of the most important and valuable forms.”³³ Beijing Opera has a long tradition which includes

³² Barbara Mittle, *Music in China Today Ancient Traditions, Contemporary Trends: Of Pride and Prejudice. Rethinking Music and Power in China* (Berlin: VWB-Verlag für Wissenschaft und Bildung, 2017), 39.

³³ Ying Fen, Robert C. Provine, Yosihiko Tokumaru and J. Lawrence Witzleben, eds, “Music and Chinese Society: Contemporary Taiwan,” *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music 7, East Asia: China, Japan, and Korea*. “Peking opera, guoyue-national music-has received much support from the government since the

technical and unusual singing, it stems from Anhui province in Qing dynasty. Beijing Opera uses spoken dialogue, costumes, make-up, gestures, staging style, and the musical accompaniments are usually played by a small percussions and string ensemble. The main four characters are, *Sheng* (male), *Dan* (female), *Jing* (painted face), and *Chou* (clown).³⁴

Not surprisingly, Beijing opera might seem strange in comparison to Western music, for several reasons. First, it seems overly loud and complex. The quarter tones, while strange to the Western ear, are more neutral sounding in traditional Chinese folk music. They occur between major and minor intervals when singers slightly alter the pitch. Beijing opera seeks to put beauty into every motion, for example “the eye movements are the most noticeable feature of facial expressions.”³⁵

Many traditional operas were revised by the Beijing Operas, including *The Drunken Beauty* (*Guifei Zui Jiu* 1914), *Farewell My Concubine* (*Bawang Bieji* 1918), *General Mu Takes Command* (*Muguiying Gua Shuai* 1959), and *White Snake* (*Leifeng Ta* 1978).³⁶ Eventually, as the style matured, Beijing Opera was regarded as “National Opera.”

1960s. It was a favorite pastime of the military as well as other mainlanders, and consequently the government spent a great deal of money on the three military Peking opera troupes and the Guoguang and Fuxing operatic schools.”

³⁴ *Sheng* is the primary male role. *Dan* is the female role. *Jing* is a painted face male role, and *Chou* is a male clown role in Beijing opera.

³⁵ Elizabeth Halson, *History and Development: Chinese Opera* (Taiwan: Central Library Publisher, 1968), 47.

³⁶ “Feature Works of Beijing Opera,” last modified December 07, 2017, <http://www.cnfla.com/wenxuechangshi/203537.html>.

New Chinese Opera

New Chinese Opera is a contemporary, yet classical opera form adapted from Western opera, and is distinct from traditional Chinese opera. The experimental period of New Chinese Opera took place between 1944 to 1955. One exemplary and revered piece, composed by various composers including Ma Ke and Li Huanzhi, is called *The White Haired Girl* (*Bai mao nu*) written in 1945. It incorporates ballet and was very successful. Using the official Mandarin language, it is based on a true story. It is considered to be a milestone in the history of New Chinese Opera because it displays unique and well-developed techniques, and distinctive aesthetic characteristics. Because of its success, *The White Haired Girl* was later adapted to dance, film, and television drama.

The second historical enlightenment period occurred between 1956 and 1966. Chinese composers of this period combined traditional folk music with operatic compositions, and integrated western musical contexts and instrumental techniques. Works such as *Red Guards of Lake Hong Hu* (*Honghu Chiweidui* 1956) and *Sister Jiang* (*Jiang Jie* 1964) were consistently lauded by the singers and the audiences. The operas flourished and were successfully produced during this specific period.

Revolutionary Opera

From 1966 to 1976, Chairman Mao launched the ten-year Cultural Revolution movement. Most middle-class workers, educators, musicians, and scholars were forced to live in the countryside to do demanding labor. Revolutionary opera emerged and “No longer did these operas bring ‘emperors, kings, generals, chancellors, maidens, and

beauties' onto the stage; instead, they presented heroic workers, peasants, and soldiers, as Chairman Mao had long since demanded."³⁷

Indeed, Chinese music was controlled by, "at least to an extent, political" forces.³⁸ These operas told stories about the China's past culture to its present. Revolutionary opera glorified the People's Liberation Army and the bravery of common people who struggled against enemies.

If viewed from a long-term angle, the revolutionary operas can be understood as one radical but nevertheless characteristic development within the Chinese operatic tradition. Similar to earlier opera forms, it was a hybrid, synthetic product that stemmed from a dialogue between high art and popular culture, as well as between several local cultures.³⁹

The most famous operatic stories, ballets, and symphonic works were selected as staged model works, called the "Eight Model Plays." Those model works were performed by the most talented musicians in the Cultural Revolution. "In these model works, Western and Chinese instruments and musical forms are combined to create Chinese, but modern music of the kind expected to be appreciated by the masses."⁴⁰ The Eight Model Plays consisted of five modern Beijing operas and the premiered dates are: *The Legend of the Red Lantern* (1970), *Shajiabang* (1971), *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* (1958), *Raid on the White Tiger Regiment* (1972), and *On the Docks* (1972); two ballets, *The*

³⁷ Barbara Mittle, "Eight Stage Works for 800 Million People: The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in Music—A View from Revolutionary Opera," *The Opera Quarterly* 26 (Spring-Summer 2010): 337.

³⁸ Barbara Mittle, *Music in China Today Ancient Traditions, Contemporary Trends: Of Pride and Prejudice. Rethinking Music and Power in China* (Berlin: VWB-Verlag für Wissenschaft und Bildung, 2017), 41.

³⁹ Barbara Mittle, "Eight Stage Works for 800 Million People: The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in Music—A View from Revolutionary Opera." *The Opera Quarterly* 26 (Spring-Summer 2010): 339.

⁴⁰ Barbara Mittle, *Music in China Today Ancient Traditions, Contemporary Trends: Of Pride and Prejudice. Rethinking Music and Power in China* (Berlin: VWB-Verlag für Wissenschaft und Bildung, 2017), 44.

White Haired Girl (1958) and *Red Detachment of Women* (1961); and one symphony, also *Shajiabang*.⁴¹

All theaters in China were only allowed to present these model works during the Cultural Revolution time. One of the permitted political ballets, “*Red Detachment of Women* (*Hongse Niangzijun*) depicts a story about a group of revolutionary peasant women on Hainan Island fight against the Guomindang.”⁴² It was even performed for U.S. President Richard Nixon when he visited China in 1972. This led John Adams to rewrite the story in his opera *Nixon in China* (1987), “which is a groundbreaking work that vividly brings to life President Nixon’s 1972 visit to communist China.”⁴³ The staging director of *Nixon in China* at the Metropolitan opera, which used the ballet movements from the original *Red Detachment of Women*.

Modern Age of Chinese Opera

Music is influential, powerful and meaningful. It reflects the culture and social circumstances of the period during which it was written. It speaks to our daily lives. The future development of Chinese opera relies on the reinforcement of traditional Chinese national cultures, while employing the innovative touch of Western music. To convey this idea to the modern audience, composers strive to create new works that are more approachable and appealing to the younger generations.

⁴¹ “Eight Model Plays,” accessed April 8, 2020, <https://baike.sogou.com/v407467.htm?fromTitle=%E5%85%AB%E5%A4%A7%E6%A0%B7%E6%9D%BF%E6%88%8F>.

⁴² Melissa Schrift and Keith Pilkey, “Revolution remembered: Chairman Mao Badges and Chinese Nationalist Ideology,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 30, no. 2 (Fall 1996): 177.

⁴³ “The Metropolitan Opera,” Alice Goodman, Synopsis: Nixon in China, accessed April 3, 2020, <https://www.metopera.org/user-information/synopses-archive/nixon-in-china>.

As one might imagine, many new operas in China are still based on political situations or historical events from the past, although the music is rewritten with modern techniques. The stereotypical plot, however, does not catch the younger generation's heart. Lu Pei believes that "composing an opera should not only create exceptionally beautiful melodies, but also should foster a deep affection that connects the audience to their life stories."⁴⁴

Lu Pei—A Brief Biographical Sketch

Lu Pei (b. 1956) is a celebrated Chinese American composer, professor and director of the Department of Composition at Shanghai Conservatory of Music. He is also the recipient of many national and international music competition awards. Lu Pei was born in Nanning, Guangxi province, and in 1982, he graduated from Guangxi Arts University and studied at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music starting in 1985. Here he learned polyphony from Chen Gang and Chen Mingzhi, learned harmony from Sang Tong and Yan Qingxiang, and learned music analysis from Hu Yanzhong. In 1987, he was hired as a lecturer in the Composition Teaching and Research Department of Shanghai Conservatory of Music. In 1988, Lu Pei and Yang Liqing cooperatively composed the ballet, "No Word Monument." The music received a great response across the country, and he has been widely recognized as a result.

⁴⁴ Lu Pei, Email message to author, January 31, 2020.

In 1991, Lu Pei went to the United States for further studies. In 1995, he received his Master's degree in Composition from the University of Louisville, and in 2002 obtained his Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Music Composition at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor. Lu taught at the University of Louisville from 2003-2006, and joined the faculty at Shanghai Conservatory of Music as a composition professor in 2006.

He received the Jury Prize from the Chicago International Music Competition, the Scholar Award at the 46th United States Annual Composer Conference, the 6th Changfeng Award at the International Composers Competition in New York, the American Composers Association Music Award, the Silver Award of Hong Kong Branch and the Chinese Musicians Association Symphony Music Competition.⁴⁵

His *Mountain Air and Bronze Drum Music* won first place in the 1983 (Chinese) National Composition Competition for piano works in Chinese style. "It was the first important national composition competition for piano after the end of the Cultural Revolution (1976)."⁴⁶ The piece shows the special sound of Zhuang music "by adding elaborate embellishments that are distinctive of their melodies, and reproducing impulsive rhythmic beats that are characteristic of ancient bronze drum music."⁴⁷

Lu Pei spent more than 15 years studying in the United States, which provided him abundant Western musical influences apart from the East. His music exhibits well-defined and distinctly personal interests through the excellence of his skill in composition and orchestration. His musical language is colorful, passionate, and intense, which

⁴⁵ Lu Pei, Bio materials via email to author, October 11, 2018.

⁴⁶ Chunli Xu, "Early Solo Works for the Piano by Three Contemporary Chinese-American Composers: Performance Analysis and Pedagogical Perspectives," (DMA diss., Temple University, 2007), 3.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 43.

creates dramatic tension throughout the music. Once after listening to Lu Pei's works, his friend, Lawrence Leighton Smith, a prestigious conductor and a professor at Yale University, exclaimed, "A master's hand is there!"⁴⁸

Lu Pei liked to collect folk music from all over China when he was a young student. His early works were inspired by the folk songs of ethnic minorities from Guangxi, Southern China. He also has been influenced by Bartók's and Kodaly's music. He is well known for employing contemporary Western compositional methods, simultaneously with varied Chinese folk tunes from different regions and provinces. These ancient folk songs have been revitalized and have won great favor from both Eastern and Western listeners. The sound of multi-ethnic elements is greatly reflected in his music. Kouwenhoven observes Lu Pei's works from the 1980s, stating that his music "shows more affinity with the linear textures of Anton Webern than with any revolutionary propaganda music."⁴⁹

In 1999, Lu composed a solo violin fantasy called *Four Fantasies on Chinese Folk Tunes*.⁵⁰ He used the timbre of the instrument to imitate the style of vocal singing in

⁴⁸ Lu Pei, Bio materials via email to author, October 11, 2018.

⁴⁹ Frank Kouwenhoven, "Mainland China's New Music (2) Madly Singing in the Mountains," 54, quoted in Chunli Xu, "Early Solo Works for the Piano by Three Contemporary Chinese-American Composers: Performance Analysis and Pedagogical Perspectives," (DMA diss., Temple University, 2007), 41.

⁵⁰ Jerry Dubins, review of *Sibelius: Violin Concerto; Stravinsky: Violin Concerto; Lu Pei: Four Fantasies on Chinese Folk Tunes*: No. 3, "Drama Beijing Opera," *Fanfare* 42, no. 1, (September/October 2018): 387. "The third movement Beijing Opera from the *Four Fantasies on Chinese Folk Tunes*. I hazarded a guess from the title that the piece was somewhat along the lines of a violin work by Tan Dun, titled *Out of Peking Opera*, on a recent release I reviewed from violinist Lu Siqing. I wasn't too far off the mark, though I have to say that Lu Pei's piece is more listenable to me than Tan Dun's piece was. As might be expected from the title, there's obvious musical mimicry of the vocalizations and instrumental sounds one hears in Chinese opera, but there are also extended passages in Pei's "Drama Beijing Opera" that could have been lifted right out of one of the perpetual motion movements from a Bach unaccompanied sonata or partita. In the contrasting passages that sound "Chinese," the music evokes moods and atmospheres that are quite affecting. In spite of my usual resistance to this sort of thing, I ended up liking this piece more than I expected to, and it seems to make a fitting coda to the two concertos. This deserves and receives my highest and most urgent recommendation."

Beijing opera, narrating the pieces in an operatic way. Many glissandos were used on the violin to mimic the human voice. At the same time, Mongolian tunes were added to the piece, crossing boundaries between the Beijing Opera and Mongolian melodies.

Later in 2001, Lu wrote *Song of Consonance* when he as an adjunct faculty member at the University of Louisville.⁵¹ The theme of the piece is based on a traditional Chinese folk song, and used the Chinese plucked instruments such as the *pipa* (traditional lute) and *erhu* (a two-stringed violin). The work includes a vocal solo with piano accompaniment using Western compositional techniques, and shows a symbiotic relationship between multicultural life experiences, and a mixed music-educational background.

Elegy, written for flute, oboe, clarinet, and piano, was premiered in March 2019 at Duke University's Divinity School, where the theme of the concert was "Music & Martyrdom: Performing Faithfully," an evening of music and conversation that reflected on the lives and legacies of martyrs. This piece is Lu Pei's response to Duke professor Lian Xi's book "Blood Letter: The Untold Story of Lin Zhao, a martyr in Mao's China." The music evokes faithful battles against the forces of evil. Lu comments, "*Elegy* fully imbued my unique music personality: emotively, musically, accessibly, and powerfully."⁵²

⁵¹ James Reel, "Influence by Aurelia Sax Quartet," *Fanfare-The Magazine for Serious Record Collectors* 29, no. 5 (May 2006): 34-35. "Lu here attempts to "depict his ideas about a dream of peace" in an ancient Chinese music form that originated in folk song, but here incorporate elements of the Western avant-garde. Scored for piano trio, pipa, and erhu, the work gives equal weight to each instrument and, in this performance, the members of the up-and-coming Amelia Piano Trio blend right in stylistically with the two Chinese musicians; there's no sense that anything is out of place. The work requires all the string instruments to employ some traditional Chinese techniques without pulling the violin and cello out of their element."

⁵² Lu Pei, Email message to author, January 31, 2020.

The *Washington Post* claimed, “it is an extremely smart, colorful and kinetic piece that builds on traditional Chinese music without ever descending into sentimentality.”⁵³ Lu Pei is a prolific and active composer whose works have performed in many countries including France, Italy, Netherlands, Britain, Belgium, Canada, South Africa, Japan, Taiwan, Singapore, and Hong Kong, as well as in many major U.S. cities and states such as New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, Minnesota, Virginia, and Alaska. His music oeuvre covers almost all possible genres, including six symphonies, five orchestral suites, three orchestral overtures, three concertos, two works of ballet music, a large output of chamber music, vocal music, film, television music, and an opera.⁵⁴ Throughout his life, Lu paid great attention to the compositional style in Western music literature, more and more of his works show a new uniting craftsmanship of the East and the West.

Writing opera has always been his ultimate goal as a composer. After three years of hard work, the opera *The Third of March* was completed and premiered in May 2018 at Nanning Theater in Guangxi. The opera has received wide acclaim and appeals to younger listeners.⁵⁵ Encouraging young people to listen to music and to Chinese opera, using both traditional and modern Western musical styles, are the main objectives of this opera. *The Third of March* showed “reinvented” compositional techniques influenced by Western musical elements. In addition, Zhuang minority folk tunes from traditional

⁵³ Stephen Brookes, “Music,” review of *Amelia Piano Trio*, by the Chinese American Composer Lu Pei, *Washington Post*, March 17, 2008,

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/03/16/AR2008031602502.html>

⁵⁴ Lu Pei, Bio materials via email to author, October 11, 2018.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

Chinese music are used and give the piece a unique stylistic identity. This is what Lu Pei believes is the future of Chinese music.

In the following chapters, this modern Chinese American composer's opera will be examined from a performer's perspective. I will discuss the arias in the opera, the storylines and the libretto, followed by performing perspectives. I will also introduce the Chinese language pronunciation and briefly compare to other languages in operatic singing, to highlight the pedagogical value of singing in Chinese. Additionally, the adoption of different Chinese folk songs in the Guangxi area and Western compositional elements will be discussed.

Chapter 3

The Third of March (2018)

Lu Pei's Inspiration and Concept

In China, opera is considered to be the center of the Western musical world. The Western *bel canto* singing style is appreciated, but Chinese opera is still exploring and experimenting with its stylistic identity in this new musical art form. Joseph Kerman defines opera in this way:

Opera is properly a musical form of drama, with its own individual dignity and force. Opera is a type of drama whose integral existence is determined from point to point and in the whole by musical articulation.⁵⁶

Lu's creative ideology is that the music and the libretto may either reinforce or conflict with one another; in both cases, opera relies on music as a guide to understanding the composer's interpretation of the libretto.

He believes that one should “hear the music and hear the play by carrying drama with music and being beautiful in both sound and in sight.”⁵⁷

It has been my desire for many years to compose an opera—I have studied opera and prepared for it for twenty years. Creating *The Third of March*, finally made my dream come true.⁵⁸

The Third of March took Lu more than three years to complete. The opera is in four acts and the libretto is written by Liang Shaowu. The title of the opera *The Third of March* is from China's March Third festival. As described in the previous chapter, the Chinese lunar calendar includes March Third as a traditional singing festival in the

⁵⁶ Joseph Kerman, *Opera as Drama* (New York: ALFRED A. KNOPF, 1956), 13.

⁵⁷ Lu Pei, Interview with the author, Shanghai, July 8, 2018.

⁵⁸ Lu Pei, “Lecture of the Composing Thinking in Opera, *The Third of March*,” *Shanghai Conservatory of Music*, November 21, 2018, translated by author.

Zhuang, Guangxi. The Zhuang people gather to celebrate the festival by cooking five-colored sticky rice, coloring shell eggs, throwing embroidered balls, and dancing on bamboo poles. This singing festival also provides a good opportunity for young people to engage romantically. When a man and woman fall in love, they exchange gifts, usually an embroidered ball from the woman to the man.

Lu points out that the primary musical theme in this opera is inspired by two famous Zhuang folk tunes, “Stars and Moon in the Sky” (*Tianshang Xingxing Ban Yueliang*)⁵⁹ and “Vine Wrapped Tree” (*Teng Chan Shu*).⁶⁰ The first song represents the love theme in the whole opera, while the latter song represents the tragedy theme. The music of these two songs expressively portrays the traditional indigenous Zhuang people.

He claims, “that the opera’s music is designed according to the characters from the local culture: Guangxi Gui opera, Zhuang folksong melody, the *Guilin yu gu* (Guilin fishing drum), rock and roll music, and harmonies from Western classical opera.”⁶¹ The opera integrates orchestral textures with drama to convey the characters’ personalities, and to promote Guangxi’s long-standing Song Fair culture. At the beginning of the premiere performance, shown in a video provided by Lu Pei, the stage design features a landscape backdrop painting in a traditional freehand brushwork style that is directly related to traditional Chinese art.

⁵⁹ Deng Hua, “Guangxi Daily, March Third of the Zhuang,” last modified April 20, 2018, <http://www.gxzf.gov.cn/sydt/20180420-690853.shtml>.

⁶⁰ “Nanning Daily,” the lyrics of *Teng Chan Shu* is “In the mountains only saw vine wrapped trees, where can we see the three-wrapped vines...” A gentle, beautiful classic folk song from Guangxi is widespread. Nowadays, there are many new interpretations of this folksong, accessed January 19, 2020, <http://gx.people.com.cn/GB/179462/12891189.html>.

⁶¹ Lu Pei, “Lecture of the Composing Thinking in Opera, The Third of March,” *Shanghai Conservatory of Music*, November 21, 2018, translated by author.

He utilizes recitatives, solo arias, duets, trios, quartets, and a variety of choral singing in *The Third of March*. The recitatives are written primarily in Chinese, but do include some English expressions such that Chinese and English are mixed within a single sentence. He also adds folk song elements, an orchestral overture, and interludes between scenes and acts the way a Western opera would. Lu Pei respects the rules and structure of opera, but also injects his own compositional style. He states, “nationalistic music cannot be characterized by only folksong melody, but rather should be the sum of quality works by the composer and a coalescence of his own creative idea.”⁶² Many musical gestures in *The Third of March* reflect the Zhuang musical style, but are not completely borrowed from their tradition.

Lu Pei begins the opera with a scene of the annual March Third festival. The prelude, featuring the chorus, shows a passionate, vibrant, and enthusiastic atmosphere reflective of the Zhuang, and opens with a borrowed melody from “Stars and Moon in the Sky.” In order to illustrate the characters in the drama, the stage director choreographed a dance for female dancers in steps reflecting the movement of the embroidered ball (*Xiu Qiu Wu*). Another dance, this time for male dancers, symbolizes the movements involved when the males scramble to catch the firecracker (*Qiang Hua Pao*) by showing the fighting scene where two villages compete for water resources.

More interestingly, the chorus engages in an antiphonal singing style simultaneously which mimics the competitive singing between these two villages.

⁶² Lu Pei, Email message and translated by author, January 31, 2020.

Antiphonal singing is one of the most common styles in Zhuang singing festivals and highlights the Zhuang lifestyle on stage.

The inspiration for the Zhuang folksong melody found in the opera comes from the natural scenery of the unique “mountain and river” landscape. The stage director for *The Third of March*, who created the Guangxi landscape in the scenery, used ink and watercolor painting to display the dreamy and poetic quality of the region. The beautiful culture and environment of the Zhuang become the central atmospheric influence throughout the opera.

Another performance technique found in the opera is the cinematic method, which gives the audience a new way to view the opera. The movie-shooting method is a modern, interpretational way to narrate the story in flashbacks, which begin with the end, then flashes back to the beginning. This performance technique was highly praised by audiences.

Lu Pei states that:

Opera is a form of a staged drama set to music, where leading roles are performed by singers, and a focus is placed on the orchestral accompaniment, choreography, costuming, and lighting design. So, opera is a pearl in the musical arts, and is a symbol of national culture.⁶³

⁶³ Lu Pei, Email message and translated by author, January 31, 2020.

The Characters

Mengshan (Tenor)

Folksong singer of Tonggu village, 18 years old, lover of Yilan

Mengshan (Dancer)

Symbolic image of the folksong singer

Elder Mengshan (Baritone)

Young Mengshan's father and the Master Singer, 68 years old, never married after Yilan died

Yilan (Lyric Soprano)

Master Singer's daughter in Nalian village, 18 years old, lover of Mengshan.

Yilan (Dancer)

Symbolic image of the Master Singer's daughter

Lianxiang (Mezzo-soprano)

Mengshan's friend, fell in love with him. Age ranges from 17 to 67 years old.

Tianmu (Baritone)

Brother of Yilan, a fighter with a bad temper, 25 years old

A Chong (Character role, use dialect accent)

Good friend of Mengshan, personality is kind, funny and timid. Can play Zhuang local instrument, Tianqin. Age ranges from 19 to 69 years old.

Mengshan's Mother (Mezzo-soprano)

Master singer's wife, 50 years old.

Caiyun (Coloratura Soprano)

Mengshan's niece, obtained the minority talent training award, went to study at Shanghai Conservatory of Music, then went abroad for further study and settled abroad with a son and a daughter, 50 years old.

Joshua (Tenor, musical theater role)

Son of Caiyun, addicted to rock & roll music. Caiyun took him back to Guangxi to prevent his continuing play pop music, 17 years old.

A Guo (Soprano)

Granddaughter of A Chong. Tourist guide, 20 years old.

The Storylines

Before composing all the components of the opera *The Third of March*, Lu Pei stresses that the music must first be beautiful.

It should correspond with the habits of music aficionados today. Opera is still a new genre in China, and for me - the real value in opera - is found in its ability to develop the plot and to create dramatic climax through music.⁶⁴

Liang Shaowu, the librettist of *The Third of March* and current professor at the Guangxi Academy of Arts, is from the Zhuang minority ethnic group, and used his life experiences to create the opera's plot. The plot is "inspired by Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (1597), and has become the Zhuang version of the tragic love story."⁶⁵ The two leading roles, Mengshan (Tenor) and Yilan (Soprano), are special because both require singing and dancing. The dance movements are performed by professional dancers and are designed by the choreographer to illustrate the Zhuang traditions. The drama may seem more realistic to the audience through a performance which combines orchestral accompaniment, singing, and intricate dancing. In the script, there are two parallel story lines involving two subjects: love and dreaming. Under the background of Guangxi's Song Fair culture, these two stories take place in the beautiful Zhuang village.

The first story happened in 1955 and is about the forbidden pursuit of love between a young man and woman, Mengshan and Yilan. The heroine, Yilan, is similar to Leonora in *Il Trovatore* by Giuseppe Verdi in that both characters promise to marry a man they do not love. They ingest poison to preserve their fidelity to the person they truly

⁶⁴ Lu Pei, "Lecture of the Composing Thinking in Opera, *The Third of March*," *Shanghai Conservatory of Music*, November 21, 2018, translated by author.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

love. Yilan is a brave, passionate, and faithful woman who chooses to die in exchange for the precious memories she has with Mengshan, and to end the hatred between the Tonggu and Nalian villages.

Why can't these two young lovers reach a happy ending? The Tonggu and Nalian Villages were fighting for water and Yilan's father in the Nalian Village was accidentally killed by people from the Tonggu Village during this fighting. After 16 years, Mengshan and Yilan met at the March Third singing festival, and Yilan fell in love with the singer, Mengshan, from the Tonggu Village. Due to the ongoing hostility between these two villages, Tianmu, brother of Yilan, prohibited her love for Mengshan. This leads to a tragic end.⁶⁶

The second story starts in the late 20th century. Caiyun (coloratura soprano) leaves her village in the 1980s to study at Shanghai Conservatory of Music and then to study abroad. Eventually she settles overseas and has a son, Joshua, who is fascinated by rock and roll music. Caiyun does not like the fact Joshua is interested in popular music and thinks that it will waste his time by distracting from his studies. Later, in 2015, she brings her teenage son, Joshua, back to Guangxi to visit her hometown with the intent of his learning the traditional music of the Zhuang. In short, Caiyun against her son's interest in rock and roll music while Yilan and Mengshan's love is forbidden. Both stories reflect the older generation rejecting younger generation's freedom of choice.⁶⁷

Despite the two storylines taking place more than 50 years apart, the "hate" between villages that prevented young people from seeking love, and the

⁶⁶ Lu Pei, Interview with the author, Shanghai, July 8, 2018, translated by author.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

"misunderstanding" between the older and younger generations that prevented young people from pursuing their interests, still impacts younger people today. As the central idea of his opera, Lu Pei hopes to enlighten people by bringing a new perspective to their lives.

Performance Histories

The premiere of *The Third of March* (orchestra version) was at the Nanning Theater in Guangxi on May 6, 2018.

Funding partner

National Art Fund Project, Guangxi Culture Department

Producer

Guangxi Performing Arts Group

Performance Team

Guangxi Opera and Dance Theater and Guangxi Symphony

Production Team

Composer: Lu Pei

Libretto: Liang Shaowu

Stage Director: Feng Jia

Music Director: Cai Yang

Cast

Yilan: Su Xiaoqing

Mengshan: Wang Liang

Lianxiang: Tang Yifang

Tianmu: Guo Chen

A Chong: Jiang Dongjian

Figure 3. Scene photo, from left to right, Lianxiang and Yilan.⁶⁸



The second performance of the aria “It is Good to See You’re Coming” from *The Third of March* was at the “Chinese Poetry-Vocal Symphony Concert –The 12th Shanghai New Music Week, Shanghai Spring International Music Festival.”

Performance Date
September 18, 2019

Performance Location
ShangYin Opera Hall

⁶⁸ Gu Feng, “Lu Pei’s *The Third of March* Will it Stand Out in Chinese Opera World,” *Shang Yin Ai Yue*, June 26, 2018, 5.

Performance Organization
Shanghai Philharmonic Orchestra

Production Team

Conductor: Zhang Liang

Composer: Lu Pei

Soprano: Wan Dan

Figure 4. From left to right: Wan Dan, soprano, Lu Pei, composer, and Zhang Liang, conductor.⁶⁹



⁶⁹ Lu Pei, Phone interview with the author, February 5, 2020.

Chapter 4

The Musical Style of the Zhuang and Its Further Applications in this Opera

Zhuang Music

The Third of March begins with a prelude in which the chorus sings “The Song of March Third” to celebrate the traditional song festival. The chorus divides into two parts, singing in Zhuang’s typical antiphonal style, to represent the Tonggu and Nalian villages. This antiphonal technique is presented as a question and answer, and makes reference to the Zhuang song festival’s singing competition ritual. The first two staves shown in Figure 5 represent the Tonggu village, labeled as chorus one (合一), and begins the question by asking “what is that far way, then coming closer?”

Figure 5. Prelude, mm. 6-10.⁷⁰

Figure 5 shows a musical score for the prelude, measures 6-10. The score is in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. It consists of three systems. The first system is for 'Chorus One' (合一) and includes a vocal line with lyrics '什么 远远 又近了 又近了 了了 哪 了了 哪' and a piano accompaniment. The second system is for 'Chorus Two' (合二) and includes a vocal line with lyrics '依依 哟 依依 依依 哟 依依' and a piano accompaniment. The third system is for the piano (Pno.) and features a continuous arpeggiated accompaniment. Dynamics include mf and mp.

⁷⁰ All the Piano/Vocal scores have been provided by Lu Pei, email to author, June 20, 2018.

The third and fourth staves in Figure 6 represent the Nalian village, labeled as chorus two (合二), and answer chorus one's question in an antiphonal singing style with "Thunder is far far away, then coming closer."

Figure 6. Prelude, mm. 32-35.

Figure 6 shows a musical score for a prelude, measures 32-35. It consists of three staves. The top staff is for Chorus One (合一), with lyrics "依 哟 依 哟". The middle staff is for Chorus Two (合二), with lyrics "雷 声 远 远 又 近 了 又 近 了 了 了 哪". The bottom staff is for Piano (Pno.), with a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The key signature is D major (two sharps) and the time signature is 3/4. The piano part starts at measure 32.

Musically, *The Third of March* is modern yet classical in form—its music has diverse changes in meter and tempo which reflect its originality and creative identity. As shown in Figure 7, Lu uses an ostinato bass pattern in the accompaniment while the folk melody of “Stars and Moon in the Sky” flows in the upper voices.

Figure 7. Act III Scene 1, mm. 3-4.

Figure 7 shows a musical score for Act III Scene 1, measures 3-4. It consists of three staves. The top staff is for Yi Lan (依兰), the middle for Meng Shan (孟山), and the bottom for Piano (Pno.). The piano part features a prominent ostinato bass pattern in the left hand, while the right hand plays a melodic line. The key signature is D major (two sharps) and the time signature is 3/4. The piano part starts at measure 3.

Zhuang people almost always associate nature with certain melodies or rhythmic ideas. In Figure 8, the rapid rhythmic dance movement style of the Zhuang patterns found in the lower voice illustrates dance movements while the leaping melodic line in the upper voice illustrates the festival's joyful environment.

Figure 8. Act II Scene 1, mm. 17-20.



During Act II scene 2, Mengshan and Yilan's duet "Embroidered ball flies" contains text which shows the embroidered ball's significance to the Zhuang culture. The lyrics state that "the embroidered ball was embroidered by my own hand. Mengshan catches it and doesn't drop it. It represents a sweet song, and holding each other in our hearts all year. The embroidered ball flies in the songs of March, and sweet feelings accompany our whole lives." Yilan begins singing the first two phrases of the duet offstage until Mengshan puts Yilan's embroidered ball on his chest, then Yilan comes onstage to sing the remainder of the duet. While the music is initially written differently in the two voice parts, they later join in a passage of imitative counterpoint, a minor third apart, as can be seen below in Figure 9.

Figure 9. Act II Scene 2, mm. 139-142.

139

依兰 S.
— 绣球飞去不飞回 — 绣球飞去不飞来 — 绣球飞在三月的

莲香 M.S.
— — — — —

孟山妈 A.
— — — — —

孟山 T.
8
飞 — 绣球飞 — 绣球飞去不回来 绣球飞在三月的

Pentatonic harmonies are frequently used in Zhuang songs and may be found below in Figure 10. The highly distinctive melodic passage is written in a high tessitura, but the voice part is written in lyrical style. The lyrics are often easy to remember, and rhyme, while the folk song form varies among arias, duets, trios, and quintets. The Zhuang traditional folk song singing style and pentatonic harmonies, contains percussive music with repeated staccato and disjunct chords in the accompaniment and a pentatonic vocal melody.

Figure 10. Act I Scene 1, mm. 47-50.

47 活跃地

彩云
— — — — —

贾许瓦
妈妈呀 就是婆婆妈妈 我不要你替我选择 我的爱好

阿虫
— — — — —

47 活跃地

Pno.
— — — — —

The opera's libretto is modern and innovative in a few ways. First, the recitative is written in Chinese, but includes English expressions that are often heard in many pop songs. Second, the recitative is accompanied by one chord, as it is in Mozart's music, but in a series of accented chords. Finally, this recitative happens during the trio passage, the speaking voice of Caiyun uses "O my God", a common English expression in her line.

Figure 11. Act I Scene 1, Trio Passage, mm. 153-155.

第一场 归来

The musical score for Figure 11 consists of four staves. The top staff is for the character Caiyun (彩云), with lyrics in Chinese and English: "白 莲 O my God 贾 许 瓦 你 明 年 就 要 考 大 学 了". The second staff is for Jia Xuwa (贾许瓦), the third for A Chong (阿虫), and the fourth is the piano accompaniment (Pno.). The piano part features a series of accented chords in the right hand and a simple bass line in the left hand. The score is in G major and 2/4 time, starting at measure 153.

Guilin yu gu is one of the narratives and singing styles in music performance in Guangxi, the singing style is straightforward and highly flexible. In the past there were no instruments other than drums to accompany singers, however it has gradually developed into folk song music and is accompanied by the *zhongruan* (a four-stringed, plucked instrument) and *pipa* (Chinese lute with a pear-shaped wooden body, and four strings which are plucked).

The distinctive style of *Guilin yu gu* is formed by the Gui dialect, and it is often used in narrative way. The sample below is a recitative by the character A Chong, the only role in the opera that requires use of the Gui dialect. The piano reduction below

shows that the left hand establishes steady staccato beats while the right hand imitates the typical plucked instruments sound and rhythm.

Figure 12. Act III Scene 2, mm. 108-110.

阿虫

108

Pno. *mp*

莲香也是五色山上的红杜鹃

Selected Arias Analysis

Yilan's aria, "It is Good to See You're Coming"

This aria is one of the most significant in the opera and is sung by the leading role, Yilan, in Act IV scene 2. The aria is set in Yilan's home where she is getting dressed to marry a man she does not love. Yilan's friends, Lianxiang and A Chong, are trying to help her escape the marriage, and tell Yilan that Mengshan is waiting for her outside. Lianxiang regrets that she told Yilan's brother, Tianmu, about their affection because he is forcing Yilan to marry another man. Lianxiang wants to make amends by wearing Yilan's wedding dress and taking her place in the ceremony. However, Yilan decides to ingest poison in hopes of mending the hatred between the Tonggu and Nalian villages. In the interview, Lu Pei mentions that the melody is composed based on features

of the Zhuang folk songs “Stars and Moon in the Sky” and “Vine Wrapped Tree.”⁷¹ The lyrics and melody of the aria are full of drama, sorrow, and virtuosity, and express Yilan’s true love for Mengshan and gratitude toward her friends.

Table 1. General structure of “It is Good to See You’re Coming”

<p>Recitative (mm.1-26) + Aria (mm.27-156)</p> <p>Three-Part song form: ABA with coda</p> <p>Introduction: mm. 27-29, in F major</p> <p>A: mm.30-84, A1 (mm.30-53) in F major, T in D-flat major and A2 (mm.61-84) in A-flat major</p> <p>B: mm.85-109, B1 (85-96) in A-flat and D-flat major, B2 (97-109) in D-flat major</p> <p>A': mm.110-129, in F major and D major</p> <p>Coda: mm.130-156 in G major and C major</p>

The aria’s introduction opens with an urgent and agitated footstep rhythm, as A Chong and Lianxiang are extremely anxious to come to Yilan’s home. During the recitative, Yilan sings “A Chong, Lianxiang, you are risking of your life!” with short phrases that are separated by rests. This exhibits the traits of the classical recitative style which delivers a speech-like message. The recitative’s accompaniment in measures 6 through 9 reflect the same thematic melody as the aria.

⁷¹ Lu Pei, Interview with the author, Shanghai, July 8, 2018.

Figure 13. It is Good to See You're Coming, Short Phrases Separated by Rests, mm. 6-9.

The musical score for Figure 13 consists of five staves. From top to bottom: Soprano (依兰), Alto (莲香), Tenor (孟山), Baritone (天木), and Piano (Pno.). The vocal parts are mostly rests, with the Soprano part having lyrics '阿虫 莲香' under the first two measures. The piano accompaniment starts at measure 6 with a 'Moderato' tempo marking and a 'mp' dynamic. The piano part features a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand.

The **A** section may be divided into two parts, **A1** and **A2**, and **A1** displays three well-balanced phrases which occur in the parallel form $8(4+4) + 8(4+4) + 8(4+4)$. This classical trait appears with the four-measure phrase in **A1** and an uneven number of measures in **A2**. The three phrases in **A1** are identical in many ways, including the simple and balanced 4+4 phrase structure that is typical of the classical period. Secondly, the tonal plan is in the home key of F major and helps to establish the key before departing to more distant keys. Finally, the melodic contour contains the main melodic motives. Lu organizes the aria by using the same melodic gestures that are heard in the recitative accompaniment and that are found circled below in Figure 14.

Figure 14. It is Good to See You're Coming, Melodic Gestures, mm. 30-33.

The musical score for Figure 14 shows two staves. The top staff is a vocal line with lyrics '看到 你们 前来' and a 'V' dynamic marking. Three specific melodic gestures are circled in red: a quarter note followed by a half note, a quarter note followed by a half note, and a quarter note followed by a half note. The bottom staff is a piano accompaniment with a bass line and a treble line.

The three intervals comprise a motive which is a central component of the **A** section. It not only dominates the passage, but also gives it a clear thematic reference to Yilan's melody. With the establishment of a moderate tempo, the motive is very recognizable and easy to remember for the audience.

The motive is repeated three times in parallel motion, however it contains a slight alteration each time. Each iteration, regardless of alteration, is recognizable by its identical intervallic pattern. Among the iterations is the phrase shown below in Figure 15, which creates emphasis on the downbeat by adding a dotted rhythm to C and A from the first and second intervals, respectively, while the third interval (F to G) remains the same.

Figure 15. It is Good to See You're Coming, Emphasis on the Downbeat, mm. 38-41.



The **A2** section explores irregular phrase structures, time signatures, rhythms, and harmonies. The two extended phrases in this section are unpredictable because while they share a similar melodic development, they also have varied rhythmic gestures and pulses. The transition between the **A1** and **A2** sections, found below in Figure 16, helps bond the entire **A** section by showing a footprint from the thematic intervals in **A1**, before the music is carried away.

Figure 16. It is Good to See You're Coming, Transition Phrase, mm 55-60.

The image shows a musical score for a transition phrase. The top staff is for the Soprano (Sop.) and the bottom staff is for the Piano (Pno.). The Soprano part has three phrases circled in red. The lyrics are '变成了 闹梦 —— 变成了 闹梦！'. The Piano part has a 'Rit.' marking above the staff. The score is in a key signature of three flats and a 4/4 time signature.

The next two phrases of **A2** are less cohesive in terms of their phrase lengths; however, they are more cohesive in their opening melodic intervals. The general breakdowns of number of measures in a4, 4+4+3, and a5, 4+2+4+3, show variation in their lengths and versatility in their ability to move emotions. However, a5 is longer than a4 with a codetta that serves as a closing statement to the entire **A** section. Lu suggested this is called the codetta. Despite their different structures, he helps the audience follow the music's progression by repeating the same melodic contour at each phrase's beginning.

The **B** section, measures 85-109, is the climax of the aria and re-establishes Yilan's most intense despair about her love of Mengshan. The **B** section's structure is less rigid than the **A** section and may be divided into two parts: **B1**, measures 85 through 96, and **B2**, measures 97 through 109. Both **B1** and **B2** are marked *Moderato*, however **B1** contains a 4+3+5 phrase structure while **B2** contains a 5+8 phrase structure. Similar to the **A** section, the **B** section's theme opens with recognizable motives. Then, the phrases

are either modified or extended, thereby enhancing the dynamic tone color and Lu Pei's creativity.

A' returns at measure 110 after a whole measure of silence. The melody recalls the exact motivic intervals from the A section, reminiscent of earlier phrases with an addition of two-measure bridge. These two measures help transition the music to the coda.

The coda starts at measure 130 and sequentially gathers Yilan's main motives from the A section in the supertonic key of G major. The coda sounds as though it is an extension of the A section. It clearly echoes the A section with its three motivic intervals and presentation of main ideas from the aria's different sections.

Figure 17. It is Good to See You're Coming, Main Motives in the Coda, mm. 130-135.

The image shows a musical score for the piece 'It is Good to See You're Coming'. The score is divided into two systems. The top system is the vocal line, starting at measure 130. It is marked 'A Tempo' and 'f'. The melody consists of five phrases, each circled in red. The lyrics under the notes are: 五 色 山 下 三 月 三 日 开 山 歌. The bottom system is the piano accompaniment, also starting at measure 130. It features a complex melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The piano part concludes with a long fermata on the final chord, marked with an 8th measure rest.

The coda, measures 130 through 156, may be divided into three phrases which last 8 measures, 9 measures, and 10 measures, respectively. The first two phrases are sung in a powerful manner while the last phrase ends faintly and freely, and concludes on a long fermata, as though Yilan is yearning for the end of hatred between the villages.

Tonality and Harmony

The aria embeds a distinctive melody that is based on the pentatonic scale and is found in the main vocal line. This pentatonic character is the most significant in Eastern music, especially in China. Western operas such as Puccini's *Turandot* have also adopted this character by borrowing Chinese folk songs like “*Mo Li Hua*” known as “Jasmine Flower.”

Lu Pei uses the pentatonic scale in Yilan's aria and writes in F major during the **A1** subsection when the main theme is introduced. Then, the aria modulates to other keys including A-flat major in the **A2** subsection, D-flat major in the **B** section, F major in **A'** subsection, and G major in the coda. The melody found in **A1** goes through the vocal line in pitches of F, G, A, C, and D, settles in a moderate tempo, and remains in a diatonic scheme. However the last chord, found in Figure 18, contains a parallel f minor chord, which many contemporary composers have found interesting.

Figure 18. It is Good to See You're Coming, Parallel Minor Chord, mm. 51-53.

The image shows a musical score for Soprano (Sop.) and Piano (Pno.). The Soprano part is in the upper staff, and the Piano part is in the lower staff. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major). The Soprano part has the lyrics "依 兰 离 地 了 心 呀" under the notes. A red oval highlights a specific chord in the Piano part, which is a parallel minor chord (F minor) occurring in measure 53. The Soprano part continues with a melodic line in the following measures.

The transitional statement shown below in Figure 19 is very unstable in tonality due to the secondary dominant and diminished chords in measures 56 through 59. While these measures are written in D-flat major they contain a C-flat which alludes to a G-flat

major tonality. The music invites movement away from D-flat major because it ends on A-flat major, the lowered mediant of the home key of F major, a technique which Beethoven greatly admired.

Figure 19. It is Good to See You're Coming, Unstable Tonality, mm. 54-60.

依 兰 Sop. *mf* Rit.
 好 人 变 成 了 阎 罗 ——— 变 成 了 阎 罗 ! ———

Pno. *mp* Rit.
 D-flat Major: V7 vii 6/4/IV V4/3/IV V6/5 /V A-flat Major

The harmonies in the **A2** subsection are richly written and most notably contain parallel harmonies, especially in thirds. Parallel harmony is one of the key characteristics of late romanticism in French compositions by Ravel and Debussy, and can also be found in Schoenberg's music. Parallel thirds can create a mysterious, exotic timbre and for this reason lead Lu Pei included the sonority in developing the aria. For example, parallel thirds are shown below in Figure 20.

Figure 20. It is Good to See You're Coming, Parallel Thirds, mm. 61-65.

依 兰 Sop. *mf* A Tempo
 阿 虫 哥 明 莲 香 妹 我 的 好 妹 妹 ——— 我 不 能

Pno. *mp* A Tempo

A recurring motive in this section is the rhythmic idea shown in Figure 21 which was first introduced in the accompaniment during the **A2** subsection. This rhythmic figure is widely used in both the accompaniment (Figure 21) and vocal line (Figure 22) and the **B** section. This specific rhythm emphasizes two sixteenth notes followed by two eighth notes

Figure 21. It is Good to See You're Coming, Recurring Motive, mm. 61-63.

Figure 21 shows the musical score for measures 61-63. The top staff is the vocal line, marked *mf* and *A Tempo*. The bottom staff is the piano accompaniment, marked *mp* and *A Tempo*. The lyrics are: 阿 虫 哥 啊 莲 香 妹 我 的 好 妹. Blue boxes highlight the recurring rhythmic motive in both parts, which consists of two sixteenth notes followed by two eighth notes.

Figure 22. It is Good to See You're Coming, Recurring Motive in Voice, mm. 72-80.

Figure 22 shows the musical score for measures 72-80. The top staff is the vocal line, marked *Sop.*. The bottom staff is the piano accompaniment, marked *Pno.*. The lyrics are: 这 机 越 啊 那 年 那 月 才 是 头 你 们 带 走 一 坛 我 酿 的 香 草 酒 啊 把 酒 交 给 金 山 寺 让 他 想 我 的 时 候. Blue boxes highlight the recurring rhythmic motive in the vocal line, which consists of two sixteenth notes followed by two eighth notes.

The music returns to the first theme in the home key of F major after a measure of silence. The rhythmic motive is shown in Figure 23, while the melody projects Yilan's disappointment with her destiny. This augmentation also may be found in measure 112 and measure 115, in comparison to measures 61 through 63 in Figure 21.

Figure 23. It is Good to See You're Coming, Augmentation Gestures, mm. 112-115.

The image shows a musical score for Soprano (Sop.) and Piano (Pno.). The Soprano part is in F major, 3/4 time, with lyrics '依 兰 的 命 运 那 是 我 的'. The Piano accompaniment features a rhythmic motive in the right hand, with two instances of 'augmentation' highlighted by blue boxes. The tempo is 'Moderato (♩ = c. 76)' and dynamics are 'p'.

The closing begins at measure 130 and pays homage to the A section theme (see Figure 25). The melody is heard in the supertonic key of G major and the music becomes more intense, both in dynamic and flexibility. The accompaniment is comprised of a series of flowing notes in diminution of the introductory in Figure 24.

Yilan's melody, however, remains faithful to its original presentation. Some secondary chords are found in measures 150 (V/V) and 154 (V7/VIb), and redirect the music which ultimately ends in C major.

Figure 24. It is Good to See You're Coming, Accompaniment Introduction, mm. 27-29.

The image shows a musical score for the accompaniment introduction of the aria 'It is Good to See You're Coming'. It features two staves: a vocal line for Soprano (Sop.) and a piano accompaniment (Pno.). The tempo is marked 'Moderato' with a metronome marking of quarter note = c. 92. The key signature has one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 3/4. The vocal line is mostly rests. The piano accompaniment starts with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic. A green box highlights the first three measures of the piano accompaniment, which consist of a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand.

Figure 25. It is Good to See You're Coming, Diminution Introduction in the Coda, mm. 130-132.

The image shows a musical score for the coda of the aria 'It is Good to See You're Coming', specifically the 'diminution' section. It features two staves: a vocal line and a piano accompaniment (Pno.). The tempo is marked 'A Tempo'. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The vocal line starts at measure 130 with the lyrics '五 色 山 下 三 月 三'. The piano accompaniment also starts at measure 130. A green box highlights the first three measures of the piano accompaniment, which consist of a complex rhythmic pattern in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The word 'diminution' is written in green above the piano accompaniment staff.

Other General Characteristics

The aria incorporates Western musical influence through its composition in three-part song form with an extended coda. The key areas explore different tonalities, and are closely related to Yilan's emotions. Extensive use of parallel thirds and other techniques makes the music more expressive.

Figure 26. It is Good to See You're Coming, Parallel Third Technique, mm. 66-73.

The image shows a musical score for a soprano and piano. The soprano part is in a single melodic line with lyrics in Chinese: "走 虽然 会 得到 受 困 一 下 的 却 是 新 机". The piano accompaniment features a prominent parallel third texture in the right hand, highlighted by a blue box and the label "parallel third". The score is in 2/4 time and includes a key signature of two flats.

Lu Pei uses melismatic writing in the leading voice's melody, a common feature in the mountain songs. Most of the notes have long rhythmic values, which imitate singing in the mountains, great plains, or other high elevated areas where long rhythms are needed to project sound over long distances.

Figure 27. It is Good to See You're Coming, Melismatic Writing, mm. 99-102.

The image shows a musical score for a soprano and piano. The soprano part has lyrics: "我 的 香 草 酒 你 藏 好 我". The piano accompaniment features arpeggiated chords in the right hand and chords in the lower register in the left hand. The score is in 2/4 time and includes a key signature of two flats.

When first looking at the score there are many interesting details. First, Lu uses arpeggiation in the accompaniment, and chords in the lower register that are widely voiced to enhance the resonant bass sound. Second, there are frequent meter changes

which can be found in Figure 28, not only between sections, but also multiple times within one phrase, effectively breaking up the phrase's regularity.

Figure 28. It is Good to See You're Coming, Frequent Meter Changes, mm. 90-94.

The image shows a musical score for the song 'It is Good to See You're Coming' (Figure 28). The score is for Soprano (Sop.) and Piano (Pno.). The Soprano part has lyrics in Chinese: '依兰 梦就是他的梦 我认命了 我不能走 我认'. The piano part includes a dynamic marking 'p' and a tempo instruction '稍放慢，稍自由'. The score shows frequent meter changes, with the time signature changing from 3/4 to 4/4 and back to 3/4. The Soprano part has four green circles highlighting the meter changes. The piano part has a dynamic marking 'p' and a tempo instruction '稍放慢，稍自由'.

Third, the music has several key changes which are unlikely to happen in traditional Chinese music. Vivid changes in tonality are usually found in the romantic music period by composers such as Puccini, Verdi, and others. Modulation, dynamics, tonal range, and harmonic have gone through a long period of development in the music history, which is not modern to Westerners, but is renewed when combined with Chinese traditional qualities. Lu Pei chose an epic way of choosing tonalities and has definitely achieved the splendid color of the sound.

While sections **A** and **B** have unique motivic and melodic features, they are very different in character. The first theme is lyrical at a moderate tempo while the second theme is hurried and sad. The bright melodies and intervallic motives inspired by Chinese folk songs stand out from other arias by Lu Pei's peers, especially due to his use of parallel thirds, which can be found in the first theme as well in the Zhuang's mountain song.

Yilan's second aria "Mengshan, my dear Mengshan"

The second aria is sung by virtual Yilan's soul after her death. The melody surrounds Mengshan's heart. She grieves the power of love and wishes true love would be inherited for centuries. The aria's music is illusory and is written with a series of augmented and both major and minor seventh chords, which are used with successive single-chord tremolos, usually on the downbeat.

Figure 29. Mengshan, my dear Mengshan, Augmented Harmony, mm. 94-95.

The musical score for Figure 29 consists of three staves. The top staff is for the Soprano (Sop.), labeled '依兰' (Yilan), with lyrics '呀' (Ya) and '我 的 孟 山' (I Mengshan's Mengshan). The middle staff is for the Tenor (T.), labeled '孟山' (Mengshan), with a long rest. The bottom staff is for the Piano (Pno.), featuring a tremolo accompaniment of single-chord tremolos on the downbeat, marked with a piano (*pp*) dynamic. The score is in 3/4 time and includes a measure rest (8^{va}) in the piano part.

Her thematic melody returns in this second aria at m. 115. This symbolizes her character in a way similar to a Wagnerian leitmotif. The melody emphasizes the second beat of each measure, and uses intervals of a rising fourth, third, and descending fifth.

Figure 30. Mengshan, my dear Mengshan, Emphasis on the Second Beat, mm. 115-117.

The musical score for Figure 30 consists of three staves. The top staff is for the Soprano (Sop.), labeled '依兰' (Yilan), with lyrics '五色山下三月三' (Wuse Shan Xia San Yue San). The middle staff is for the Tenor (T.), labeled '孟山' (Mengshan), with a long rest. The bottom staff is for the Piano (Pno.), featuring a piano accompaniment with a focus on the second beat of each measure, marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The score is in 3/4 time and includes a tempo marking of 'Moderato'.

Chapter 5

LANGUAGE

Aria Lyrics Translation

【 依 兰 】

Yilan

(“It is Good to See You’re Coming” in act IV. Yilan’s two good friends came to the wedding and want to help her to get out of the situation. They do not want Yilan to marry the man she does not love. However, Yilan decided not to be married, and takes the poison at the end of aria).

【 宣 叙 调 】

Recitative

A Chóng, Liánxiāng, nǐ mén bú yào mìng le!
阿 虫， 莲 香， 你 们 不 要 命 了！

A Chong, Lianxiang, you are risking your life!

【 咏 叹 调 】 《 看 到 你 们 前 来 》

Aria “It is Good to See You’re Coming”

kàn dào nǐ mén qián lái
看 到 你 们 前 来
bú pà wēi xiǎn dào zhè lǐ
不 怕 危 险 到 这 里
wǒ de xīn
我 的 心
rú tóng hē le yī bēi xiāng cǎo jiǔ
如 同 喝 了 一 杯 香 草 酒
yòu tián mì yòu nuǎn huó
又 甜 蜜 又 暖 和
wǒ de a gē tā guǐ mí le xīn qiào
我 的 阿 哥 他 鬼 迷 了 心 窍
hǎo rén biàn chéng le yán luó
好 人 变 成 了 阎 罗
A Chóng gē ah
阿 虫 哥 啊
Lián xiāng wǒ de hǎo mèi mèi
莲 香 我 的 好 妹 妹
wǒ bù néng zǒu
我 不 能 走
suī rán huì dé dào le ài
虽 然 会 得 到 了 爱
liú xià de què shì xīn chóu
留 下 的 却 是 新 仇
zhè zhǒng zǐ zhòng zài tiān mù gē xīn lǐ
这 种 子 种 在 天 木 哥 心 里

See you coming

Without being afraid of coming here

My heart

Is like drinking a glass of vanilla wine

It is sweet and warm

My elder brother is possessed

A good person becomes a Yama

Brother A-Chong

My good sister Lianxiang

I cannot go

Although I will be loved

It will leave behind new hatred

The seed is planted in Tianmu’s heart

zhè chóu yuàn a 这 仇 怨 啊	This grudge
nǎ nián nǎ yuè cái shì tóu 哪 年 哪 月 才 是 头	When would be the end to this
nǐ mén dài zǒu yī tǎn wǒ niàng de xiāng cǎo jiǔ a 你 们 带 走 一 坛 我 酿 的 香 草 酒 啊	Take a jar of my vanilla wine
bǎ jiǔ jiāo gěi Mèng shān gē 把 酒 交 给 孟 山 哥	Give the wine to Mengshan
ràng tā xiǎng wǒ de shí hòu hē yī kǒu 让 他 想 我 的 时 候 喝 一 口	Let him take a sip when he misses me
bā wǒ zhuǎn gào Mèng shān gē 帮 我 转 告 孟 山 哥	Please help, telling Mengshan
tiān huāng dì lǎo, wǒ de xīn jiù shì tā de xīn 天 荒 地 老, 我 的 心 就 是 他 的 心	Till the world's end, my heart belongs to him
dì lǎo tiān huāng, wǒ de mèng jiù shì tā de mèng 地 老 天 荒, 我 的 梦 就 是 他 的 梦	Till the world's end, my dream is his dream
wǒ rèn mìng le, wǒ bù néng zǒu 我 认 命 了, 我 不 能 走	I accept my fate, I cannot go
wǒ rèn mìng le, wǒ bù néng zǒu 我 认 命 了, 我 不 能 走	I accept my fate, I cannot go
wǒ zài bú yuàn kàn jiàn liǎng jiā de xuè 我 再 不 愿 看 见 两 家 的 血	I do not want to see the blood between two villages
nián nián dōu zài wǔ sè shān xià bù tíng de liú 年 年 都 在 五 色 山 下 不 停 的 流	Flowing by the Five-colored Mountain every year
Mèng shān gē ya wǒ de Mèng shān gē 孟 山 哥 呀 我 的 孟 山 哥	Mengshan, my dear Mengshan
nǐ hē le wǒ de jiǔ 你 喝 了 我 的 酒	You drank my wine
nǐ cáng hǎo wǒ de xiù qiú 你 藏 好 我 的 绣 球	You hide my embroidered ball
nǐ jì zhù wǒ de gē 你 记 住 我 的 歌	You remember my song
nà shì wǒ de mìng, nà shì wǒ de hún 那 是 我 的 命, 那 是 我 的 魂	This is my life, this is my soul
yǒu mìng yǒu hún jiù yǒu gē 有 命 有 魂 就 有 歌	There are songs for life and soul
Mèng shān gē, wǒ de Mèng shān gē 孟 山 哥, 我 的 孟 山 哥	Mengshan, my dear Mengshan
wǔ sè shān xià sān yuè sān 五 色 山 下 三 月 三	Under the Five-colored Mountain on March Third
yǒu mìng shān gē chàng bú duàn 有 命 山 歌 唱 不 断	There are mountain songs whenever there is life
yǒu hún shān gē dài dài chuán 有 魂 山 歌 代 代 传	There are mountain songs whenever there is soul

【 依 兰 】

Yílán

(This aria is sung after Yilan's death in Act IV. Yilan's melody surrounds Mengshan's heart. In the premiere of this opera, Yilan was visualized as an image up high while singing the song, and there were two dancers on the floor of the stage representing the two leading roles, Yilan and Mengshan. It depicts the sense that, no matter how hard they try to be together, there is always a force to separate them. The lyrics are taken from the second half of the first aria "It is Good to See You're Coming.")

【 咏叹调 】 《孟山哥呀，我的孟山哥》 **Aria** "Mengshan, my dear Mengshan"

Mèng shān gē ya wǒ de Mèng shān gē 孟 山 哥呀我的孟 山 哥	Mengshan, my dear Mengshan brother
nǐ hē le wǒ de jiǔ 你 喝 了 我 的 酒	You drank my wine
nǐ cáng hǎo wǒ de xiù qiú 你 藏 好 我 的 绣 球	You hide my embroidered ball
nǐ jì zhù wǒ de gē 你 记 住 我 的 歌	You remember my song
nà shì wǒ de mìng, nà shì wǒ de hún 那 是 我 的 命, 那 是 我 的 魂	This is my life, this is my soul
yǒu mìng yǒu hún jiù yǒu gē 有 命 有 魂 就 有 歌	There are songs for life and soul
Mèng shān gē, wǒ de Mèng shān gē 孟 山 哥, 我 的 孟 山 哥	Mengshan, my dear Mengshan brother
wǔ sè shān xià sān yuè sān 五 色 山 下 三 月 三	Under the Five-colored Mountain on March Third
yǒu mìng shān gē chàng bú duàn 有 命 山 歌 唱 不 断	There are mountain songs whenever there is life
yǒu hún shān gē dài dài chuán 有 魂 山 歌 代 代 传	There are mountain songs whenever there is soul

Basic Chinese Pronunciation in Pinyin (International Phonetic Alphabet)

China is a multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic country. There are fifty-six ethnic groups, with more than eighty dialects and thirty kinds of characters. Mandarin is the official Chinese language, and simplified and traditional characters are the main characters in writing. Pinyin is a phonetic symbol spelling system, which is like the International Phonetic Alphabet. It shows the way to pronounce each character. Pinyin is composed of three elements, initials, finals, and tones.

The initials are what are called consonants in English. There are twenty-three consonants in mandarin: b, p, m, f, d, t, n, l, g, k, h, j, q, x, z, c, s, zh, ch, sh, r, y, w. Most of them sound similar to English, except q = [tʃ] sound, as in “cheer,” but more plosive, x = [ʃ] sound, as in “shoe,” z = [ds] sound, as in “beds,” c = [ts] sound, as in “sits,” zh = [dʒ] sound, as in “judge,” ch = [tʃ] sound, as in “Church,” r = [r] sound, as in “ruler,” no trill but with more fricative.

The finals are combined with six common vowels, plus two compound vowels: a, e, i, o, u, ü, and ou, iu. A = [a] sound, as in “father,” some of them sound [æ] as in “cat,” e = [ə] schwa sound, as in “her,” i = [i:] sound, as in “feet,” o = [ɔ] sound, as in “bought” u = [u] sound, as in “boom,” ü = [y] sound in French or the word Frühling in German. The compound vowels are ou like [o] sound, as in “Chicago,” iu like [j], as in “you.” In Chinese, up to three multiple vowels could join together in one character. Some examples when they all appear consecutively in one syllable are, “kuài” it means “quickly,” or “huài” it means “bad.”

In Chinese, every word could carry four different tone variations, and as a result, each tone of the word has a different meaning of its own. The difference of tonal flow is

very important in daily communication, otherwise it can be misleading. Here are a few examples: “zhǐ dǎo” means guidance; “zhī dào” means know; “fù qián” means payment, and “fū qiǎn” means superficial. Apart from the four main tones there is a neutral tone. The most important point is all the characters are clearly pronounced, carrying the tone changes.

The primary movement of the first tone is flat, with a smooth and even sound. The second tone rises, the fourth tone falls, and the third tone is a mix of both. It is the most complex which combines the second and fourth tones, and first goes down then up in sound. For example, in the aria, Yilan sings “xiāng cǎo jiǔ” which “xiāng” is the flat tone, it means aromatic, but it is sung in the third tone, then it becomes “xiǎng,” that means miss.

Table 2. The Phonetic Symbols of the Tonality

Tone	Character	Detail
First tone	mā	Flat tone, the word means mom.
Second tone	má	The pitch starts medium in tone, then goes up, the word means numb.
Third tone	mǎ	The pitch goes down then rises toward the top, the word means horse.
Fourth tone	mà	The pitch starts from the top then strongly goes down, the word means scold.
Neutral tone	ma	The pitch lower than the first tone, and shorter.

“If the foundation of the art of music is to be laid in any language, it will be in Chinese.”⁷² Languages differ from music in emphasis on melody or rhythm: English stresses rhythm more, but Chinese lays more emphasis upon the melodies.

The second and third rising tone



The fourth falling tone



In the common practice of Chinese songs, the melody is usually associated with the language itself, and the natural sound of the Chinese music is noted from the monosyllabic Chinese language, with the various types of speech expressions being important elements in Chinese music melody. This is also the reason that when Chinese composers write a song, you can easily tell the tone of the melody from the native language. Lu Pei used the four tones of Chinese pronunciation to compose the pitches, “especially in the recitative, not only makes it musical, but also connects the line with Chinese speaking habits that are easy for singing, and easy for the meaning of the lyrics.”⁷³

Another interesting fact is, in Pinyin, words pronounced the same way can have many different characters in writing. Some examples of words from the lyrics of Yilan’s aria, such as “gē,” has two versions in the simplified writing character, “歌” and “哥,” “shān gē” “山歌” means mountain songs, but “gē gē” “哥哥” means brother. Another

⁷² John Hazedel Levis. *Foundations of Chinese Musical Art: Illustrated with Musical Compositions*. New York: Paragon Book Reprint Corp, 1963, 7.

⁷³ Lu Pei, Lecture of the Composing Thinking in Opera, *The Third of March*, Shanghai Conservatory of Music, Nov 21, 2018, translated by author.

example is “xīn” in the writing, characters be either “新” or “心.” “新” means new, but “心” means in one’s heart.

The so-called ‘nasal’ sounds, [n] as in ‘nose,’ [m] as in ‘mouth’ and [ŋ] as in ‘singing’ are all familiar sounds to an English speaker, but which drastically change meaning in Chinese. For example, “xīn” means heart, or new, depending on the character, but “xīng” means star or gorilla. Thus we see that Chinese nasal sounds are mostly decided by these two. Pinyin ending syllables with N are “an, en, in, un, ün.” In the aria, there are many [n] sounds on the final syllable combined with [a] such as “qián, xiǎn, tiān, yuàn, nián, shān, sǎn, chuán, zhuǎn, and duàn,” and there are a few words ending with “xīn,” “mén, rén,” and “hún.” Ng ending syllables are “ang, eng, ing, ong.” For example, the role’s names “Mèngshān” and “Liánxiāng” both have the ng [ŋ] sound. Other common words ending syllables in the aria such as “cáng, chéng, néng, mìng, tíng, chóng, zhòng.”

What is discussed above are the basics of pronouncing in Chinese. The pronunciation of the main four tones of Pinyin are the most important starting point. For English-speaking singers to learn Chinese songs, they must learn the diction, just as they do in Italian or German or French.

Performance Practice

Emotion is comprised of the synthesis of multiple feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. It is not only a subjective and intuitive feeling but also an objective physiological response. The most common emotions include joy, anger, sadness, surprise, and love; also there are some more emotions such as jealousy, shame and pride. Music is a way of expression, an art form where composers convey their emotions through style, text, harmony, and also the performers' own personalities and interpretations.

The first music sung by Yilan in Act II, scene 2, is a duet “Embroidered Ball Flies” with Mengshan. This compositional choice of delaying the heroine’s entry is similar to what Puccini did in his masterpiece *La Bohème*. This late arrival underscores the tenderness and warmth of Yilan’s vivid character in the opera.

The melodic range in the aria “It is Good to See You’re Coming” in act IV, scene 2 lies between E-flat4 to A-flat5, the vocal range is perfect for soprano. As legato singing is one of the primary techniques required in the aria, this would also be a wonderful piece for younger singers with a bit of experience, like seniors in college. In the recitative, Yilan only has two phrases, which are direct yet full of emotion. The text is “A Chóng, Liánxiāng, nǐ mén bú yào mìng le!” which means “A Chong, Lianxiang, you are risking your life!” During the scene, A Chong and Lianxiang are trying to help Yilan run away from the marriage, and the text reflects so many feelings such as love, surprise, sadness, and despair, a complex combination of emotions that Yilan is undergoing. It’s similar to the recitatives in Mozart, where there is more speech-like declamation. The phrases are short, with a large number of rests and beats in between words. The silences incorporated here are also very expressive. Music is actually continuously playing in the character’s

mind and the rests even make the music more interesting and exciting. The remainder of the recitative is Lianxiang's dialogue and will usually be left out when singing the solo aria.

The melody of Yilan is beautifully and conversational, and the atmosphere becomes sentimental. The thematic tune is C-F, A-C, F-G, even if the home key F major modulates to other related keys, these intervals have been repeated several times. The opening melody starts on the pitch C5, which is an easier middle register to set up the breath as well as the right position where the voice should start.

Lu composed a few balanced four measured phrases in **A1** section, clearly showing the direction of the phrase and the breaths. It would be better to add *portamento* between the three intervals, and sing through the direction of the whole phrase so as to the three intervals smoothly. Since the phrase is not very long, it is good for the young singers to learn and practice. However, the phrase was written in a descending gesture, so be sure to keep a horizontal approach, rather than a vertical one.

Figure 31. It is Good to See You're Coming, First Phrase of the Aria, mm. 29-33.

The image shows a musical score for a vocal solo and piano accompaniment. The vocal part is for Soprano (Sop.) and is written in a treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a 3/4 time signature. The tempo and dynamics are marked *mf*. The lyrics are in Chinese: 依兰 (Yilan) 看到你们前来 (kàn dào nǐ men qián lái). The piano part (Pno.) is written in a grand staff with a key signature of one flat and a 3/4 time signature. The piano accompaniment features a descending melodic line in the right hand and a harmonic accompaniment in the left hand.

Yilan’s leading motive also has been played in the accompaniment (see Figure 32), which is reminiscent of Mimí’s music in *La Bohème* by Puccini, where her main melody has been repeated in the accompaniment as well.

Figure 32. It is Good to See You’re Coming, Leading Motive in the Accompaniment, mm. 6-9.



The emotions at the beginning of the aria are sweet and filled with gratitude. With the changes of rhythm in the thematic motive, the music becomes more dramatic and intense. During the transition, only one word holds for nine beats with *crescendo* and *rit.*, starting on D-flat5, moving to E-flat5. From the singer’s perspective, singing a longer or higher note with a closed vowel such as [i] is definitely not easy. In Chinese singing, the same rules of diction apply just like singing in Italian, English or French, the vowels can be modified, in order to carry through the vocal line and the pitch. Lu Pei knows singers very well, and he intended to help the singers dealing with this issue in the opera.

In Figure 33, the lyrics are “hǎo rén biàn chéng le yán luó,” which means “a good person becomes a Yama.” The second time “luó” is sung, it’s on a longer note, and the composer used the closed vowels [u] and [o], but one doesn’t need to modify, as the preceding, becomes open vowel [ɔ] have already created enough space in the mouth to

keep the vowel rounded and vertical. This not only helps with the dynamic change, but also with projecting the sound forward, through the entire orchestra.

Figure 33. It is Good to See You're Coming, Transition Phrase, mm. 54-60.

依 兰 Sop. *mf* *mp* Rit.

hǎo rén biàn chéng le yán luó biàn chéng le yán luó
好 人 变 成 了 阎 罗 变 成 了 阎 罗 !

Pno. *mp* Rit.

D-flat Major: V7 vii 6/4/IV V4/3/IV V6/5 /V A-flat Major

As you can see in Figure 33, the text has been repeated twice on several secondary dominant and diminish chords, it makes the music more interesting and shows the complex emotion of the character, Yilan, who is upset about her brother not letting her to see Mengshan. Hence, the plot and mood fit perfectly. In the character's subtext, Yilan did not blame her brother for doing so, but felt more sad helplessness, because she knows her brother will not hurt her.

Yilan makes her decision to go through with the wedding in **A2**. She is such a kind-hearted and faithful woman that she hopes her brother can put aside his hatred from the past, and be open minded for the future of these two villages. In the first part of **A2** (see Figure 34), the vocal range is within an octave, from E-flat4 to E-flat5, and mainly

focuses on the tonic chords in A-flat major. The vocal line contains some dotted rhythms and syncopation, while the music is playing a sequential idea that establishes a stable background. It is important to highlight the contrast in character.

Figure 34. It is Good to See You're Coming, Vocal Line Rhythm Changed, mm. 61-64.

The image shows a musical score for a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line is for Soprano (Sop.) and is in A-flat major, 3/4 time. It starts at measure 61 with a mezzo-forte (mf) dynamic and a tempo marking of 'A Tempo'. The lyrics are: 'A Chóng gē ah, Lián xiāng mèi wǒ de hào mèi mèi'. The piano accompaniment (Pno.) is also in A-flat major, 3/4 time, and starts at measure 61 with a mezzo-piano (mp) dynamic. The piano part features a sequential idea in the right hand and a more stable accompaniment in the left hand.

An even and balanced sound is required in this middle register from E-flat4 to E-flat5. Lu likes to compose phrases within an octave range. In order to sing this low E-flat4, mixing the head and chest voices, as well as staying deeply connected to the breath is a great start. In Figure 34, the longer note is on “mèi”, the nasal consonant [m] integrates with two vowels, and the pronunciation sounds like “day, or may” in English. However, the [m] consonant, which does not require that much fricative on the lips like in other languages, but it put more emphasis on the diphthong [ei] singing in Chinese.

In the first half of **B** section, Lu Pei used strophic singing which is one of the unique features of mountain songs. The texts are set in four lines, see below:

Figure 35. Aria text.

tiān huāng dì lǎo, wǒ de xīn jiù shì tā de xīn 天 荒 地 老, 我 的 心 就 是 他 的 心	Till the world's end, my heart belongs to him
dì lǎo tiān huāng, wǒ de mèng jiù shì tā de mèng 地 老 天 荒, 我 的 梦 就 是 他 的 梦	Till the world's end, my dream is his dream
wǒ rèn mìng le, wǒ bù néng zǒu 我 认 命 了, 我 不 能 走	I accept my fate, I cannot go
wǒ rèn mìng le, wǒ bù néng zǒu 我 认 命 了, 我 不 能 走	I accept my fate, I cannot go

The text depicts that how much Yilan loves Mengshan, and despite their immortal love, the melody is the most lyrical and touching. It also shows how strong and determined Yilan is to not run away from the marriage.

In measure 95, the first high note of G-flat5 appears, which Lu Pei composed with the vowel [u] as well. The text “wǒ bù néng zǒu” means “I cannot go.” The “bù” means no, so to sing that particular note on a downbeat feels more natural, while it also helps emphasize the feeling of unshaken decision in this dilemma. In the last word “zou” in the phrase, the voiced consonant [z] is pronounced the same as in English, so the tongue position stretches forward and up. The music also reaches to a climax at this point.

Figure 36. It is Good to See You're Coming, Music Climax, mm. 91-96.

In the climax of the second part of **B**, both music and texts display the generosity and nobility of Yilan. She would rather sacrifice herself for the sake of peace between the two villages. The syllabic melody is composed in eighth and sixteenth notes that represent the excited and passionate expression of the character. The highest notes (A-flat5) occur on the text “sè shān” with the “schwa” [ə] and bright [a] vowels. Lu wrote three E-flat5 before the jump of perfect fourth to the A-flat5, and these repeated notes help establish a solid foundation before singing the high notes. The text “five-colored mountain,” a metaphor paints the grand Guangxi landscape of “mountains and rivers,” and highlights the rich and colorful life of Zhuang.

Figure 37. It is Good to See You're Coming, High Notes Occurs in the Aria, mm. 99-100.



In Figure 38, Lu Pei used the E-flat5 to start each phrase where “nǐ” means “you,” emphasizing the importance of Mengshan in Yilan’s heart. For singers, the same onset note appearing in the different phrases is definitely a great way to find the right singing position. It also leaves more freedom of interpretation. For the audience, singing “you” three times makes a stronger impression, especially of the sad emotions in the lyrics. The very dramatic texts are the hope and love of Yilan, which contrast the bitter experience of sadness and fears at the end of the opera.

The text from mm. 104-108, shown below:

nǐ hē le wǒ de jiǔ

你喝了我的酒

nǐ cáng hǎo wǒ de xiù qiú

你藏好我的绣球

nǐ jì zhù wǒ de gē

你记住我的歌

You drank my wine

You hide my embroidered ball

You remember my song

Figure 38. It is Good to See You're Coming, Emotional Texts, mm. 104-108.

The image shows a musical score for a vocal and piano piece. The vocal line is for a soprano (Sop.) and is written in a treble clef. The piano accompaniment (Pno.) is written in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The score includes Chinese lyrics and their English translations. The tempo is marked 'Rit.' (Ritardando) and the dynamics include 'ff' (fortissimo). The key signature is one flat (F major) and the time signature is 4/4. The score is for measures 104-108.

The thematic melody comes back in the A' section, in the same home key of F major, but with a different text. In the score, Lu marks *p* in this phrase, but it might be better to sing *mezzo forte*, not *piano* this time, since the same melody will repeat after eight bars.

At the end of the A' in Figure 39, Yilan sings “Dear Mengshan, my dear Mengshan,” the text obviously showing that Mengshan is always in Yilan’s mind and heart. The vocal line also shows a strong influence of Chinese music style with use of the pentatonic scale.

Figure 39. It is Good to See You're Coming, Pentatonic Scale, mm. 122-127.

In the coda, the first three phrases in A' have been repeated in G major in here. The dynamic in the voice and orchestra are all written *forte*, and the text for first time mentions name of the opera: *The Third of March*. In Pinyin, it is “sān yuè sān,” where “sān” is the number “three,” and “yuè” means “month.” Since Yilan’s main melody has already been sung several times before, the last time it’s repeated in the coda is the most energetic and passionate to sing, and the music glorifies the greatest love, not only between two people, but also in the whole ethnic group.

In Figure 40, the last two notes of the phrase both have *fermatas* on them, and the last note D5 ends on a dominant chord, sounding like an unfinished cadence. It’s as if the music has more hopes and more imagination. The word “chuán” means “pass on” on this last note D5, which ends on the consonant [n] and it is important to sing through the final consonants for interpretation. Therefore, adding the shadow vowel following the [n] of the word “chuán” until the music fade away is a great way highlight this word. The lyric music enhanced the tragic elements, the deep feeling and high spirit emotion of Yilan’s story through the whole opera.

Figure 40. It is Good to See You're Coming, Shadow Vowel Technique, mm. 151-156.

The image shows a musical score for Soprano (Sop.) and Piano (Pno.) for measures 151-156. The Soprano part is in the upper staff, and the Piano part is in the lower staff. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C). The tempo is marked "Moderato" with a quarter note equal to a common time signature (♩ = C). The Soprano part starts at measure 151 with the lyrics "dài dài chuán" (代 代 传) and features a long, sustained vowel sound. The Piano part features a complex, rhythmic accompaniment with various dynamics including *f* and *ff*. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

依 兰
Sop.

151 dài dài chuán
代 代 传

Moderato (♩ = C)

Pno.

151 Moderato (♩ = C)

f *ff*

CONCLUSION

Globalization is helping people around the world be more closely connected, and while the Internet has been the greatest contributor to this, different art forms can speak for their unique languages. Music conveys our feelings, emotions, expression and aesthetic perception, and it changed and evolved significantly throughout centuries and in different places around the world.

Lu Pei's opera, *The Third of March*, has a voice of its own, a voice representing current Chinese music in the 21st century. It showcases a unique folk song culture together with Western operatic artistry. It not only incorporates Zhuang folksong music, *Guilin yugu*, and pop music from the East, but also adopts the priceless Western operatic form. The abundant characters of music unfold using orchestration, recitatives, solo arias, antiphony and chorus. Apart from the music, the choreography played a large role as well. The traditional cultural symbols such as embroidered balls, *Qiang Hua Pao*, the Guangxi traditional instrument *tianqin*, and Chinese landscape painting throughout the whole opera revitalizes passion for this country and its people.

The amount of Asian music being heard by the Westerners is increasing with the significant cultural exchanges of students going abroad. This document's purpose has been to introduce more people to Chinese music, Chinese language, and to inspire them to sing Chinese opera.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR LU PEI, COMPOSER OF *THE THIRD OF MARCH*

Interview length: 55 minutes
Interview date: 07/08/2018
Interview place: Shanghai
Translation by Banlingyu Ban

Ban: Professor Lu, what is the main creative background of this opera?

Lu: March Third is a traditional festival of the Zhuang ethnic groups in Guangxi. It is also a traditional sing festival in the Song Fair culture of this region. This opera is a Zhuang version of *Romeo and Juliet*. The time was about the middle of 20th century, it tells the love story of a young man and woman of the Zhuang ethnic group in the 1950s. People in two villages (Tonggu Village and Nalian Village) were fighting for water resources. The father of the girl (Yilan) in Nalian Village was killed by the people in Tonggu Village in the past. Yilan's brother is a fighter with a bad temper. Yilan fell in love with the male singer, Mengshan of Tonggu Village. Yilan's brother disapproved of their love, because of the hatred history in the two villages, and it turned out to be a tragedy, this is one of the story lines.

Another story line is in modern time at the beginning of the 21st century. A woman (Caiyun) in Tonggu Village went to the Shanghai Conservatory of Music in the 1980s, then went abroad to study and settled abroad with a daughter and a son. Her son's name is Josh. He is going to college and is fascinated by rock and roll music. Caiyun doesn't like it, and feels that it delays his studies and wastes his time. Caiyun decides to take Josh back to China and return to Guangxi to see the good music there, so he can learn that folk music is much better than the buzzing Western music.

Ban: This opera has two story lines running through two different time periods. This is a very interesting idea, the way similar to in movies. So how did the opera director stage the premiere? What are your main creative techniques?

Lu: The two storylines in the opera run parallel, which requires a considerable amount of work for the director and technical staff. Because of the time constraints of the show and other considerations, the director deleted the modern story line (about 40 minutes of music) at the premiere in order to highlight the stories of the old times, and the music with national characteristics. In the modern story line, I added a lot of Western composition techniques, rich orchestral textures and harmony. Moreover, there are two intentions of this modern story line. One is to get out of the tradition of always writing the stories of ancient times, and add more real things that happen in modern cities. . .

However, due to concerns with national policy, sometimes the librettists are afraid to innovate because of fear of script errors. But *The Third of March* is about Guangxi's culture, it has no political background. Moreover, young people like modern music, jazz, rock, and modern stories. The second main purpose of my opera is to make more young people like it and appreciate contemporary Chinese opera.

The main feature of the opera is combination of Guangxi folk song tunes, culture and Western opera technique, while incorporating the characteristics of Zhuang music, Guangxi Gui opera, Guilin fishing drum, pop music (rock), and European and American classic opera form. In the modern story line, as soon as the soprano Caiyun came in, I wrote a large section of pop music, and the entire orchestra was a pop-style accompaniment.

My creative compositional writing style is not focus on one way, it has components of humor, modern atonal techniques, avant-garde style, and the style also changes by my mood and emotion. I like the reviews given to me by the *Washington Post*, which stated, "Lu Pei's music is an extremely smart, colorful and kinetic piece that

builds on traditional Chinese music without ever descending into sentimentality.” At the same time, even if the style of one work is very popular, then I may change to another style of composition to create the next work.

Ban: It's really a pity that the complete music was not presented after you put so much efforts and time into the opera. I remember singing your quartet vocal work during my college time. Also, I still remember it because the folk melody was very beautiful. What about the melodic line of this opera? When was the premiere?

Lu: For an opera, I don't want it to look like a traditional Italian opera. I hope that this opera *The Third of March*, will be positioned from the beginning to be beautiful in sound and in appearance. Beautiful sound means good melody, now it has been accomplished, this opera was premiered at the Nanning Theater in Guangxi on May 6, 2018. The audiences and professional musicians are all expressed their love to this work.

What is beautiful in appearance? Beautiful in appearance means that there are many characteristic dances, sets, and lighting arrangements of the Guangxi Zhuang people. The rehearsal techniques also incorporated many musical elements. To put it simply, it is to hear music and hear opera, the true meaning of opera is to carry drama with music.

(At this time, the composer gave me a DVD recorded made during the opera's premiere, and said that he hopes in the future, when the opera is performed in Shanghai, the audience can fully enjoy the music and production of the entire opera.)

Ban: I heard that there are many new operas in China recently. However, I haven't had the opportunity to listen and watch these works since I have been studying in the

United States for the past few years. How enthusiastic are modern audiences are for the new Chinese opera?

Lu: The development of opera in China in recent decades has greatly improved the overall appreciation level. But there are still major problems. Many local Chinese original operas lack of novelty, the background story is always old-fashioned, and the music is sometimes not accepted by the general public. This is still based on the influence of some political factors.

Regarding the premiere of *The Third of March*, Guangxi Nanning Theater has more than 1,500 seats. There were two performances of *The Third of March* in total. All seats were sold out for both performances. More than 65% of the audience entered the theater for the first time and they have never heard symphonic music, and have no musical background previously. During the opera performance of more than two and a half hours, the seating rate has remained almost the same. No audience left midway, and several audience members said, "I want to watch this opera a few more times, the music is so beautiful." The Dean of the Shanghai Opera House, he is also a composer which said that he has heard 50-60 new operas recently and *The Third of March* is the best modern opera.

Ban: I know your works include symphonies, chamber music, concertos, ballet music, and vocal music. *The Third of March* is your first opera. What is your original intent? How long did it take to create it?

Lu: Writing opera has always been my ultimate goal. It is my dream that tell the story with Guangxi's traditional folk song melody and the characteristics of Zhuang music. Opera is still a new style in China, the music creates the climax of drama. I call

this style a “real” opera. Therefore, in the creation of this opera, I also respected the principle writing of opera by making use of the musical styles of various characters and using the dramatic conflicts of music, as well as the grand symphony to express lifelike personalities. Real operas should have a rich variety of music. In addition to arias, there should also combined the tunes of folk songs, choruses, and orchestra passages. It took about 3 years to create the opera, but I really enjoyed writing it.

(In the next 10 minutes, the composer and I enjoyed a video of the opera's premiere. The first part was the prelude, Lu introduced the music of the opening has two themes: the theme of love and the theme of tragedy. First theme is Guangxi's famous folk song “Stars and Moon in the Sky,” and the second theme of tragedy is “Vine Wrapped Tree” from the Zhuang. In the second half of the prelude, dancers fighting for water were added to express the hate element of the drama. The opera is performed in a flashback technique, beginning with a description of the story's ending, and then turning back to describe the story's process. At the beginning of the opera, it is very interesting to show how the people of Zhuang like to express their feelings through singing. The antiphonal singing is a competition between two villages as well as the most distinctive singing method in the Guangxi folk songs.)

Ban: There are two soprano characters in this opera. Which character do you think is more suitable for me?

Lu: The role of soprano Yilan is very suitable for your voice. The role is a lyric soprano and is about 18 years old, while Caiyun is 50 years old and a coloratura soprano. Yilan's role can be performed in the traditional Bel Canto singing style, or in the traditional Chinese folksong singing style. In the opera, I also added a clown character

called A Chong, who uses Gui local language to perform, which is one of the features of the Zhuang music, *Guilin yu gu*. The purpose is to make the opera humorous, witty, and not too plain.

(Due to time constraint, the composer let me hear the soprano Yilan's aria “It is Good to See You’re Coming,” in the act IV of the opera. The melody is beautiful, and the music combines the most important "love" and "tragedy" themes of the opera. Lu also said that folk music in a few places is indeed world music. *The Third of March* uses a variety of creative techniques in order to make the audience appreciate what Chinese opera it is.)

(On the same day, Lu also presented me with a vocal score that created in 2015 for soprano and orchestra: “Hey, You Can See, the Banner of Peace.” The work was originated from World War II's epic theme. After interviewing with Lu, I still kept contact with him online for any questions about this opera topic dissertation. In June 2018, I got the opera's piano score and the opera script from the composer. Lu also sent me several reviews about the premiere of the opera *The Third of March*. These first-hand materials are of great help for my thesis writing.)

Lu: It has been my longtime dream to write an opera. To this end I have studied opera and prepared for twenty years. Now the creation of *The Third of March* has finally made my dream come true.

Figure 41. Composer granted author the score of Soprano and Orchestra: “Hey, You Can See, the Banner of Peace.”⁷⁴



⁷⁴ Interview photo with Lu Pei, Shanghai, July 8, 2018.

APPENDIX B
COMMENTARY FROM CHINESE EXPERTS AND CRITICS ON
THE THIRD OF MARCH

Fu Xianzhou (Reviewer) I was overjoyed after watching the opera last night. The quality of the opera is very high standard. Whether it is music, staging, singing or dancing, are all very great and meet the requirements of opera. The dance movements in the opera are handled cleanly and the level of orchestral performance is very good. Lu Pei's music is both modern and down to the earth, the music is beautiful and emotional, include the arias, recitatives, and chorus. In terms of the librettist and stage director, this drama is in line with the principles of an opera creation, as well as the expression of the characters, and the dance movements reflect the Zhuang personalities. Generally speaking, this opera has a lot of creations, not only successful in the original drama but the music and the performers.

Ming Yan (Reviewer): Romeo and Juliet's love is an eternal theme both in China and Western world. This drama is adapted in the Zhuang ethnic style, which is a bright idea. The modern interpretation of the traditional theme and nationalization is worthy of recognition. In terms of music, needless to say, Lu Pei made a national presentation in a universal language. Guangxi, is the hometown of “songs and dances,” and it has plenty of folk songs. The amount of folk song materials are the advantage for Lu Pei, but it is also a restrict factor for the most difficult music to surpass because the existing music materials are already so good.

After listening to *The Third of March*, I feel that Lu Pei is indeed a very mature composer. He has made up the folk song original materials and then recreated them to his own unique compositional style. The opera must be based on the drama of singing, and it cannot simply come from a specific folk song form. I think Lu Pei did a great way to

create the nationalize music. At the same time, Lu also has a broader view in vision and composition technique. What impressed me the most was the prelude, in just a few minutes, he covered the entire play with high-quality materials. The “anger” of the chorus, and “hate” movement from the dancers, and the orchestra played the “love” and “tragedy” themes are both impressed me.

Lu Huang (Professor in the Department of Composition, Shanghai Conservatory of Music): I think this opera can score 90 points. Lu Pei dealt with the technique issues very well, from the use of the music theme, folk song materials, and so on. There is a section of Yilan’s aria that I am very impressed with and still can feel that melody now. Even though it is not presents the original folk song, but it feels like a real folk song to me. I think Lu Pei handles it very well.

Li Ruixiang (Director and Composer of the Shanghai Opera House): (Li Ruixiang departure from Guangzhou to Nanning, Guangxi on May 5th to see the opera. He could only watched the rehearsal of the opera, and left for Shandong the next morning. Li was so excited after watching it that he said he has to speak at the discussion seminar after the premiere of the opera. This review was written during the trip to Shandong and was read out at the discussion seminar after the premiere.)

Impressions after Listening to the Opera *The Third of March*, 2018.5.7.

I watched the rehearsal of the opera *The Third of March* on the night of May 5th without prior knowledge of any details of the drama. Here I will discuss my impressions based on the memories for reference.

1. The aspects of successful music composition: this is an opera that demonstrates exceptional skills. When the prelude came out, you are swept away by the rough and spinning “strong man” dance movement style, you are not allowed to observe it leisurely. You will be immersed immediately in this exciting moment! After the prelude, we can basically judge the success of this work already, because it shows the distinct the Zhuang personality, the power of the drama, and the rigorous thinking of the opera. The opera’s prelude often contains the elements such as the drama themes, the character’s personalities, and the style of the music. This is the case in the prelude of *The Third of March*.

The *Adagio* theme that emerged after the *Allegro* theme, and leads us to the quiet and sadness night of the Zhuang. These two confrontational themes of music profoundly show the theme of the drama: the hatred and love. Throughout the entire music, Lu has an overall musical idea and can effectively control it, especially in the orchestral writing. The orchestra is in a leading position of this opera, it is by no means a pure vocal accompaniment, but more about the creation of an event environment, the externalization of logical conflicts, the rendering of emotional expressions, and spectator thinking. The orchestra greatly enriches the musical development of the opera. This is extremely rare in the ordinary Chinese opera, especially in the theme of minority ethnic operas. This is a very welcome improvement.

The opera uses the conventional orchestra, it does not have the traditional Chinese instruments in it, but still sounds a distinct and charm voice of the national music. The main skill is the soul of the music style exists in the melody, rhythm and harmony, if you grasp these compositional techniques accurately, the style is naturally bright. Just like the

creation of the symphonic, the composers use the standard orchestra to compose, but we can hear the different music styles of German, French, Russian, and American. *The Third of March* gives us its own musical expression, the music of the national opera can also be written in this special way. Any dogmatic setting of a national opera is not help to the development of the modern times.

2. The opera has naturally the writing style of recitative. It is closely related to the rhythm, intervals, and the tones of the Chinese pronunciation, so the recitative can be both understood and also make the music beautiful. It is precisely because of this that the transitions between recitatives and arias seem to be smooth, making the vocal music have a great unification. In the music character, “A Chong” is a clown role: he combined the Gui dialect and the Zhuang music style, make the narrating and singing together, and created the most outstanding comedy role.

3. Multi-functional chorus: the chorus explores a variety of performance possibilities, both lyrical and narrative, as well as singing and dancing styles, and philosophical thinking. The function of the chorus in this opera is not only the voice of the masses, but also almost “the second orchestra,” which can freely express the composer's thoughts and emotions, as well as build a music atmosphere to express the drama together with the orchestra.

I have watched a lot of Chinese original operas in recent years, especially during this year’s “The Third Chinese Opera Festival” held in Nanjing and “China’s Outstanding National Operas” held in Beijing, and participated in many seminars. I think, the music creation of *The Third of March* was one of the best. The reason for its success is closely associated with the composer's art and life.

From the perspective of the composer's development, *The Third of March* is a creation that is very unique to Lu Pei's artistic style. His studying experience also gives the style and success of this opera because Lu Pei grew up in Guangxi. The artistic environment he absorbed here in the early years -- the rich Zhuang singing and dancing -- with the compositional skills he obtained in Shanghai Conservatory of Music and study abroad in the United States. It is impossible to create the music style like the opera *The Third of March* with its huge success but without such an expansive life experiences!⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Lu Pei, Email message and translated by author, January 20, 2020.

APPENDIX C
AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Banlingyu Ban (Ban Ban)
Soprano

Banlingyu Ban will receive her Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Voice Performance from Arizona State University in May 2020, where she studied with Professor Carole FitzPatrick. She graduated with a Professional Studies Diploma from the Mannes School of Music and holds B.M and M.M degrees from the Shanghai Conservatory of Music.

Born in Shandong, the Chinese soprano made her American debut at Carnegie Hall in 2015 followed by a series of concerts at the Lincoln Center, Alice Tully Hall, National Opera Center, Carnegie Hall, the United Nations, and Gammage Auditorium in Arizona. The *New York Times* wrote: “conveys the inner resilience of this tragic heroine through the bright tones and strong delivery of the vocal lines,” and was “enjoyably audible with a nice pearly quality” (*Opera News*).

Ms. Ban’s opera roles include “Rosalinde” in *Die Fledermaus* with the Martina Arroyo Foundation, the title role in *Suor Angelica*, and “Romilda” in *Xerxes* with ASU Music Theatre and Opera, “Cio-Cio-San” in *Madama Butterfly* with Heartbeat Opera, “Mimi” in *La Bohème* with Shanghai Summer Music Festival, and “Monica” in *The Medium* with the Chicago Summer Opera. She also performed “Giannetta” in *L’elisir D’amore* with The Mannes Opera and sang “Lauretta” and “Nella” in *Gianni Schicchi* with Burletta Opera Festival in Shanghai Lyceum Theatre. She has also been a soloist in Mozart’s *Coronation Mass*, *Lord Nelson Mass* by Haydn, and was a featured soloist in Mendelssohn’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

In competitions, Ms. Ban was the winner of Dorothy Lincoln-Smith Classical Voice Competition, the Forte International Music Competition and the New York Lyric Opera Competition; a finalist in the Lois Alba Aria Competition 2018; third place and Best Puccini Awards of the Tuscia International Opera Competition in Italy; and the Excellence Award from the Asia International Vocal Festival in Hong Kong.