

“When East Meets West,”

Chen Yi’s *From Old Peking Folklore*:

The Merging of Chinese and Western Musical Idioms

by

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## ABSTRACT

This project serves as a performance guide for Chen Yi's work *From Old Peking Folklore* for violin and piano. The primary source material for the document is derived from six hours of interviews and musical coaching that the writer undertook in March 2020 with Chen Yi at her residence in Missouri. The work is heavily influenced by Chinese Opera, and a brief examination of the history of Chinese Opera is included to provide context to the performer. Elements of performance practice on traditional Chinese instruments and their influence on the work are also explored, with detailed explanations given for the realization of numerous indications in the score from the composer. Finally, a link to a lecture recital and performance of the work is provided by the writer.

Dedicated to my mentor Dr. Katherine McLin and to my parents.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Chen Yi, a highly-respected Chinese-American composer, has composed many works for strings, among them *Fisherman Song* (1980), *Romance of Hsiao and Ch'in* (1997), *Romance and Dance* (1999), *Ning* (2001), and *Tunes from My Home* (2007). *From Old Peking Folklore*, a work for violin and piano written in 2009, has never been recorded as of this writing. Although it is rarely played, *From Old Peking Folklore* is an excellent representation of her unique compositional style which includes a fusion of eastern and western aesthetics.

This document, along with the accompanying lecture recital (<https://youtu.be/jAjbcT1M2AE>), provides violinists with valuable information about the context and performance practice of the work. Approximately six hours of coachings and interviews with Chen Yi give insight into her life, compositional philosophies, and information specific to *From Old Peking Folklore*, and is shared in this performance guide.

Reflecting her cross-cultural background, Chen Yi's distinctive style may be heard in numerous ways in *From Old Peking Folklore*. She uses different role types such as *Qingyi*, *Hua Dan* and *Older Dan* from Beijing Opera and the Chinese *Jingyun Dagu* style with Western techniques, and imitated traditional Chinese string instruments sounds.

## CHAPTER TWO

### CHEN YI: A CROSS-CULTURAL PHENOMENON IN MUSIC

Chen Yi was born in Guangzhou in 1953 and ultimately became a member of the post-revolution generation of Chinese composers. Her parents were both classical music enthusiasts who helped construct her musical background by encouraging and training her as a violinist and pianist. Chen Yi's parents collected classical music recordings and played them every day during and after dinner, which left a deep impression in her heart. She treasures one incident from her childhood, when she ate dinner with her parents and listening to Heifetz and Kreisler perform their own compositions. Her father told her it would be wonderful if one day she could play her own pieces like them. Later, she studied music theory and folk songs with Zheng Zhong, who became an important mentor in her life. He had a significant impact on her theory and folk music studies. She remembers he told her that, since "she was born with black hair and black eyes, she could understand Chinese culture better and should carry on the culture and share it with more people".<sup>1</sup> Chen Yi said that this moment was a turning point. She started to do as he suggested as a composer, and she continues that work to the present day.

In 1966, the Cultural Revolution struck China and many people suffered seizure of property, imprisonment, torture, and general humiliation. Chen Yi continued to practice both violin and piano with a mute so as not to attract attention, until the Red Guard broke into her house.<sup>2</sup> As a result of Chen Yi's family being well-educated and connected with Western intellectuals, her family was not only targeted, but separated,

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<sup>1</sup> John de Clef Piñeiro, "An Interview with Chen Yi," *New Music Connoisseur*, Vol.9, No.3 (Fall 2001): 27-31.

<sup>2</sup> Chen Yi, "Tradition and Creation," *Current Musicology*, 67-68 (Composers Issue 1999), 59.

forced into labor, and subjected to public criticism. The Cultural Revolution was a horrible time in her life partially because she was forced to perform daily heavy labor.

Chen Yi recalls that:

In order to help the army to build military battle castles, I had to walk all the way up to the big mountain. I sometimes had to get up at 4 a.m. just to avoid the heat of the sun. There were days when I also had to carry 100 pounds of stone and mud twenty-two times, from the foot of the mountain to the very top.<sup>3</sup>

Although she was forced from music theory and folk songs to perform intense labor, she still loved music, and nothing could stop her from seeing the beauty of nature and smelling the scent of a field. She used her spare time to play violin to poor kids, farmers, and even soldiers. During the Cultural Revolution, only revolutionary songs were allowed to be sung and played, so she made up double stops and fast passages that she learned from Paganini when she played the songs, which continued to nurture her creative mind.<sup>4</sup>

As a result of her vigorous, but secretive violin practice during the Cultural Revolution, Chen remained an advanced violinist after the Cultural Revolution ended in 1976. After the Cultural Revolution, educational institutions were restored and Chen Yi was among the first group of composition students to be admitted to the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing. As part of her academic studies, Chen Yi took several field trips to the countryside where she collected folk songs from more than twenty provinces and fifty ethnic groups<sup>5</sup>, which enabled her to further investigate her musical

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<sup>3</sup> John de Clef Piñeiro, "An Interview with Chen Yi," *New Music Connoisseur*, Vol.9, No.3 (Fall 2001): 27.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Chen Yi, Liner notes for *Sound of The Five*, New World Records 80691, 2008.

roots. Chen Yi “learned from the common people” whom she claims “have carried on the rich Chinese culture” for millennia. She further expressed her view of Chinese folk music continues:

Folk songs are a mirror of people’s daily lives, their thoughts, and sentiments, local customs and manners. They are sung in regional dialects and use the idioms of everyday speech with their particular intonations, accents and cadences This correlation between speech and music distinguishes folk songs of one region from another.<sup>6</sup>

In the early 1980’s, Chen Yi started to explore twentieth-century compositional styles and techniques. During her studies at the Central Conservatory, she received recognition and won several prizes for her works, such as solo concertos, chamber ensemble works, and orchestral works.<sup>7</sup> Chen Yi ultimately graduated from the Central Conservatory of Music in 1986 as the first female composer in China to receive a master’s degree in composition<sup>8</sup> and was admitted to the DMA degree in composition at Columbia University in the United States.

The doctoral study Chen Yi undertook afforded her not only a rigorous study of Western music practices but also brought her clearer understanding music about herself and the many influences that shaped her own compositions. She studied with Chou Wen-Chung, professor and department chair of the music division at the School of the Arts at Columbia University in New York City and Mario Davidovsky during her doctoral years. Marilyn Bliss has observed, “If we know one thing about Chen Yi from listening to her music, it is that she must be a dynamo. Energy pulses through her music like a direct

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<sup>6</sup> Yueh-yin Liao, “Three Piano Chamber Music Works of Chen Yi: ‘Night Thoughts,’ ‘Romance and Dance’ and ‘Tibetan Tunes’: An Aesthetic and Structural Analysis, with Suggestions for Performance.” (D.M.A. diss., University of Miami, 2014), 53.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>8</sup> Chen Yi, “Tradition and Creation,” *Current Musicology* no. 67/68 (Fall-Winter 1999): 59-72.

current of electricity.”<sup>9</sup> In 1993, Chen Yi received the Doctoral of Musical Arts degree with distinction from Columbia University. The same year, she was appointed, through the *Meet the Composer New Residences* program, to a three-year term as Composer-in-Residence for the Women’s Philharmonic, Chanticleer, and the Aptos Creative Arts program in San Francisco. The success of Chen Yi’s practice in cross-cultural musical fusion garnered her widespread critical acclaim. Her works are considered innovative in regard to their intention, practice, technical innovation, and stylistic evolution in addition to bring together Western and Eastern music practices.

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<sup>9</sup> Marilyn Bliss, Program notes to *Chen Yi: Invisible Curve*. (New World Records, NWR 80683, 2008).



## CHAPTER THREE

### CHINESE CHARM: BRIEF BACKGROUND OF CHINESE FOLK MUSIC

Chen Yi often turns to the tone, timbre, musical characteristics, and musical style of traditional Chinese music. She also celebrates the sounds of three main types of instruments in Chinese folk music: percussion such as the gong and drums; woodwinds, such as the flute and *dizi*; and strings, such as the *qin* and *sihu*.<sup>10</sup>

Beijing opera, once referred to as *zaju* and also now called Peking Opera, originated during the Song dynasty (A.D. 960-1279) when the opera's plot took priority over music and dance. Beginning in the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368), an emphasis on singing, narration, fighting, and action emerged. The styles of both Southern and Northern Opera were also established at this time. Northern Opera music was dominated by the heptatonic scale and was grand and rich in scope, whereas, Southern Opera was dominated by the pentatonic scale and more tender and elegant expression. Romance Opera is a form of short story in the classical language that emerged during the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368-1644). Romance Opera combines both Southern and Northern folk tunes and was predominantly accompanied by percussion instruments such as the gong. Romance Opera typically contained around twelve characters with a mix of *sheng* (male roles), *dan* (female roles), *jing* (painted roles), and *chou* (clowns).<sup>11</sup> Roles in early Beijing Opera, also known as Peking Opera, had seven categories, *Sheng*, *Dan*, *Jing*, *Mo*, *Chou*, *Wuhang*, and *Longtao*, which were determined by the opera's characters.<sup>12</sup> Similar

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<sup>10</sup> Ningning Wang, "Dance in Beijing Opera," in *A History of Ancient Chinese Music and Dance*, (Salt Lake City: American Academic Press, 2019), 132.

<sup>11</sup> Wang, "Dance in Beijing Opera," 475.

<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth Wichmann, *Listening to Theatre: The Aural Dimension of Beijing Opera* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991), 5.

to Romance Opera in the Ming dynasty, Beijing Opera had four major role categories; *Sheng*, *Dan*, *Jing*, and *Chou*. Each character indicated a particular age, gender, and level of dignity.<sup>13</sup> The audience inferred a character's role by their makeup, headdress, and other visually and costume conventions.<sup>14</sup>

During the mid-Qing dynasty, operas began to focus on local singing, which featured lively performances and include easier-to-understand lyrics and scenes. In 1779, the 44<sup>th</sup> year of Emperor Qianlong's reign, Wei Changsheng (1844-1902), famous for the *Qinqiang Dan* role, brought a refreshingly updated stage performance to Beijing audiences in which all the old rules are banned.<sup>15</sup> Also, in celebration of Emperor Qianlong's eightieth birthday, local styles of opera from Anhui, Hubei Province were performed in Beijing. During this period, the Beijing Opera stage was filled with many different operatic styles, known as *luantan* in traditional Chinese. As a result, operas written in Beijing around the mid-nineteenth century contained numerous operatic styles.

#### *JINGYUN DAGU*

From the Ming and Qing periods to the Republic of China period, many new cities were built. In order to create their own unique narratives, two types of singing emerged from these new communities. The first was folk narrative singing, which used local traditions, such as *lianhuailuo* (蓮花落), and *fengyanghuagu* (鳳陽花鼓). The other type of narrative singing included older art forms combined with local and dialectical features such as the *cihua* (詞話) in the Yuan (1271-1368) and Ming (1368-1644)

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Wang, "Dance in Beijing Opera," 473.

dynasties, and ultimately the *tanci* (彈詞) in the south and *guci* (古詞) in the north. Most of the aforementioned *quyi* (曲藝) varieties found in China today are varieties that originate from the Qing dynasty (1636-1912).

After the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, more than 400 *quyi* types were actively practiced throughout China. The *quyi* types of the Han Chinese can be roughly classified into two categories, narration and singing, and include five types, *pingshu* (評書), *xiangsheng* (相聲), *kuaiban* (快板), *guqu* (古曲), and *zouchang* (奏唱). Narration uses *xiangsheng* and *pingshu*, while singing uses *Guqu*, such as *Jingyun Dagu*, *Danxian Paiziqu*, *Jiaodong Dagu* (found below in Figure 1), or *Hubei Dagu*; similar to narrating and singing are *Shandong kuaishu*.

**Figure 1.** Pingshu<sup>16</sup>



<sup>16</sup> “Most Influenced Pingshu Artists in China,” Feichang Lishi, Accessed July 7, 2020, [https://m.sohu.com/a/280732616\\_166075/?pvid=000115](https://m.sohu.com/a/280732616_166075/?pvid=000115).

In the world of *quyi*, the phrase ‘the plucking of the south, the drumming of the north’ is well known.<sup>17</sup> Here, the words “plucking” and “drumming” refer to the two most refined genres, *tanci* (彈詞) and *dagu* (大鼓) of southern and northern China, respectively.

*Suzhou pingtan*, began in the city of Suzhou and has been popular in the Jiangnan region since the early twentieth century. In northern China, *Jingyun Dagu* plays a dominant role, while in southern China *pintan*, found in Figure 2, is dominant.

**Figure 2.** *Suzhou Pingtan* is melodious and euphonious.<sup>18</sup>



*Jingyun Dagu*, literally meaning “musical narrative” in the Beijing dialect, is accompanied by a drum and clapper, and is commonly known in the West as a Peking drum song. The singer/narrator accompanies themselves by striking the surface of a

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<sup>18</sup> Jin Jie, *Chinese Music* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 107.

single-headed flat drum, which rests on a tripod, with a long, thin stick held in the right hand, and a pair of clappers held in the left hand (Figure 3). The clapper and stick often provide intricate and syncopated rhythmic patterns.

**Figure 3.** *Jingyun* drum song.<sup>19</sup>



Two string players, often playing the *Erhu* and *San Xian*, provide largely heterophonic accompaniment to a vocal phrase which is primarily based on a heptatonic scale with disjunct motion and unpredictable atonal and rhythmic shifts. *Jingyun Dagou*, a kind of drumbeat performance, emphasizes singing through its concentration on depicting short

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 105.

episodes. In terms of schools, *Jingyun Dagū* contains three major genres, *Liu*, *Bai*, and *Zhang*, named after its three major exponents. *Liu* refers to Liu Baoquan (Figure 4), king of “*Jingyun Dagū*,” who innovated in 1900 by using Mandarin as the major dialect instead of the Hebei dialect. Additionally, he was the first to begin using the *sihu*, a four-stringed instrument, and the *pipa*, a lute, as accompaniment in conjunction with the three-stringed lutes and wooden clappers traditionally used. Later with the help of famous artists Bai Yunpeng and Zhang Xiaoquan, *Jingyun Dagū* gradually became more popular in Northern China as one of the most influential forms of *guqu*. Liu Baoquan was famous for singing the “*Three Kingdom*” stories, and Bai was a master of singing “*A Dream of Red Mansions*” stories.<sup>20</sup>

**Figure 4.** King of *Jingyun Dagū* Liu Baoquan.<sup>21</sup>



The rhythmic and vocal vitality of *Jingyun Dagū* was particularly suitable for the portrayal of battles. The narratives were derived largely from historical epics such as *Saga of the Three Kingdoms*, which takes place shortly after the Han dynasty and tells of

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 104.

<sup>21</sup> “Chinese Opera Master Mei Lanfang and King of Jingyun Dagū Liu Baoquan,” Chinese Drama Publication, Accessed July 7, 2020, [https://m.sohu.com/a/131370953\\_669504/?pvid=000115](https://m.sohu.com/a/131370953_669504/?pvid=000115).

the fight for control of China by the three kingdoms *Wei*, *Shu*, and *Wu*. Tunes of *Jingyun Dagu* have two major forms, *Manban* and *Jiban* and consist of half-speaking and half-singing such that the *yunbai*, or spoken part, is equally important to and mixed with the singing. As one of the influential forms of *Guqu*, the music of *Jingyun Dagu* contains a rich variety of beautiful melodies, distinctive rhythms, and expressivity. Characterized by disjunct motion and melodies which are enhanced by many decorative sounds, the basic pattern of the lyrics in *Jingyun Dagu* is a seven-character sentence, with each song containing approximately 140-150 sentences.<sup>22</sup>

### *DAN*

In Chinese Opera, the typical name for leading female roles is *Dan*. Since this is one of the principle roles in Beijing Opera, *Dan* may be played by either male or female actors; however, in the nineteenth century all *Dan* roles were performed by men.<sup>23</sup> Female roles in Beijing Opera were divided into four subdivisions: older *Dan*, ‘blue cloth’ *Dan* (Qingyi), ‘flower’ *Dan*, and martial *Dan* (a stronger, more forceful character). Older *Dan* characters were significant roles because they represented a higher social status due to the character’s elders status and is always identified by the character using a walking cane, a respectable aspect in Chinese culture. All other *Dan* roles were middle-aged women or younger. For example, the ‘blue cloth’ (*Shuixiu*) role refers to women who are shy or reserved but also have a high social status, recognizable by women wearing “long sleeves” (*Shuixiu*) during a performance. *Shuixiu* (blue cloth) roles were unique and were refined by Cheng Yanqiu, a Chinese opera singer, who was taught by

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> My Beijing China, “Roles in Beijing Opera,” accessed March 22, 2020, <https://www.mybeijingchina.com/travel-guide/beijing-opera/opera-roles.htm>.



Mei Lanfang (1894-1961), the *Dan* role master in China. This particular type of clothing specially emphasized upper limb movement in the arms and shoulders while “running around on the stage” emphasized leg movements. These movements formed a beautiful, elegant dance.<sup>24</sup> Interestingly, the “Flower” *Dan*, who were energetic and upbeat young women characters, represented a fairly low social status. In performance, the “Flower” *Dan* role was usually quite humorous and participated in more dance-acting than the “Blue cloth” role which was supported by speech and occasional song. “Flower” *Dan* roles always wore short blouses with pants or skirts that reflected their lively personalities. In general, the “Flower” *Dan* role was played by girls ages twelve to sixteen.

In contrast, the social status of *Wu Dan* (*Martial Dan*) could be either high or low, with no consistencies in Beijing Opera. Like other *Dan* roles, the *Martial Dan* could also dress like a male even though it was from the female category of Beijing Opera. Additionally, the headdress of *Martial Dan* often included a peasant feature.<sup>25</sup> For instance, the *Martial Dan* could be cast with a high or low social status, yet were generally more distinguished than “Flower” *Dan* and lower than “Blue cloth” *Dan*. This also meant that *Martial Dan* could be equipped with the female version of stage armor that was noticeable by the pheasant feathers on their head ornament.<sup>26</sup> Lastly, the final category of *Dan* was called, the “Flower shirt” (*Huashan*), and was developed in the early twentieth century by performers of the *Dan* role.<sup>27</sup> The *Huashan* role was a combination of the three young

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<sup>24</sup> Ningning Wang, “Dance in Beijing Opera,” in *A History of Ancient Chinese Music and Dance*, (Salt Lake City: American Academic Press, 2019), 487.

<sup>25</sup> Wichmann, *Listening to Theatre*, 9.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*



*Dan* role types and included both the nature and skills of the martial, blue cloth, and flower *Dan* roles, allowing the performer (*Huashan*) to display all four skills: song, speech, dance-acting, and combat. The most famous actors who performed *Dan* roles in China are Mei Lanfang (1894-1961), Cheng Yanqiu (1904-1958), Shang Xiaoyun (1900-1976) and Xu Huisheng (1900-1968).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CHEN YI'S *FROM OLD PEKING FOLKLORE*: A PERFORMANCE GUIDE

Chen Yi's work *From Old Peking Folklore* draws from the Chinese singing music tradition and specifically Beijing Opera. The music style of this work is *Jingyun Dagu*,<sup>28</sup> which is evident in the piano introduction that imitates the "plucking" accompaniment of the drums and gong, while the violin performs the main melodious singing part. According to Chen Yi, female characters in *From Old Peking Folklore* act as the *Dan* role in Beijing Opera.<sup>29</sup> The two *Dan* roles implied in this piece are the Qingyi (青衣) and "Flower" *Dan* (花旦) roles.<sup>30</sup> The Qingyi role, or blue cloth, is that of a virtuous lady who is mature, dignified, and serious. The blue cloth role is the most prominent female role in traditional Chinese drama.

The primary melody of *From Old Peking Folklore* occurs five times in the violin part. Between each statement Chen Yi inserted sections which mimic the singer accompanying themselves by striking a drum. Each occurrence indicates not only the beginning of a musical section, but also refers to different Beijing opera characters through the varying registers.

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<sup>28</sup> Chen Yi, Email Interview with the composer by Pan Du, January 24, 2020.

<sup>29</sup> Chen Yi, Personal Interview with the composer by Pan Du, March 6, 2020.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

**Example 1.** *From Old Peking Folklore*, violin part, mm. 11-20.<sup>31</sup>

Example 1 shows the first time that the violin states the primary melody, and according to Chen Yi, refers to the characteristics of “*Flower*” *Dan*, a lively and nifty character in Beijing opera.<sup>32</sup>

**Example 1A.** *From Old Peking Folklore*, violin part, mm. 21-35.<sup>33</sup>

Example 1A shows the second time the primary melody appears, this time appearing in the *Qingyi* (blue cloth) character of Beijing opera. *Qingyi* (blue cloth) represents a young

<sup>31</sup> Chen Yi, *From Old Peking Folklore* (PA: Theodore Presser Company, 2009), 1.

<sup>32</sup> Chen Yi, Personal Interview with the composer by Pan Du, March 6, 2020.

<sup>33</sup> Chen Yi, *From Old Peking Folklore* (PA: Theodore Presser Company, 2009), 1.

woman who is beautiful, of high social status, and intrinsically dignified.<sup>34</sup> Based on these specified characteristics, Chen Yi writes the melody in a higher tessitura and includes both slides and harmonics which, as a result, require more technical ability from the violinist.

Finally, Chen Yi writes the primary melody using the *Lao Dan* Beijing Opera character. *Lao*, literally meaning ‘old’ in English, refers to an older female character in Beijing Opera. This time, Chen Yi writes the melody in D major, which adds depth to the character and shows compositional variety.

**Example 1B.** *From Old Peking Folklore*, violin part, mm. 105-119.<sup>35</sup>

The image shows a musical score for violin, consisting of three staves. The first staff starts at measure 105 and ends at measure 110. It features a series of chords and triplets, with dynamics ranging from *mp* to *f*. A box labeled 'J' is placed above the staff at measure 108. The second staff starts at measure 111 and ends at measure 115. It contains a melodic line with a sixteenth-note triplet, a slur, and a dynamic of *f*. The third staff starts at measure 116 and ends at measure 119. It continues the melodic line with a sixteenth-note triplet, a slur, and a dynamic of *mf*. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, triplets, and dynamics.

Although published in 2009, *From Old Peking Folklore* and Chen Yi’s other pieces are rarely performed by violinists. The author met with Chen Yi on March 6, 2020 and found that this was the first time Chen Yi had heard someone perform *From Old Peking Folklore* live. Chen Yi composed another piece, *Chinese Rap* for violin and

<sup>34</sup> Wang “Dance in Beijing Opera,” 487.

<sup>35</sup> Chen Yi, *From Old Peking Folklore* (PA: Theodore Presser Company, 2009), 3.

orchestra, which was commissioned by the Kennesaw State University (KSU) Symphony Orchestra in 2012, and is dedicated to and premiered by Professor Helen Kim in celebration of her tenth anniversary at KSU. This orchestral work is inspired by the melody directly from *From Old Peking Folklore*, and contains the A section of *From Old Peking Folklore* as a cadenza-like violin solo in *Chinese Rap*. According to Chen Yi's program notes, *Chinese Rap* is written in a three-part form whereby the introduction is identical to the A section in *From Old Peking Folklore* (see examples 1C and 1D).

**Example 1C.** *Chinese Rap* for violin and orchestra, mm. 45-59.<sup>36</sup>

**Example 1D.** *From Old Peking Folklore*, mm. 11-20.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Chen Yi, *Chinese Rap* (Bryn Mawr, PA: Theodore Presser Company, 2013), 15.

<sup>37</sup> Chen Yi, *From Old Peking Folklore* (PA: Theodore Presser Company, 2009), 1.

There is a clear similarity between the melodies of *Chinese Rap* and *From Old Peking Folklore* that may be observed in the single, reiterated, ornamented note in the opening measures, and in five subsequent measures they share.

### Technique Interpretations

#### 1. Rhythm

In order to imitate Chinese folk music, Chen Yi uses some conventional rhythms from Peking Opera, *Jingyun Dagu*, and other traditional performance practices. One significant rhythmic pattern is the dotted rhythm which occurs on the first pair of four sixteenth-notes and may be found below in Example 2. Chen Yi stated during a coaching session in Kansas City on March 6, 2020 that all four sixteenth-notes should have the same volume and articulation such that none of them are secondary.<sup>38</sup> For performers, rhythmic emphasis should be given to the first pair of sixteenths without changing their volume relative to the latter pair. In an effort to imitate the *Erhu*, the thirty-second-note should be very short and connected to the following note.

**Example 2.** *From Old Peking Folklore*, violin part, mm.154-158.<sup>39</sup>



<sup>38</sup> Chen Yi, Coaching with the composer by Pan Du, March 6, 2020.

<sup>39</sup> Chen Yi, *From Old Peking Folklore* (PA: Theodore Presser Company, 2009), 4.

## 2. Form

Chen Yi wrote *From Old Peking Folklore* in a five-part rondo form and the B section may be found below in Example 3. The A section is lyrical, similar to the singing style in Peking Opera or folksong, while the B section is percussive, similar to a *Luo* part in China, and places the violin and piano in percussive dialogue. Thus, the juxtaposition of the A and B sections create an obvious character change which helps engage audiences.

**Example 3.** *From Old Peking Folklore*, violin part, mm.31-43.<sup>40</sup>

The image shows a musical score for a violin part, spanning measures 31 to 43. The score is written on a single treble clef staff. It begins at measure 31 with a melodic line marked *mf*. At measure 35, there is a section marked 'C' with a 'V' above it, indicating a change in character. This section is marked *ff* and features a highly rhythmic, percussive texture with many triplets and accents. The score continues through measure 43, maintaining this rhythmic intensity. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 2/4.

The *Luo*, pictured below in Figure 5, literally means ‘gong’ in English and refers to a flat gong whose pitch drops or rises when struck with either a padded mallet or the side of a flat, wooden stick. The pitch of the instrument is determined by the strength and location of the strike on the drum. Chinese drum refers to a nineteenth-century ceremonial hall drum. The Chinese drum has an indefinite pitch and tone, is played with two sticks, is medium in size, has two heads made of animal

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 1.

skin, and is barrel-shaped. Pitch and tone can be controlled by the strength and location of the strike on the drum (see Figure 6).

**Figure 5.** *Luo*.<sup>41</sup>



**Figure 6.** *Tanggu*<sup>42</sup>



Chen Yi imitates the gong and drum sound in *From Old Peking Folklore* by using minor second double stops, found in Example 3, and occasionally even more dissonant intervals inspired by the indefinite gong and drum pitches. The method of

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<sup>41</sup> *Catalogue of the Crosby Brown Collection of Musical Instruments: Asia, Gallery 27. 2.* The Metropolitan Museum of Art. New York, 1903, vol. II, pg. 21.

<sup>42</sup> *Catalogue of the Crosby Brown Collection of Musical Instruments: Asia, Gallery 27. 1.* The Metropolitan Museum of Art. New York, 1903, vol. I, pg. 21.





**Figure 7.** *Dizi* in different sizes and keys.<sup>44</sup>



*Jiahua*, the second technique Chen Yi uses, is again inspired by Beijing Opera and it provides variation of ornamentation and may be found notated below in Example 4B. *Jiahua* literally means ‘adding decoration’ or ‘variation’ in performance and is a way of varying memorized music spontaneously, a practice referred to by scholars as a “semi-improvisatory.”<sup>45</sup> An example of *Jiahua* may be found below in measure 127 of Example 4B.

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<sup>44</sup> “Dizi, Chinese Woodwind Instrument,” accessed October 2020, <https://www.easonmusicsschool.com/chinese-orchestra-instruments/chinese-woodwind-instruments/dizi/>.

<sup>45</sup> Sunzhuo, *The Chinese Zheng Zither: Contemporary transformational* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2015), 141.

**Example 4B.** *From Old Peking Folklore*, violin part, mm.125-133.<sup>46</sup>

The musical score for violin part, measures 125-133, is presented on two staves. The first staff (measures 125-129) begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). It features a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, with dynamic markings of *mp* and *mf*. The second staff (measures 130-133) continues the piece, starting with a *mn* dynamic marking and transitioning to *mf*. The notation includes various articulations and fingerings, such as 'V' and '2' above notes, and '4', '2', '2', '4' above a final group of notes.

The primary sixteenth notes within the first beat in measure 127 are B, C-sharp, and D. If the score were written for traditional Chinese string instruments, such as the *Erhu* or *Banhu*, the score might only mark the primary notes in order to leave room for the performer's improvisation.

Artificial harmonics, the third technique used by Chen Yi may be found in Example 4C, imitate the way the *Dan* role performs with *Shuixiu* (long sleeves) and mimics harmonics played by Chinese string instruments in Beijing Opera.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Chen Yi, *From Old Peking Folklore*, 4.

<sup>47</sup> Guo Xin, "Fusion process in the Instrumental works by Chen Yi," (Ph. D diss., Florida State University, 2002), 189.

**Example 4C.** *From Old Peking Folklore*, violin part, mm.16-30.<sup>48</sup>

The musical score for Example 4C consists of three staves of music. The first staff, measures 16-19, shows artificial harmonics with a 'u' above the notes and a 'mf' dynamic marking. The second staff, measures 20-25, includes a box 'B' with the instruction '(use palm to tap on fingerboard)', a 'mp' dynamic marking, and a crescendo from 'fp' to 'f'. The third staff, measures 26-30, features a 'mf' dynamic marking and a 'f' dynamic marking.

The artificial harmonics in measures 17 through 19 should all be emphasized despite their rather short duration. According to Chen Yi, all artificial harmonic notes should be stressed. In other words, these ornamentations notes are not merely ornaments, but rather important notes that the performer should take care to perform as precisely as possible. The technique is borrowed from *Erhu* playing.

Other types of ornamentation borrowed from *erhu* performance practice are *Huayin* (slides) and *Dahuayin* (glissandi). Although it can be used between any interval, *Huayin*, found in example 5A, is most often used between minor thirds and when changing positions<sup>49</sup>. *Huayin* is performed in one bow between notes located on the same string. *Erhu* players vary the speed of their slides by “lingering longer in either the beginning or end of a slide.”<sup>50</sup> *Dahuayin*, found in measure 113 of Example 5B, slides over larger intervals at a speed which is dependent on expression. The

<sup>48</sup> Chen Yi, *From Old Peking Folklore*, 1.

<sup>49</sup> My Beijing China, “Roles in Beijing Opera,” accessed March 22, 2020, <https://www.mybeijingchina.com/travel-guide/beijing-opera/opera-roles.htm>.

<sup>50</sup> Lan Tung, “Info for Composers,” last modified November 2015, accessed April 2, 2020, <http://www.lantungmusic.com/erhu/for-composers/>.

composer may choose to specify the glissando's starting and ending pitches or leave it to the performer to decide.

**Example 5A.** *Huayin, From Old Peking Folklore*, violin part, mm.65-68.<sup>51</sup>



**Example 5B.** *Dahuayin, From Old Peking Folklore*, violin part, mm.111-115.<sup>52</sup>



Measures sixty-five and sixty-eight of Example 5A are both small leaps of a minor third, while measure 113 in Example 5B is a larger leap of well over an octave. Chen Yi specifies the starting and ending pitches with these dramatic expression markings. Based on what Chen Yi said during the coaching session at UMKC, the progression from the higher, G-harmonic to the lower B is important and should be performed with emphasis. By performing large glissandi with progressions stressed from note to note, the effect will sound more like the *Erhu*.

#### 4. Fingering

Because of her advanced violin skills, Chen Yi wrote *From Old Peking Folklore* with fingering suggestions. For example, the violin entrance at measure eleven, found in Example 6, contains a repeated G for two measures. While this extent of repetition is

<sup>51</sup> Chen Yi, *From Old Peking Folklore*, 2.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

unusual in Western classical music, it is common in Chinese folk music such as Chinese Opera. Note repetition is idiomatic for music written for traditional Chinese string instruments like the *Erhu*, *Jinghu*, and *Banhu* and if Chen Yi were writing for *Erhu* player there would be no grace notes, as the player would be expected to ornament the music themselves. Here however, grace notes are written to guide performers other than *Erhu* players, and reinforce the music's improvised quality and joyful mood. Chen Yi specifically writes these notes to ensure the violinists are encouraged to feel and expressively speak through their instruments. She also uses the technique of *Huihuayin*, a fast slide to a step higher or lower than the primary note, that then immediately return to the primary note. This sequence happens very quickly, as do grace notes in Western music.

**Example 6.** *From Old Peking Folklore*, violin part, mm.11-15.<sup>53</sup>



Measure eleven begins with the G in second position rather than first because Chen Yi marks the sequential fingering of B-A-G as 3-2-1; however, the end of measure twelve indicates the fingering of G should return to second position. According to Chen Yi, this fingering decision may be traced back to her working experiences in Beijing Opera Troupe Orchestra in the 1970s.<sup>54</sup> Chen Yi states that the orchestra contained both Western instruments such as violin, viola, and cello, as well as traditional Chinese instruments such as the *Erhu*, *Pipa*, and *Zheng*. All that Chen Yi

<sup>53</sup> Chen Yi, *From Old Peking Folklore*, 1.

<sup>54</sup> Chen Yi, Personal Interview.

learned during The Cultural Revolution about how Chinese instruments work in terms of fingering, vibrato, and articulation, is applied to Western instruments and in particular, to fingerings in the violin's second position to the erhu. Using these fingerings was the easiest way to mimic the *erhu's* sound and keep phrases on one string in order to avoid string crossings. Thus, Chen Yi places almost all fingerings in *From Old Peking Folklore* on the second string due to her experience working in opera for eight years, giving her the chance to discover that the violin's second position naturally translates to music on the *Erhu*.

#### 5. The "Horse Neigh"

Horse neigh is a technique from traditional Chinese instruments, such as the *Erhu*, *Sihu* and *Zheng*, to imitate the timbre of a horse neighing. The horse neigh consists of two actions: 1) a down-bow, fast glissando to a very high pitch on the string, and 2) an up-bow, slower glissando from the first note moving lower. The horse neigh is an effect without a specific pitch that can be found notated in Example 7 during measures 150 through 153. The horse neigh is played for a specified number of beats and is of indeterminate pitches.<sup>55</sup> The bow speed is irregular, and there is no standard symbol to notate the horse neigh. Additionally, the down-bow and up-bow movements are not notated into specific rhythms.

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<sup>55</sup> Tung, "Info for Composers."

**Example 7.** *From Old Peking Folklore*, violin part, mm.144-153.<sup>56</sup>



Chen Yi writes this horse neigh idea by indicating that the violin player should play a long, slow, descending glissando from the first and highest pitch. As shown in Example 7 from measures 150 through 153, there are no pitches notated for the end of the two horse neighs. Usually, glissandi are one-note slides, but here she mimics the technique by adding the second slide note. Chen Yi marks the effect *fortissimo* in measure 150 which also intensifies the music and creates a chasing effect.

6. Proportion enlargement

This piece is written in a five-part rondo form, with writes a closing section after the final A section which sounds brilliant, victorious, and festive. Chen Yi uses proportional enlargement which extends the duration of notes in order to broaden and rhythmically expand the original melody.

**Example 8.** *From Old Peking Folklore*, violin part, mm.144-147.



<sup>56</sup> Chen Yi, *From Old Peking Folklore* (PA: Theodore Presser Company, 2009), 4.



For instance, when comparing Example 8 with Example 1B, Chen Yi writes the same figure in measure thirteen as in measure 145, however she extends the note's duration from one beat to two. Although the material is similar, this section sounds grander and more final as a direct result of this expansive treatment.

Through study of Chen Yi's pieces, namely those written for Western instruments, one sees that Chen Yi often diminishes the number of beats in a measure to depict *accelerando*. Additionally, she composes some music by reversing the *accelerando* technique. For instance, in measure 145, instead of compressing the number of beats to illustrate *accelerando*, Chen Yi augments the duration of dotted rhythm to twice its original value in measure 13 which informs a sense of closing.

#### 7. Closing Gesture

Chen Yi writes three ascending statements of a two-bar sextuplet figure in order to build the dynamic from *mezzo piano* to *fortissimo* and create momentum to the finish. These three statements transverse three octaves, each one an octave higher than the previous. In addition, she writes accents beginning in measure 160 every two measures and speeding up in measure 166 to every eighth note to bring the piece to a brilliant and propulsive finale.

**Example 9.** *From Old Peking Folklore, Violin part, mm.159-169.*<sup>57</sup>

Additional information and comments from the coaching with Chen Yi:<sup>58</sup>

1. The main note in the piano entrance is G, with the F# used for imitating the sound of the gong. The execution of this should be really clean, elegant, fresh and graceful.
2. Almost all the chords in this piece imitate percussion instruments. She specifically mentioned that pianists should use both hands to create a short, straight-forward articulation in the opening to mimic the sound of Chinese gong.
3. Chen Yi stated that the melody should feel like old Chinese people who are walking and enjoying the day. She pointed out that when the accompaniment has big leaps, like the *Liyin* gesture on the *Dizi* shown in Example 4A, she was mimicking the technique *Dahuayin* from traditional Chinese instrument *Da SanXian*. She writes similarly for the violin using big glissandi.

<sup>57</sup> Chen Yi, *From Old Peking Folklore* (PA: Theodore Presser Company, 2009), 4.

<sup>58</sup> Chen Yi, Coaching.

4. At rehearsal C, Chen Yi stated the violinist's right-hand pinky has to stand on the bow, and that the bow should remain in contact with the string to create an even length and volume. This section should sound like two percussion instruments competing with each other.
5. In the last section, such as measure 126, the performers should create a sound which is not only lyrical but also intense and edge-like. When the climax of the piece is reached in measure 137, the performers should communicate a triumph and victory with the audience.
6. Chen Yi said that from measure 160 violinists should not try to bounce the bow. The bow should remain on the string with short bows, and then use the bow speed and amount of bow to create a *crescendo*. Finally, the last *pizzicato* which is marked *sfz* is to be loud and plucked with energy but afterward immediately dampen the strings using the left hand. This is called a dead stroke in traditional Chinese music, like the big drum's final sound.
7. Upon hearing the writer and pianist Hongzuo Guo play through the piece, Dr. Chen Yi discovered ~~are~~ two printing mistakes in the violin part, both in measure 130. The final two notes should be C and D instead of B and C.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

The music of Chen Yi appeals to both Western and non-Western audiences. As one of the most internationally renowned female Asian contemporary composers today, Chen Yi has become a prominent figure in music throughout the world. Her writing is influenced by Chinese folk songs and Beijing opera. Like other prominent Chinese composers, such as Bright Sheng and Tan Dun, Chen Yi's writing is a fusion of East and the West through its featuring of traditional Chinese instruments, influence of Beijing Opera and contemporary Western performance techniques and instruments.

Chen Yi's music has become more widely known for two reasons. First, Chen Yi has written for a range of musical genres including vocal music, music for traditional Chinese instruments, music for ensembles of Chinese and Western instruments, and various genres of Western instrumental music ranging from solo works to full orchestral works.<sup>59</sup> Second, her compositional style lends itself to substantial research opportunities for musicians interested in the combination of diverse cultural idioms. This may be seen by the significant number of dissertations, journal articles, and conference presentations on the subject. Additionally, Chen Yi is a professor and therefore inspires both performance and composition students through her presence as a faculty member.

In *From Old Peking Folklore*, Chen Yi uses the violin to mimic the sound of Chinese string and woodwind instruments. Through using a single melody only, she creates a variety of timbres to reflect the different roles in Beijing opera. Like Bartók,

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<sup>59</sup> Guo Xin, "Fusion," 47.

another composer who sought to give voice to traditional folk music on the concert stage, Chen Yi's music uses folk melodies, pentatonic scales, extreme dynamic changes, surprising intervals, and dissonant chords. Her compositional style however is firmly rooted in Chinese traditions. By providing the performer with background information about traditional Chinese music and Opera, as well as a performance guide and link to a lecture/demonstration of the work, the author hopes this document will provide valuable context to help violinists of all cultures better understand the construction and performance of *From Old Peking Folklore*, in order to make it more accessible and create more visibility for her works. Additionally, the author hopes that this document will invite further research and understanding of Chen Yi and her music.

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APPENDIX A  
LECTURE RECITAL

As part of my project, the writer held a lecture recital on Oct. 10, 2020. A video of the recital is archived at the following link:

<https://youtu.be/jAjbCT1M2AE>.