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THE ERHU AND ITS ROLE AS A VEHICLE FOR SYNCRETIC MUSIC PERFORMANCE IN SINGAPORE

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the *erhu,* a bowed lute from China and its development as a vehicle for syncretic music-making in Singapore. Chapter One considers the *erhu's* status in Chinese culture and focuses on the differences between how the *erhu* was perceived by the "proletariat" of the early twentieth century contrasted with the imperialists of that time.

A central assumption in this study is that *erhu* music-making in Singapore is inextricably bound with the traditions of both Western and Chinese culture. This concept is introduced in Chapter Two, with a discussion on musical syncretism. The *erhu* is a member of the *huqin* string family and is one instrument in the new ensemble idiom of the Singapore Huqin Quartet. This ensemble is the first to have *huqin* set up together in the manner of a Western string quartet. This ensemble has been influential on and contributes to a broad range of musical happenings in Singapore. It also represents one development of *erhu* as "world music". Phoon Yew Tien, who writes for the Singapore Huqin Quartet, is introduced.

Chapter Three encompasses the different instruments that make up the *huqin* family, as played by the Singapore Huqin Quartet (which will be referred to as the SHQ in abbreviation). It also looks at the development of the modern Chinese orchestra. Chapter Four provides the descriptions and characteristics of the *erhu* and its performance techniques. In Chapter Five, eminent musical figures such as Liu Tian Hua and Hua Yan Jun (also known as Abing) will be discussed. Their music composed for the *erhu* has become an important part of the repertoire of the SHQ.

The concluding chapter outlines differences between Western and Chinese music and looks at the merging of the two. A product of this merger is the compositions of distinguished Singapore composer, Phoon Yew Tien. His works are a fine example of the *erhu's* musical qualities and demonstrate the compositional potential of the SHQ's syncretic idiom with the merging of the Chinese and Western art-music forces. A musical composition by Phoon viewed in a compositional perspective summarizes the possibilities of further development of this style.

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In ever loving memory of my mother, Ong Chai Hoi

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INTRODUCTION

The *erhu* as a musical instrument has fascinated me since I was introduced to it at primary school in Malaysia. The hauntingly beautiful and soulful music of the *erhu* and other traditional Chinese instruments encouraged me to learn the *guzheng* (bridged zither) as well. However, my early music training began primarily on Western instruments such as the piano, violin, flute and later the electronic organ, mainly because of my parents' interest and encouragement. This mix of Chinese and Western musical learning is usual for Malaysian and Singaporean people of Chinese descent.

After completing secondary school, I pursued a three-year programme for a Diploma in Music at the Malaysian Institute of Art in Kuala Lumpur, located in the heart of the cosmopolitan capital of Malaysia. My exposure to Western elements of music began with an in-depth study of Western music theory and composition as well as piano performance which became my principal subject. Operatic voice was my second study. The need to enhance my understanding of my own cultural heritage, outside of Western conservatoire traditions of learning and teaching, spurred me to learn more about traditional Chinese music.

Since its rise in popularity, from street music to that of the concert hall, the *erhu* has been well suited to Chinese musical experimentation with the blending of Chinese and Western art music. From one of the *erhu's* early twentieth century proponents, Liu Tian Hua, to the Singapore Huqin Quartet and present day Singaporean composer Phoon Yew Tien, the fascination of Han Chinese with the fusing of Chinese and Western musical elements has been largely played out on the *erhu.* It is a vehicle for conscious syncretic musical change, both in China and Singapore. Recognizing the importance of Eastern or Chinese music, its interrelationship with Western music and other world music and the rise in popularity at the Malaysian Institute of Art, the Department of Music began offering Chinese instruments as a principal or second study. These traditional Chinese instruments are the first to be introduced in the country for a Diploma course. This course became an integral part of the framework in the music curriculum as well as in its concerts. This peripheral music, however, plays a minor role in other music establishments in Malaysia. As Head of the Music Department and lecturer since graduating from Columbia College in United States of America in 1990, I considered undertaking a conventional musicological study on Chinese instruments and especially on the *erhu.* This study of the *erhu* is germane due to its growing enthusiasm and its influence on the Singapore Huqin Quartet's professional development. The motivating force lies in my desire to understand and investigate the merger of musical styles which embodies the application of Western music techniques to the traditional East.

In 1993 whilst at Kwangsi in Nanning, mainland China, at the invitation of the Chinese Embassy and as a participant in the International Folk Song Festival, I was thrilled by the enormous musical potpourri and "mosaic music" of the various ethnic communities. It was incredible observing what was coming from the peasantry and tribes-people who may be considered as the non-literate cultures, whom one might expect to be lacking in musical experience or artistic thoughts. The level of performance by these ethnic groups was commendable both in folk song singing as

well as Chinese ensemble and orchestral playing. A concert tour to Beijing and Tianjin in China, together with a goodwill exchange performance with the National University of Inner Mongolia in 1997, strengthened my interest and aim to work on a detailed study of Chinese musical instruments, of which my favourite was the *erhu*.

LANGUAGE, TRANSLATION AND DRAWINGS

Throughout the thesis I have written in italics all the Chinese words or terms using the *pinyin* system. I have sourced information predominantly in English but also in Chinese. Translations from Chinese books are kept to a minimum and only used for illustrations and diagrams as well as Chinese music dictionaries for historical facts.

Explanations on the use of certain words in Chinese musical terminology are included in the text and also found in the glossary. The spelling used to indicate dynasties, for example "Song Dynasty", is based on the research materials in the bibliography. I do not use 's' on words like the *erhu*, *huqin* and other Chinese musical instruments because the addition of 's' after a Chinese word is not the usual practice of the Chinese language.

I have drawn images, pictures and diagrams with the assistance of my music student Lee Eng Fei who drew the portrait of Liu Tian Hua. In addition, I also depended on my camera and tape recorder for documenting purposes.

RESEARCH APPROACHES, METHODOLOGY AND INTERVIEWS

I have been influenced by works such as 'Music of the Billion, An Introduction into Chinese Musical Culture' by Liang Ming Yue, who has extensively covered Chinese musical culture. My main purpose has been to understand current trends of interest and issues associated with the *erhu* as an instrument of syncretic music. Isabel Wong's 'From Reaction to Synthesis: Chinese Musicology in the Twentieth Century' provides an in-depth and concise approach to the study of cultural interpolation, tracing the stylistic characterization of Chinese music and historical survey of mainland China. In addition, Chow Wen Chung's insightful writing on 'Asian Aesthetics and World Music' assisted my study of the *erhu*. Chow's bi-musical approaches further deepened my understanding of the comparison and synthesis of Western and Chinese music.

Other writing I have drawn upon is ethnomusicologist Jonathan Stock's "Musical Creativity in Twentieth-Century China: Abing, His Music and Its Changing Meanings." Stock is an authority on Abing, an eminent *erhu* player from the early twentieth century. Stock's experience in Western music and historical ethnomusicological background on the *erhu* and its music helped me comprehend the heuristic value of my study. Stock questions the value of historical musicologist Yang Yin Liu's writing about Abing's biography which was inconsistent in its contents.

My colleague, Don Tew, the conductor of the PCCO (Professional Cultural Chinese Orchestra), has answered many questions from conversations I had with him

about Chinese music theory and Chinese instruments. Some of my students who major in the *erhu* and also *erhu* instructors at Malaysian Institute of Arts have assisted me in my enquiries about the technique of performances and details about the *erhu's* current repertoire.

To understand the *erhu* as a vehicle for syncretic music-making in Singapore, the themes of this study include historical processes documented with iconographic works; the role of the communist party in the popularization of the *erhu*; current and past performing repertoire; external and internal influences on the Singapore Huqin Quartet (which will be referred to as the SHQ in abbreviation) and the compositions of renowned Singaporean composer Phoon Yew Tien; the changes in the interpretation of musical creation in the discourse of music history in Singapore; Western and Chinese influences on the social and cultural development of the *erhu* and the *huqin* family. Musical analysis is also used and deemed crucial in concepts that are applied in the epistemology of music where musical structures and other parameters of music arise in this study. I have chosen to examine and analyse a piece of composition written for the Singapore Huqin Quartet by Phoon Yew Tien. My approach is based on a mixture of Western and Eastern theoretical understanding of music. I see Phoon's work as an example of the incorporation of syncretic forms and the acceptance or 'domesticating' of musical ethnicity in Singapore.

I also interviewed Cheng Chung Hsien, Chiang Kum Mun, Ling Hock Siang, Poh Yee Luh and Terence Ho, members of the Singapore Huqin Quartet, together with their manager. I met them on three occasions. I visited them in Singapore and during their New Zealand tour to Wellington for the New Zealand International Arts Festival in 2004. Their performance was intriguing and of a high calibre. In one of the three concerts performed by the SHQ, the use of the piano, guitar and saxophone was introduced with both Western classical and jazz colours at different times, collaborating with the Eastern timbres for the *huqin* in diatonic tonalities. This performance led to an interview with collaborative musician, Associate Professor Matthew Marshall at Massey University in Wellington.

The following statement by Bell Jung, (2002) reiterates the musical background and influences experienced by Phoon and the SHQ and signals the role of musical borrowing in the shaping of the true understanding of non-western music.

> For some who identify nearly completely with China [and] to those who identify hardly at all, how such a sense of identity develops depends to a considerable degree, of course, on one's ethnicity, cultural heritage, and upbringing; on where one grew up; on where one has been or is living and working; and on other factors that might be very personal. The fact that scholars are trained in the West or being taught the Western music also influences their position along the spectrum (Jung, 2002, p.25).

Bruno Nettl has also pointed out the introduction of the Western form of music to other facets of society from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is reciprocated in a different way by the non-Western world and also by the Europeans and North Americans to its Eastern form of music. Nettl further noted:

> By the middle of the twentieth century, the most prominent kind of music in the world's cultures, [where] Western and non-Western elements [are]

> combined, [is also the period where] musical practices and concepts from the West [are] used in various ways to modify [the] non-Western traditions (Nettl, 1985, p.14).

This is reiterated by musicologist Leonard B. Meyer that the twentieth century spells "a steady-state in which an indefinite number of styles and idioms, techniques and movements, will coexist in each of the arts" (Meyer, 1967, p.172). China is one of many countries influenced by Western music in the early twentieth century; others include India, Indonesia and Brazil.

A FRAMEWORK OF MUSICAL SYNCRETISM

The music of the Singapore Huqin Quartet has been called syncretic. As part of Singapore's musical heritage, the string quartet genre originated from British colonials whilst the *erhu* came from the Chinese immigrants of Guangdong and Fujian Provinces in China. The SHQ is the product of British and Chinese musical heritages in Singapore. To understand its repertoire we need to explore definitions of syncretism. Musical syncretism is one aspect of the process of musical change[1]. It reconfigures musical performances of two ethnic groups and creates a new musical product. A definition by Alan P. Merriam is the "blending together of elements of two cultures, changing the original values and forms" (Merriam, 1964, p.313). Musical syncretism is built upon the observations of people experiencing and adopting other groups' musics, countries' cultures, forms, etc. As a result, new musical products emerge. For example, one genre typically thought of as syncretic is Dondang Sayang from Malaysia. It is the blending of European violins accompanying Malay "pantun" or poetry.

Merriam's definition of syncretism is suitable for this thesis as this definition blurs cultural boundaries by combining personas and styles found in the works of Phoon Yew Tien. Phoon is an example of a Singaporean composer drawing on both his Western and Chinese heritage. By commissioning pieces from composers such as Phoon, the SHQ serves to exemplify the syncretic strand of current musical studies and interpretations in Singapore.

In Singapore today, musical innovations and musical changes are becoming valued and applauded. Blacking had pointed out, "it is particularly important to distinguish changes in musical composition or performance that are not labelled or intended as such by musicians, from changes that are intentional and recognized" (Blacking, 1977, p.11). It is clear the SHQ's attempt at syncretic music-making is intentional. Its repertoire of syncretic compositions, such as Concord (see page 83), is enjoyed by Singapore audiences. It is a systematic or conscious attempt to merge cultures. The nationalistic efforts of the SHQ urge it to attach meanings to the two genres of

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[1] What is musical change? "The study of musical change must be concerned ultimately with significant innovations in music sound, but innovations in music sound are not necessarily evidence of musical change. If the concept of musical change is to have any heuristic value, it must denote significant changes that are peculiar to *musical* systems, and not simply the musical consequences of social, political, economic, or other changes" (Blacking, 1977, p.2).

Western and Chinese music[2].

Another issue to consider is that of "purists" as opposed to "syncretists". "Purists" reveal the traditional sense of music history. They focus on preservation and authenticity and their attachments to the fine things of the past. This is through maintaining the "traditional" or folk elements of music whilst discounting the development of its musical happening *per se*. The so-called authenticity movement or "purists" see structural musical coherence and style as very important. The argument of the "purists" is that musical changes should be a "natural transformation"; a gradual change over time, which is not necessarily a conscious music-making process, as opposed to the SHQ's idea of intentional syncretic music. A "purist's" perspective does not acknowledge the cultural diversity of a nation such as Singapore.

Syncretic music generates an array of challenges, one of which is audience acceptance. Prospective innovators of music in Singapore such as the SHQ need to understand the impact of their reconceptualization of Western and Chinese music. Compositions by Singapore composer Phoon Yew Tien, for example, have been written with the knowledge and intention that the materials used are familiar to audiences. As such, the compositions have communicative value to Singapore audiences. It is thus legitimate to adopt and explore the SHQ's rearrangement of two cultures' musical parameters as an engaging representation of Singapore's musical changes.

I have also followed Margaret Kartomi's definitions of the term syncretism which relates to the merging and adopting of different cultures or artistic activities. This is found in Phoon Yew Tien's composition for the SHQ. As stated by Kartomi and Blum, the "creative transformation normally occurs as a result of convergence which may result in an influx of new musical ideas, organizing principles and repertoires and the effects of contact range from the making of minor adjustments within existing musical styles . . . . ." (Kartomi and Blum, 1994, p.ix). The musical sampling by Phoon Yew Tien in appendix A, as an example, is a departure from the conventional form of writing for the Chinese pentatonic scalar structure in this composition. The SHQ performed syncretic works based on the Western discordant melodic progression, musical textures and form or structures. The quartet generally kept to the traditional or local Chinese melodic line and rhythm with shared concepts on embellishments, sequential movements and fusion of scalar patterns.

Kartomi affirms the confusion involving the many different meanings for syncretism. In her article, Kartomi said: "Terms used for syncretism such as cross-fertilized, hybrid, creole, mestizo and mulatto have sometimes been confused in their meanings with negative attitudes to illicit breeding and interracial liaisons" (Kartomi, 1981, p.229). The ideas associated with these terms are the belief that the resultant product is subservient or less important. I have chosen to use the word "syncretic" strictly to avoid any confusion with other apparently similar terms.

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[2] As John Blacking has pointed out "unchanging cultural tradition is dead and of no use to man except perhaps as an inspiration to do something else, and music without social situations, which by definition can never be identical, ceases to be music as a performing art" (Blacking, 1977, p.8).

I hope this study will play a modest role in bridging the conventionally accepted norms of a stylistic approach to traditional Chinese music and musical changes today. This point of view surfaced from the older generations of Malaysian and Singaporean Chinese audiences. As musicologists Mark Slobin and Jeff Todd Titon sum up: "A conglomeration of music-cultures is taking place all over the world, and this fact sometimes makes it difficult to isolate traditional styles of music" (Slobin and Titon, 1984, p.8). I will discuss further the division of my study as below.

THE DIVISION OF THE STUDY

This thesis seeks to examine the Chinese *erhu's* contribution through the development of this instrument with its role as a vehicle for syncretic music-making in Singapore. It is divided into six separate chapters that cover most of the musical aspects of the *erhu* and its family. Chapter One contextualizes the *erhu's* place in the Chinese socio-political scene from the early twentieth century. Its historical background prior to the twentieth century is also covered along with an introduction to the physical description and musical characteristics of the *erhu.*

Chapter Two explains the involvement of a new ensemble, the Singapore Huqin Quartet in creating a syncretic ensemble idiom. It comprises members of the *huqin* family of which the *erhu* is depicted as the 'soul' amongst the *huqin* instruments. To introduce this ensemble, each member's profile is included in this study as well as the history of the Singapore Huqin Quartet. Interviews have been conducted with the Singapore Huqin Quartet members, their manager, Terence Ho, Associate Professor Matthew Marshall of Massey University and composer Phoon Yew Tien in our discussions on Singapore's vision of 'unity in musical diversity'. The SHQ and Phoon are engaged in a relatively new approach of stylistic mannerisms, interpretation and other idiosyncrasies of music in a socio-cultural-political trinity. Thus is offered prima-facie grounds for new development in Singapore's music scene. Perhaps any recognizable interest closely related to ethnic music when carefully configured could translate to syncretization in a multi-cultural cosmopolitan nation like Singapore. Phoon Yew Tien is introduced in this chapter.

Chapter Three contains details of the family of *huqin,* describing concisely the individual instruments which are an all-embracing way of understanding the *erhu's* relatives. The lack of literature dealing specifically with the modern Chinese orchestra further strengthens the need to examine the musical parameters of this genre which is becoming a recent research phenomenon. A brief look at the Chinese orchestra is necessary to understand the *erhu's* solo and ensemble roles from which the ensemble instruments are derived. As such, new instruments had been developed such as the *gehu.* This instrument is found in the Singapore Huqin Quartet as earlier discussed in Chapter Two. The modern Chinese orchestra is introduced as the *erhu* and its *huqin* family are amongst the principal instruments to have maintained prominent positions in the modern Chinese orchestras.

Chapter Four examines the *erhu's* performance technique and the performance signs and symbols are appropriately shown to indicate both the Western and Chinese musical symbols and terminology. Primary emphasis in Chapter Five draws upon the

erhu music of eminent scholar-musician Liu Tian Hua, and the *erhu* specialist Abing, who have contributed enormously to these compositional materials. Abing's close alliance with the *erhu* came from his Daoist background. He brought much credibility to *erhu* music despite his controversial and nebulous association in the socio-cultural and political norms of his time. Transcribed examples and cipher notations of their works as well as technical exercises are tabled which deal with the diachronic and synchronic variants of these pieces. Their music composed for the *erhu* has become an important part of the repertoire of the SHQ.

To understand the repertoire played by the Singapore Huqin Quartet and Phoon's compositions, the characteristic differences between Western and Chinese music aesthetics are analysed in Chapter Six. This chapter covers a comparative study of scalar structure or tonal inventory, rhythmic or melodic motifs, thematic development and other syncretic idioms of music. This analysis relates specifically to the current Singapore music scene. In this chapter, the notion of musical change and its expressive paradigm which have long since juxtaposed the elements of Western traits on non-western music will be presented as interactive. These musical changes would not primarily be constituted as dichotomies and continuums with other domains of musical culture. The suggestions on musical changes made by ethnomusicologist Margaret J. Kartomi's in her article "The Processes and Results of Musical Culture Contact" (1981) reflected on the need to understand the responses produced when confronted with different cultural strands that indicate the impact of syncretic and authentic forms.

CHAPTER ONE

1.1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE *ERHU*

In order to understand the Singapore Huqin Quartet's use of the *erhu* as a syncretic instrument, it is crucial to establish the place of the *erhu* in Chinese music and culture. As there are many studies on the Western string quartet, this topic will not be covered here. The history of Chinese stringed instruments spans over a thousand years. *Erhu*, (*er* means two and *hu* means barbarian) is a two-stringed bowed lute which had its beginnings more than 500 years ago (see photo 1.1, p.9). The *erhu* also has a role as a second fiddle in a Chinese orchestra or ensemble. It is also sometimes called *erhsian, wongtzi* or *huhu.* It is used to accompany narrative folksongs (called *t'an-t'ze* in the South and *ta'ku-shu* in the North) and was common in the instrumental and theatrical music of the Canton and Shanghai regions (Liang, 1980, p.270). Unlike the *sheng* (mouth organ) and *guzheng* (plucked zither), the *erhu* is a relative late-comer to the pool of Chinese traditional instruments, many of which date back at least 2000 years, which is much earlier than its stringed instrument. It can be observed that the earliest level of syncretism for the *erhu* began when it was adopted by the Han from the tribes to the north and west. There are two kinds of *erhu* in the modern Chinese orchestra. They are the *zuyin erhu* (principal erhu) and the *tuoyin erhu* (second erhu). The *tuoyin erhu* is a perfect fourth lower than the *zuyin erhu.*

Just as the various northern and western region ethnic groups commonly called *Hu* by the inhabitants of Central China, the *erhu* is also known as the *huqin*[3]. *(Hu* also means "foreign" in Chinese) and is a derogatory word for tribes. *Qin* means stringed instruments. This inevitably leads to confusion as *erhu* is sometimes called *huqin.*) It actually belongs to the "*huqin*" family which encompasses various Chinese bowed stringed instruments such as *jinghu, gaohu, zhonghu, banhu, gehu* and *da gehu.* These instruments will be discussed later in Chapter Three.

There are eight organographic schemes for Chinese musical instruments classified by the materials of construction. These are skin (drums), gourd (mouth organ), silk (instruments with silken strings), wood (percussive wooden beaters), earth (vessel flute and clay jars), bamboo (vertical transverse flutes), stone (lithophones), and metal (bronze bells). The *erhu,* with its silk strings, comes under the silk category

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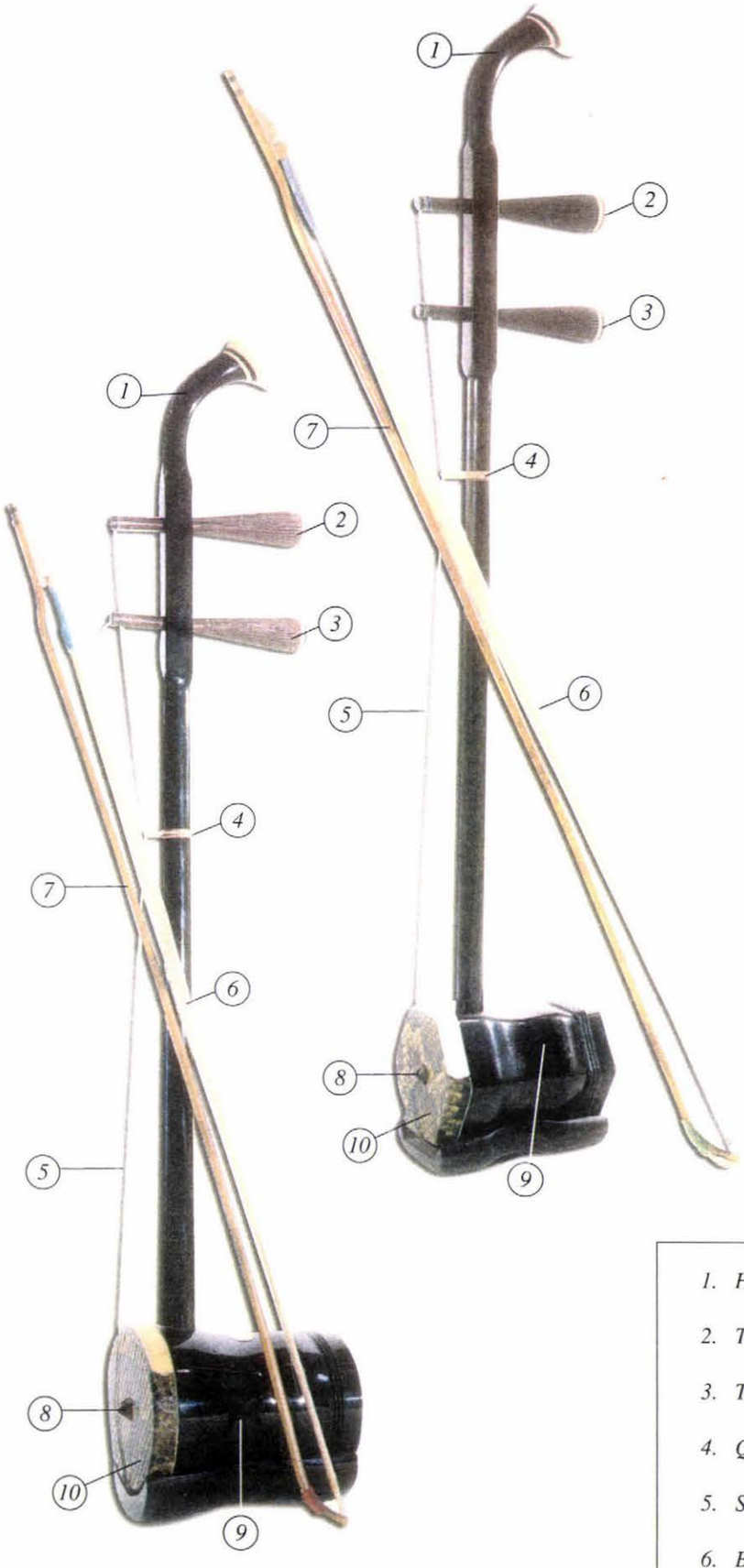
[3] *Huqin's* sound boxes were in the shape of a tube, bowl or box. They were made of wood, bamboo, coconut shell, gourd, horn, brass, and so on. The front side of the sound box (which functioned as a soundboard) was covered with the skin of a snake, frog, buffalo, horse, sheep, or camel, or with a wooden board, bamboo leaf, or tree leaf (Liu, 2002, p.113). These extended from the Song to the Qing Dynasty (960-911).

The organological origin of the *huqin* (a bowed or scraped lute) is uncertain and controversial. One early reference to a *huqin* type of instrument occurs again in the "Yue Shu" ("Book of music", 1104 A.D) which was a large musicological survey by Chen Yang[9] of the Song Dynasty, volume 128 (Liang, 1980 p.269). It however, only became popular when bowed instruments were gaining recognition during the Song Dynasty (960-1279 AD), amongst the Northwestern minority clans of China (see appendix B.1 for list of dynasties).



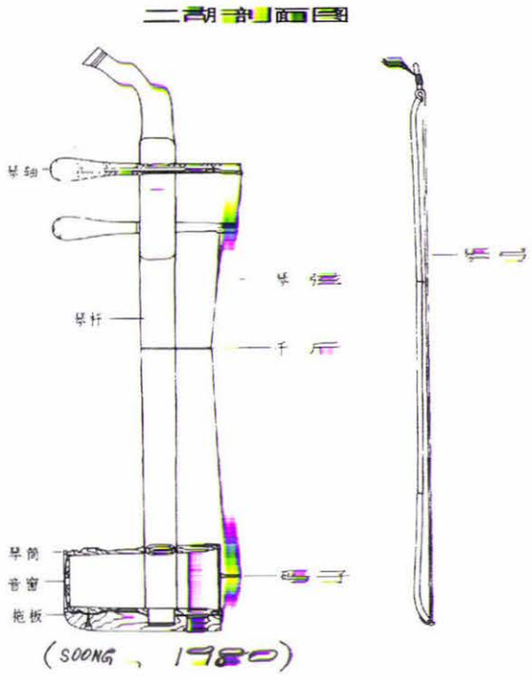


Photo 1.1 *ERHU*

1. *Head*
2. *Tuning Peg For Inner String*
3. *Tuning Key For Outer String*
4. *Qianjin*
5. *Strings*
6. *Bow Strings*
7. *Bow Stick*
8. *Bridge*
9. *Resonator*
10. *Vibrato Skin*

and was first mentioned in the section of *Shundian* in the *Shijing* "Book of History"[4]. The classification system above is called the *bayin* system or "eight timbres," and is categorized not only by the materials inherent in the respective instruments, but also their symbolic unification between sound and nature.

Thus, the manifestation of the timbre[5] or tone quality of the *erhu* is due to its constructional materials and the effects of exposure to variable temperatures and humidity on these materials (Liang, 1985). As such, absolute care must be taken to ensure that the instrument is kept in pristine condition.

With the development of the *erhu*, its former use of two silk strings had been replaced by metal strings since the late 1940s. One of its earlier ancestors, a rubbed string instrument of China, was the *yazheng* as stated in the "Yue Shu" Encyclopedia or Book of Music, completed in 1104 AD. It is a half-tube bridged zither, still being used today, except that it is now rubbed with a bow instead of a bamboo stick as before.

Another predecessor of the *erhu,* the *xiqin,* dates back to the mid-eighth century (Tang Dynasty, 618-907AD), when a bamboo strip was used, instead of a bow with horsehair. According to historical records, the x*iqin* was associated with the northern Mongolian Xi tribe who migrated to Central Northern China. The *xiqin* was originally the principal musical instrument of the Hu tribe, derived from the *hsiantao* stringed drum, which has a similar shape. It was a favourite instrument of the Xi people. According to its description in the book, the *xiqin* closely resembles today's *huqin* family except in the way it was played.

According to Chen Yang's[6] description, the *xiqin* resembles the modern day *erhu* but with the absence of a *qianjin* (restrainer). The *qianjin* is attached to the two strings between the bridge and pegs to act as pitch control for fine tuning (see photo 1.1). The *qianjin,* which resembles the capo on a guitar, tuned the strings immediately when bow pressure is applied. The neck and soundbox of the *xiqin* are relatively shorter, compared with the present day *erhu,* which underwent many changes in the twentieth century. An *erhu*[7] player today is able to perform a wide spectrum of mood and expression which allows room for virtuosic playing. It has become the favourite of the "proletariat" as the *pipa* and *guzheng* have to the urban sophisticate.

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[4] "*Shijing* is the earliest Chinese anthology of poetic songs" well-known in the West as Book of Odes, Book of Poetry or Classic of Poetry stretching from the sixth to eleventh century (Liang, 1985, p. 54).

[5] "The timbre or texture of sound relates to sound's inherent characteristics, to the dimensions of its material existence, whose tactile character renders it in a certain sense, similar to the existence of material bodies in time and space" (Shepherd and Wicke, 1997, p.123).

[6] Chen Yang depicted the *xiqin* in China's first music encyclopedia which was completed in 1105. As his contemporaries, the late-eleventh-century traveller and chronicler Shen Kuo, wrote in a poem depicting the *mawei* (horsetail) *huqin's* (*erhu*) plaintive sounds, played by prisoners of war captured by the Mongolians during a Chinese military expedition into Central Asia (www.shef.ac.uk).

[7] Its resemblance could also be found in Korea, the *hyegum*, Japan, the *Kokyu*, Mongolia's *morin khuur* and other countries in the Middle East, India as well as in Central Asia.

Historically, there were two regional schools of thought: the Henan school known for its typical glissando trademark and the Shaanxi school for its shrilling vibratos and extensive range. These schools brought about many changes to the musical scene of twentieth-century China along with the efforts of *erhu* folklorist and composer Liu Tian Hua (1895-1932). They brought about the *erhu's* change in status from an instrument used to accompany vocal narratives to one of solo performance and ensemble instrumental playing.

1.2 SOCIO-POLITICAL BACKGROUND

Although the *erhu* is an ancient instrument, the twentieth-century development of *erhu* music can be parallelled with the four periods of recent history in mainland China which commenced with the Republican Revolution of 1911 and the May Fourth Movement[8] (1911-1922). Subsequently, the Chinese Communist Party embarked on the famous "Long March" with the founding of its headquarters at Yan'an in Shaanzi Province until the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. This was followed by the Cultural Revolution[9] from 1966-1969 to the *Qinpai*[10] or modern era until today. The *erhu* was an instrument at first ignored, then favoured, by the ruling Communist Party.

Chinese history has seen the blending of cultures which can be traced back to the seventh century when Han China was at its zenith during the Tang Dynasty. The relocation of the Han Chinese people from the north to the various regions and provinces of China saw an influx of multi-cultural art-forms being disseminated. "This process of sinicization is responsible for the development of Chinese music of the Han and Tang Dynasties" (Chow, 1990, p.179). The syncretization processes of Chinese music in general and *erhu* music in particular came to a head in the 1920s, with the May Fourth Movement, where the first application of Western techniques into Chinese traditional melodies were initiated in an effort to forge a national classical tradition (Jones, 1995).

A brief look at the political changes in China during the first half of the twentieth century provides a context for the ideologies surrounding *erhu* development. The educated class during the May Fourth Movement bore the embattled notions of revolutionising China's ideology when Confucianism and other traditional values were rejected and deemed the source of China's national ills. In 1921 the Chinese

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[8] On 4 May 1919, a new intellectual class emerged in the political scene, which had been dormant for some time, culminating in a series of student demonstrations led by *Beida* (University of Peking) students. It was a result of a provocation due to an offer of the sovereignty to Japan, at the Versailles Peace Conference, of the territory in Shandong province which reinforced Japan's position. These demonstrations were followed by nationwide strikes by workers, merchants, and students that lasted well into 1922, marking the watershed of modern Chinese history. (Chow, 1960, p. 84-194)

[9] The Cultural Revolution documented the destruction of almost everything that witnessed both materially and China's cultural past. The arrests of the "Gang of Four" in 1976, and the brutal suppression of student uprisings in Tiananmen Square in 1989, were among the aftershocks (Fletcher, 2001, p. 344) during the revolution.

[10] *Qinpai* or new syle is also used for music as in *Qinpai Erhu School* or New Era *erhu* school.

Communist Party (CCP) was formed, and an embroiling scramble between the Kuomintang (KMT), being the Nationalist Party, over the supremacy of China, raged on for twenty-eight years, each vying for complete control over the other.

Musicologist Isabel Wong notes: "By 1923, the impact of Marxism-Leninism on Chinese thought and on Chinese arts and music began to be felt" (Wong, 1997, p.77). The 1957 anti-Rightist campaign, which led to the unsuccessful "Great Leap Forward" the following year, compounded the sufferings of traditional artists. Artifacts, musical instruments, historical sites and places of worship were dismantled for their materials to cope with the massive famine and ailing nation. The Anti-Revisionist campaigns of 1960, and the Socialist Education from 1962 and Four Purifications (1964-66) paved the way for the Cultural Revolution. This Revolution, working on similar beliefs, was spear-headed by Mao Zedong (1893-1976). His "Great Leap Forward" campaign was launched in 1958.

Mao took up the threads of populism by propagating the "songs and tales of the peasants as spiritual models" (Schimmelpenninck, 1997, p.6). This repertory was initiated by the folklorists of the 1920s, which Mao used for his political agenda. He resolved to transform China into a modern world-class superpower. Mao's misjudged campaign led him and the Red Army to eradicate any intellectuals, artists and sympathizers who went against his oligarchic rule. Musicians in China, generally were humiliated and incarcerated, which subdued many aspiring young musicians from pursuing this career, as they felt isolated and in danger.

It is thus not surprising when music scholar Shen Sin Yan suggests that, "e*rhu* music was not recognized in Beijing in the first quarter of the twentieth century, although it was already the most fascinating instrument in eastern and southern China" (Shen, 2001, p.4-15). In fact, *erhu* music was initially neglected and ignored by the Chinese Communist Party during the early twentieth century. It is an interesting paradox in which the communist government initially shunned its own heritage. It opted for foreign or Western music and its instruments. Chinese instruments were reshaped later by the Western influence, ideas, and aesthetics. As music author James P. O'Brien noted: "It is important to realize alternation in China, between isolationist tendencies and foreign influence" (O'Brien, 1994, p.135). Isabel Wong further emphasized that "the Chinese intelligentsia, confronted with Western music and Western views on music, reacted to them, tried to understand them, and eventually took action to adapt them for the reshaping of traditional Chinese music and music scholarship" (Wong, 1991, p.37). At first this was at the expense of traditional instruments such as the *erhu.* Later the *erhu* was incorporated into the mix. For the *erhu* the 'reshaping' suggested by Isabel Wong took the form of syncretic music-making such as its use in the modern Chinese orchestra, an expanded ensemble based on a Western Symphony Orchestra and string quartet ensembles such as the SHQ.

Another paradox to note is that Confucian categorizations regarding the ideology of music learning have remained important even though May Fourth scholars wanted to reject Confucianism. Four types of music were categorized during the Sui Dynasty (581-618 A.D) and Tang Dynasty (618-907 A.D). The *yayue*[11] (elegant and refined

[11] In Chen Yang's *Yueshu* (Book of Music) of 1101, a detailed description of *yayue* could be found as the first surviving material regarding this practice during the Tang Dynasty.

music) meant ceremonial or courtly music, music for the nobility and Confucian ritual for the Imperial family. *Yanyue*[12] (banquet music) symbolizes the empire's prosperity and the gentry's constant desire to be entertained and their aesthetic way of living. Third, is the *suyue* (commoner's music). This category included an array of music for the proletariat and professional musicians or street musicians, labelled as down-trodden social misfits. The *erhu* belonged in this category until the early twentieth century. The fourth category is the *huyue,* which means foreign music, and this included music from *Fu ran* (South East Asia), Korea, India and other countries.

During the Sui and Tang Dynasties music was revered and viewed as having a natural order to follow which contributed to the success of dynasties and heirs to the monarch. As such, each dynasty acquired specialists from the Bureau of Music[13] to manage all music festivities, ceremonial music and banquets, in order to look after the interests of the Imperial throne. Music was also considered to be of high moral value and virtue, but this applied to the ruling class only. On the other hand, Daoists opposed feudalism as exalted by Confucianism. In the Chinese metaphysical tradition of Daoism, it is the merger of two cosmic forces that harmonizes the universe, where there is one positive and one negative force. As Confucianism preaches success, Daoism provides a refuge for those lacking opportunity for betterment (Needham, 1962). *Yang* represents the positive (+) and *yin*, the negative (-). Ethnomusicologist Rembrandt Wolpert explains that these *yang yin* dualism or cosmic energies are found in the twelve musical notes of the dodecatonic octave. These were divided into two groups of six, representing the *yang* and *yin* tones of male and female phoenixes (pheasant-like birds). Those obtained from rising fifths represented the *yang*, and those derived from descending fourths represented the *yin* (Wolpert, as quoted in Fletcher, 2001, p. 330).

As mentioned above, prior to the twentieth century the *erhu* was the instrument of the proletariat producing *suyue.* This categorization of music ceased to be used after the insurgence of the Communist Party. The *erhu* accompanied in operas and later emerged in the twentieth century as a solo instrument of equivalent status with the other Chinese instruments such as the *qin, pipa* and *guzheng*. This rise in status stemmed from the belief of Liu Tian Hua (1895-1932), a leading *erhu* and *pipa* innovator and composer that Chinese music needed to be reformed. One of his efforts included the founding of a *Guoyue Gaijin She* - "Society for the Improvement of National Music"- in Beijing. He helped develop playing techniques on traditional instruments and deployed Western interpretive styles and techniques to traditional Chinese pieces. This reformation continued right through the establishment of the People's Republic of China.

Mao's concept of "mass-line"[14] for the creative arts meant compositions were written

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[12] "Yanyue was a court musical performance for the nobles and gentries during a state function and during days of festivities" (Liang, 1985, p.99).

[13] The Bureau of Music was established during the Han Dynasty (202 B.C-200 A.D) and subsequently survived in various guises through different dynasties up until the twentieth century.

[14] A strategy or process that has two components: mobilization and organization, in line with Mao Zedong's revolutionary changes.

as themes with a rural emphasis, that is, for the working masses. As it was previously categorized as *suyue*, the *erhu* was in a quintessential position to become the musical instrument for the general populace. Writers, artists and folk musicians were urged to seek inspiration from the masses with the changing directions of being "cleans[ed] of any religious or erotic content" (Rees, 2000, p.20) in their musical compositions. This distinguishes it from all the other Chinese traditional instruments, which are associated with courtly traditions of music-making and were (and sometimes still are), tarnished in Communist eyes. Music author and *erhu* player Colin Huehns notes, "[Therefore], it may not be too strong to say that, for this reason, the *erhu* represents the soul of the Chinese communist Party elite" (Huehns, 2000, p.94). By the 1960s, the once ignored *erhu* was the popular proletariat instrument favoured by the Communists. The political ideology which promoted values counter to the past feudalistic and capitalist elite required a "cultural platoon" which was headed by composers like Lu Ji[15] (1890) and Ma Ke[16] (1918). Lu, in particular, was influential in the shaping of modern Chinese music. It is fair to say that the popularity of the *erhu* today is a direct result of such cultural engineering.

Parallel to the development of the *erhu* was the proliferation in the first quarter of the twentieth century of the Western art of music, with the founding of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music in 1927, followed later by Conservatories of Music in Guangzhou and Fujian Province, offering both Western and Chinese traditional music subjects. This continued right through to the open-door policy initiated by the ruling government at the beginning of the 1980s which attracted quite a sizeable audience who flocked into Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou (Canton) to witness the performances of invited or visiting Western orchestras (Wong, 1997).

A famous casualty of the communist indecisive attitude to the *erhu's* role in Chinese society was the blind *erhu* player Abing. Yang Yin-Liu[17] (1899-1984), a historian and musicologist, once worked closely with Abing. Yang's main contribution was the publication of *Zongguo Yinyue Shigang* (Historical Outline of Chinese Music) written in 1944 encompassing local music scholarship, musical taxonomies and methodology for the study of the history of Chinese music. He was one of those responsible for making a recording of Abing's performance on his *erhu.* The exploitation of Abing's *erhu* pieces 'The Moon Reflected on Second Springs' by the communist government brought such agony to Abing that he resigned to isolate himself and refrain from playing the instrument ever again. His "battered" work was reinstated to its present glory after China's "liberation," (as it is called in mainland China after 1949). This summarizes the strands of political influence on the development of the *erhu.* It was first ignored by early revolutionists from the 1900s to 1930s, in favour of Western string instruments and orchestra. Later it was re-discovered as a proletariat instrument, suitable for propagating communist ideologies in promoting a productive agrarian society.

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[15] Lu Ji, who once studied at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, was a member of the Chinese Communist Party and later the chief party spokesman on policies regarding music (Zhongguo Yinyue Cidian, 1984). He was also the founder and the first Director of Central Conservatory of Beijing.

[16] Ma Ke composed many compositions comprising mass songs for nationalist propaganda purposes as well as folk songs.

[17] See (Zhongguo Yinyue Cidian, 1984) for a biography of Yang.

1.3 PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION AND MUSICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE *ERHU*

1.3.1 ORGANOLOGY AND TUNING

The *erhu* is about 81 cm long and has a thin neck made of hardwood. There are two tuning pegs or handles found at the upper end of the stem. One end of the resonator chamber is covered with snakeskin while the other end is carved in lattice or left open. "The top of the neck is often carved in the form of a stylized head of a dragon [a symbol of prosperity in Imperial China] or bat" (Liang, 1980, p.270). As mentioned earlier, two steel strings run through the *qianjin* and over a narrow bridge, placed in the middle of the snakeskin. The *qianjin* (a cord loop) acts as a regulator of the height from the neck of the *erhu* as well as ensuring the evenness of the vibrating length of the strings. A piece of small foam or cloth is placed behind the bridge to muffle its tone giving it a fine, rich but quiet sound. Thus, additional amplifiers or microphones are required for the *erhu* to be heard in a concert hall during a solo performance (see photo 1.1, p.9).

The resonator carved with *hongmu* or padouk wood (which resembles rosewood) is about 13 cm in length and 9.6 cm in diameter and is covered with python skin glued around the outer sides. The other side of the wooden drum resonator is made of ebony or sandalwood with an octagonal, circular or hexagonal shape. The colour and age of the wood determines the sound quality of the *erhu*. The thickness of the skin, which is evenly scraped, plays a role in determining the degree of brightness in tone. The thinner the skin, the brighter is the tone. A characteristic of the *erhu* is the humming or sometimes described as "whining" tone, deemed close to the human voice, which relies on the thickness of the snakeskin for its eloquent and expressive tones.

The wooden bow is a thin bamboo stem or resilient reed connected to approximately 150 to 200 nylon strands or fibres from the horse's tail that make up the bow hair. A prominent feature of the *erhu* is that the bow hair is permanently inserted between the two strings. The general thought was that, originally, all *huqin* could be played by tribal horsemen while riding without the bow slipping off. The bow could however be removed when changing the strings or bow.

The *erhu* player usually rests the *erhu* wedged on the left upper thigh, while holding the instrument with the left hand. The right hand would be preoccupied with pushing and pulling the bow (*tuigong* and *lagong),* horizontally on the two strings. The bow sits approximately one inch above the bridge[18]. The higher and thinner string sits furthest away from the body. The player pushes the bow away from himself on the outer string. The lower and thicker string sits closest to the body. The player then pulls the bow towards himself on the inner string. The outer string is called wai *xian* (in Chinese) as this is the further string, away from the player and *nei xian* for the inner string[19].

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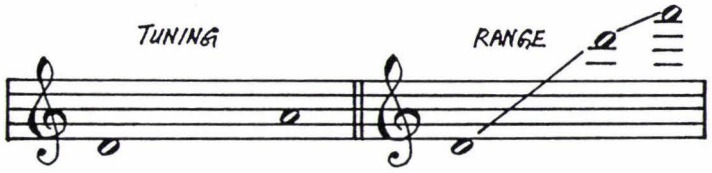
[18] See appendix C, picture 1.1. Illustrations to display the bowing of the outer and inner strings by the pushing and pulling effect.

[19] See appendix C, picture 1.2. Illustrations to show how the strings are depressed in various positions on the strings.

The *erhu's* musical range is about three octaves from D^1 to D^3 and the two strings are tuned a fifth apart, usually D^1 and A^1 [20] (see ex. 1.1). The lower of the two strings is either the tonic or dominant of the piece being played. There are special exceptions to the tuning above. An example is the 'Great Wall Capriccio' by Liu Wen-Jin for which the *erhu* was tuned C^1 to G^1 instead as required by this piece. No further adjustment of the pitches is required once the strings are tuned and the *erhu* can then be played in any key that is with a 'movable *doh.*' The interval of the 5^{th} seems paramount. It is more crucial when the *erhu* is being tuned that the pitches of the two strings remain a fifth apart than the accuracy of the pitch of the strings itself [21]. In other words, the D^1 and A^1 mentioned above are only guides.

Flexibility in tuning is important as *erhu* players often lower the tension of the string by a tone or so, to achieve the warranted timbral or tonal effect of a piece he or she is playing. For example, the famous *erhu* player Abing favoured the use of thicker strings and employed the absolute tuning of a perfect fifth, G to D^1.



Ex. 1.1

If two *erhu* are used as in *Jiangnan Sizhu*[22] or Jiangnan silk and bamboo ensemble, the lead *erhu* is then tuned to D^1 and A^1 while the other is tuned to both B and $F\#^1$ or A and E^1. The leading *erhu* is also known as *fanhu* which means "course-tuning"[23] as in guitar playing. Its strings are thicker than the second *erhu.*

Another interesting feature is that the instrument is devoid of a fingerboard. The fingers depress the two strings simultaneously without hitting the wood of the neck.

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[20] The top octave of its range can only be achieved by fine players. D^1 is a major 2^{nd} above middle C and the 3 on the D^3 note denotes three octaves higher on the D note based on the Chinese simplified numerical system.

[21] See appendix C, picture 1.3. Diagram shows the tuning of the two strings.

[22] The music played in the tea-houses and leisure-centres of Shanghai, and commonly [found] throughout southern Jiangsu and northern Zhejiang" (Jones, 1995, p.270). *Jiangnan sizhu yinyue* or silk-bamboo elegant music is a type of entertainment music usually played by a chamber ensemble, comprising amateur string and wind players. It "is predominantly an urban genre and was a favourite pastime of the gentry and educated class" (Liang, 1985, p.219).

For *Jiangnan sizhu* music, the largest collections of such music is by Gan Tao (1985) and as for *sizhu* studies, they could be found in Gao Hou Yong's book (1981), J.L.Witzleben's dissertation (1987) and others (Thrasher, 1993).

[23] Course-tuning for guitar playing meant two strings instead of the usual single string on the guitar, being pegged together to produce a richer sound tuned to the same pitch or an octave higher. During the Renaissance and Baroque period, these could be found on three or four strings of the lutes being pegged into two strings whilst the remaining strings are single strings.

This allows ample room for the strings to be manipulated freely. However, the strings should always be depressed firmly[24]. The potential for tremendous tone flexibility to produce special effects like the horse galloping and neighing is widely used by Chinese composers. The *erhu* is a difficult instrument to master. The alteration of the tension of the strings, due to the pushing and pulling bow action, as well as judging the correct length of the vibrating string to produce vibratos, can prove to be very challenging for novice players.

Erhu can be purchased off the shelf in many music centres that import Chinese instruments in Malaysia and Singapore, for example the Zhuan Yi Music Centre or through PCCO (Professional Cultural Chinese Orchestra) in Kuala Lumpur. Special orders for more expensive or modified versions of the *erhu* can be made through agents acting for the company. In Suzhou, Shanghai, and Beijing, craftsmen's hand-made instruments of the best wood and snakeskin, are sold only at the factory to well-connected professional musicians and their students. The cost of a fine *erhu* is equal to several months' salary for a Chinese musician (Liu, 2002, p.175).

1.3.2 INFLUENCES ON CURRENT *ERHU* AESTHETICS

The sound quality of the *erhu* is dramatic, expressive and wistful. It is also described as a combination of masculine and feminine, demanding and extroverted as in masculine, as well as coaxing and subtle as in feminine. These were the important traits valued by the post-1949 Communist ruling class that recognized the *erhu* as a symbolic representation of the rural peasantry and the voice of the proletariat. Such tone quality is also valued today by the SHQ.

There are generally two obvious influences on *erhu* playing in China today, the "glorification of the masses" through *erhu* music and its development of virtuoso *erhu* technique which can be seen in the *Qinpai erhu* school (New Era *erhu school*) of playing and in many noted *erhu* establishments in China that emerged in the 1970s. *Erhu* compositions from the current *Qinpai* school tend to demand immense energy from the player. They contain huge leaps with aggression and mesmerising passion, which is quite contrary to the delicate, refined and veiled sound of the silk and bamboo music or *Jiangnan sizhu* music of Southern China, from where silk and bamboo music draws influence. However, that does not indicate that *sizhu* music[25] (refer footnote 22) places less emphasis on dynamic changes.

Qinpai erhu pieces are formulated from the Shaanxi folk song elements and the

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[24] See appendix C, picture 1.4. To depress and indicate the string motion.

[25] *Sizhu* music can be found in five principal regional styles in China. They are *Jiangnan sizhu, Guangdong xiaoqu* (Cantonese little songs), *Chaozhou xianshi* (poetic strings of Chaozhou), *Fujian qingyin* (elegant music of Fujian), and *baisha xiyue* (white sand of soft music) (Liang, 1985, p.220).

melodious operatic style of *Qinqiang*[26], named after the capital of Shaanxi Province. "*Qinpai erhu* is the successful blending of the demands of the modern marketplace, an influx of Western philosophy and aesthetics and an indigenous musical language" (Huehns, 2000, p.109). As for *Jiangnan sizhu* music, "direct Western influence [may have] been minimal", but "indirect influence" [did occur]. As such, with China's long standing history of borrowing from foreign concepts, ideas and objects, it is undeniable that despite the *Jiangnan sizhu* ensemble's recognition "as icons representing the Chinese culture, [its musical instruments] are evolved from prototypes not indigenous to China" (Witzleben, 1995, p.136).

These various styles of *erhu* solo and ensemble playing serve to influence the Singapore Huqin Quartet and Singapore composers such as Phoon Yew Tien. These techniques of *erhu* playing found their way to Singapore through aspiring musicians or teachers who had continued their music studies in Qinpai *erhu* conservatoires and/or were exposed to the "silk and bamboo" style of playing in China.

1.3.3 *ERHU* MASTERPIECES BY VARIOUS COMPOSERS

A classic *erhu* piece, *Guan Shan Yue* 'Moon over the Mountain Pass', remained a legendary work composed during the Tang period for an ensemble (Shen, 1998). In the 1940s, *erhu* virtuosic performer and composer Lu Xiu Tang's *Huai Xiang Xing* 'Memory of Hometown' was well-known during those turbulent years. In the 1950s Shang Shao contributed a series of traditional "technical exercises from theatrical practices including *erhu* exercises for Huju (of Shanghai), Yuju (of Henan) and Qinqiang (of Shaanxi)" (Shen, 1998, p.28).

Currently, George Gao Shao-Quing is known for his incorporation of jazz, pop and new age compositions into *erhu* repertoire, gaining recognition for his innovations in his delivery of 'Little Cabbage', that depicts the current trends of contemporary writing styles. His repertoire also includes Chinese traditional music. One of these was his astounding interpretation of Liu Wen-Jin's 'Great Wall Concerto', during his 1998 performance with the Mississauga Symphony in Canada. Rong Chun Zhao's transcriptions for the *erhu* entitled 'Hora Staccato', presents a Western music interpretation similar to playing on a Western music instrument. Many special effects, as in the whimsical horse neighing of Chen Ju's 'Galloping War-Horses' at the end of the piece, reflected the many possibilities of the instrument.

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[26] *Qinqiang* is an operatic style of the Shaanxi Province and its surrounding areas, and had flourished in the nineteenth century.

Below are some renowned *erhu* pieces often played by the Singapore Huqin Quartet and are also current repertoires for *erhu* players in Malaysia and Singapore.

- Ten solo pieces by Liu Tian Hua
- *The Moon Reflected on the Er-Quan* by Hua Yan Jun (Abing)
- *Ting Song*, Listening to the Pines by Abing
- *The Flowing River Water* by Min Hui Fen
- *Sanmenxia Changxiang qu,* The Sanmen Gorge Capriccio by Liu Wen Jin (See appendix D, example 4 for transcription of piano music.)
- *The Yubei Ballad* (a Northern Henan Ballad) by Liu Wen Jin
- *The Great Wall Capriccio*, *erhu* concerto by Liu Wen Jin
- *Erhu* Concerto No.1. Red Plum by Wu Hou Yuan
- *Xin Sheng*, New Life – a Tibetan composition arranged by Liu Ming Yuan

CHAPTER TWO

2.1 INTRODUCTION OF THE SINGAPORE HUQIN QUARTET AND THE MEMBERS' PROFILES

An ensemble that is currently experimenting with a new syncretic idiom of *erhu* music and playing techniques is the Singapore Huqin Quartet. Following the traditions of Liu Tian Hua and Abing they incorporate both Chinese and Western melodies and performing techniques in their performances. The Singapore Huqin Quartet (occasionally referred to as the SHQ in abbreviation), was conceived as a new medium of expression and idiom in Chinese ensemble music. After its debut concert in December 1999 and the many successful performances that followed, the Singapore Huqin Quartet was seen as "the first and only independent Chinese string quartet in Singapore and possibly internationally," that has a permanent set-up (Singapore's Reviews of the Arts Magazine, 1999). It has drawn much attention in Singapore by demonstrating ingenuity and creativity and by blurring the divide between Western and Chinese music.

The Singapore Huqin Quartet comprises four string players from the Singapore Chinese Orchestra (SCO), who are masters of the various *huqin* that they play. They were all born in Singapore and are descended from Chinese families. Poh Yee Luh, who is also SCO cellist, plays the lowest and mellow-toned *gehu* and is the founder of the quartet. Ling Hock Siang is a graduate from Shanghai Conservatory of Music and plays the intermediate range *erhu*. Cheng Chung Hsien plays the alto or *zhonghu,* and the high-pitched *gaohu* player is Chiang Kum Mun.

The quartet was born out of the players' enthusiasm for Chinese traditional music and Western chamber music. It began as a fun project to create something unique, but soon became a serious undertaking for the foursome. Ling, the *erhu* player explains,

> "although you see a *huqin* quartet featured in concert programmes every now and then, none of these is a permanent set-up. In China, there are quartets and quintets of various forms. They are either made up purely of plucked-string instruments or combinations of these with bowed-string and wind instruments" (Singapore's Reviews of the Arts Magazine, 1999).

There has yet to be one ensemble that involves strictly only the bowed-string family. Ling makes regular trips to the Shanghai Conservatory of Music in China, as he believes in improving his technique and equipping himself with a better understanding of the *erhu* and its repertoire. He brings new ideas back with him to further develop the potential of the Singapore Huqin Quartet.

The SHQ has also explored pieces of non-Chinese origin and styles. I had the opportunity to witness its maiden performance held at the Malaysian Institute of Art recital hall in September 2000 where I played host. It was intriguing to watch the SHQ demonstrate the broad expressive capabilities of these *huqin*, breaking away from the conventional norm, with their uniqueness in recreating a stylistic approach of a Western string quartet. The Singapore Huqin Quartet performed skilfully on new, rearranged or restylised compositions in the Chinese and Western idiom with dexterity, ease and confidence.

2.1.1 HISTORY AND PROFILE

The Singapore Huqin Quartet was formed in June 1998. As the SHQ comprises only instruments of the *huqin* family, it endeavours to seek new variations in approaches to Chinese chamber music. Its first appearance was at the Malaysian Institute of Art in Kuala Lumpur and since then many concert tours have followed, including tours to the Brisbane and Adelaide Festival Centres. The Singapore Huqin Quartet has also successfully delivered various talks and presentations to composers. Since its concert at the Jubilee Hall in Singapore, the Quartet has also performed regularly at the Singapore Art Museum. It has also performed at the City Chamber Hall, with a programme comprising mainly works by Singaporean composers, as well as at the Esplanade during the Chinese Festival of Arts in February 2003. Through the National Arts Council of Singapore, the SHQ showcased its performance skills at the Cervantino International Festival in Mexico in October 2002, and was greeted with high acclaim and standing ovations. A month later, it once again was on stage at the Asia Music Festival in Seoul, Korea.

2.1.2 SINGAPORE'S MUSICAL HERITAGE IN CONTEXT

Singapore's musical heritage is diverse. Here I will outline the Chinese and British factors from which the SHQ draws influence. I will not look at the indigenous Malay or Indian influences as they are not apparent in the SHQ's playing. Singapore was separated from the Federation of Malaya on 9 August 1965, two years after being part of the formation of the federation which comprises Malaya, Sabah and Sarawak. Malacca, being a centre point for trade, bureaucracy and religious activities, is from where the Peranakan[27] culture traces its early beginnings. The Peranakan soon found their way to Singapore Island. The Eurasians, whose ancestors were Portuguese, were amongst the early settlers besides the Peranakan who arrived from the state of Malacca.

Chinese Influences

As early as the 1500s, colonialism transformed the state affairs of Peninsular Malaysia by establishing the infrastructure of the government, without violating the rights of the Sultanate hierarchies and religious practices which, up until today, helped establish the judiciary system. As part of Peninsular Malaysia which was colonized from 1786, the state of Singapore had its early reputation as a trading port where merchants brought in their culture, religion, trade and influence. Early immigrants included Malay, Javanese, Bugis settlers and others. Chinese immigrants from Malacca and Riau had settled earlier. Only a few of the Province of Guangdong and Fujian's inhabitants formed part of the more recent immigrants to the Island. The infiltration of these various ethnic groups and their culture is why a multi-cultural nation can remain a majority of 77.5% ethnic Chinese, 14.2% of Malays, 7.1% of Indians and other peoples such as Eurasians in the late 1990s (Lee,

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[27] Peranakan is a mixture of Malay and Chinese race and culture where inter-marriages occured between Malay women and Chinese men. The men's roots could be traced back to Southern China (Fujian Province) who had migrated to Malacca and Penang in the 1400s.

1998, p.518).

British Influences

With its founder, Sir Stamford Raffles, in 1819, British influence was established in Singapore. It remains today and is still a member of the British Commonwealth, which marginalized and required its people to adopt Western culture and values beside their own cultural traits.

Western classical music became very popular in the 1960s and 70s. The establishment of the National Theatre in 1963 saw the fruition of musical activities through the presence of invited foreign and local artists and musical groups who shared the same commitment to the development of the performing arts. "Yet what the National Theatre and People's Association concentrated on [then] were only general cultural activities; creative musical work received no encouragement, [as] there was hardly any tradition for making new music" (Ting, Leong and Tan, 1990, p.98 and 99). Albeit, this growth of cultural legacy embraces the nation that is gripped at the same juncture by flourishing economic and industrial development. The 1970s saw further development of interest in Western classical music alongside higher standards of living and industrial expansion on the island. As mentioned by Singapore's renowned composers Ting Chu San, Leong Yoon Pin and Bernard Tan "during the seventies, over one hundred instrumental groups which included a Chinese-instruments orchestra, a traditional folk orchestra and ensembles were started" (Ting, Leong and Tan, 1990, p.100). With its present postmodern global diversity, "practices of mixing, syncretic hybridization, blending, fusion, creolization, collaboration," can be interpreted (Feld, p.265) as a cultural, social interactive happening. These changes invite musical intensity to a nation like Singapore. The SHQ's attempt at syncretic music-making is an example of intentional and innovative musical happening.

The Singapore Symphony Orchestra (SSO) was founded in 1979, initiated by the sponsorship of its government. Choo Huey expanded his role as the conductor, and encouraged the younger generation to embrace Western classical music. Furthermore, Lim Yau, who holds the rein of the Singapore Youth Orchestra (SYO), is extolled for cultivating aspiring musicians in Western classical music-making. This paradigm supported the continued efforts of the Singaporean authorities to enhance the understanding of foreign music and culture. It is within this context that the players of the SHQ grew up encouraged to learn violins, violoncellos, *erhu* and *gehu,* for example, *gehu* player Poh Yee Luh. This can be seen in their brief biographies on the following page.

Broadly speaking, the cultural environment in Singapore is supportive of developing young musicians and groups or ensembles, encouraging them into any forms of cultural relativism in terms of syncretic works or performances. This trend has increased in recent years, with the founding of the Singapore Arts Festivals, the formation of the Composers' Circle in the 1980s, and the National Arts Council's offer of scholarships and sponsorship of overseas performances including local events. The Composers' Circle provides a springboard for composers to effectively

lobby for their works to be given due attention and also to organize unprecedented conferences and forums on new compositions and new forms of works. Furthermore, a Conservatorium of Music was built in 2003 at the National University of Singapore, supplementing the needs of growing interest in music education.

The initiation of Chinese orchestras as an extra-curriculum activity in addition to the school choir, on a small or large scale has become a standard curriculum for Singapore schools. There are currently 150 active Chinese orchestras in schools and institutions of higher learning in Singapore. It is a healthy pre-occupation for this explicitly urban environment. The idea of fostering social integration through cultural events also plays a part in this pluralistic society. As Tolstoy once remarked, music "is a means of union among men" which has made acquired audio-culture "indispensable . . . . towards the well-being of individuals and of humanity" (Tolstoy, 1929).

In 1996 the Singapore's Ministry of Education embarked on a musical project to inculcate communal spirit through schools by organizing interclass singing competitions as well as group singing. This deterrent against segregation amongst the multi-races helped unite the nation and create a national identity. Two years later, a multi-cultural promotional voice festival, 'Sing Singapore', was formed to further strengthen the government's policy of a united Singapore, emphasizing more local compositions in various vernacular and varied genre from Chinese folk music, Malay songs to Western pop music. Subsequently, the musical venture 'Festival of Songs', was held at open-air venues for the first time in 1994, to promote its citizens' participation (Lee, 1998)

The infrastructure of Singapore is a remarkable body of administration, with its pragmatic sets of policies, rules and regulatory bodies, which attempts to provide the arsenal for nation building, social, cultural, economic and general order. As Shostakovich[28] said in 1931, "there can be no music without ideology . . . . even the symphonic form, which appears more than any divorced from literary elements, can be said to have a bearing on politics" (Shostakovich, as quoted in Barry, 1989, p.182).

2.1.3 PROFILE OF THE SINGAPORE HUQIN QUARTET MEMBERS

CHIANG KUM MUN (*gaohu player*)

Chiang studied the *erhu* with a prominent *erhu* instructor Zhang Bing Zhao during his secondary school days in Singapore. In 1995, the Zubir Said Scholarship was awarded to him by the National Arts Council, which provided him with the springboard to pursue his music study under *erhu* maestros such as Chen Yao Xin and Min Hui Fen. This enabled Chiang to establish a strong foundation in *erhu* performing. He received a study grant from the Singapore Chinese Orchestra Company Limited, and furthered his music study in *erhu* and *gaohu* performing

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[28] Interview in the *New York Times,* 20 December 1931, quoted in Schwarz, *op cit.*

techniques and skills in 1998, with Chen Yao Xin and Yu Qi Wei in Beijing and Guangzhou respectively.

Chiang won first prize in the *erhu* senior section of the 8th National Music Competition in 1991. He won the National Chinese Instrumental Solo Open Category in 1992. He has been the instructor of Cheng San Community Club Chinese Chamber Ensemble since 1990. The ensemble now known as Cheng San Echoes of the Valley won the first prize at the National Chinese Music Competitions Ensemble Open Category. Chiang's performance has been highly commended by the local Chinese music circle, for his virtuosity as an *erhu* and *gaohu* player.

LING HOCK SIANG *(erhu player)*

Ling started learning the violin at the age of eight. He was introduced to *erhu* playing in 1982, when he became a member of the Dunman High School Chinese Orchestra. He went on to win the first and second prize in the junior and senior categories at the 1983 and 1985 National Music Competition respectively. Ling became a member of the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts City Chinese Orchestra and continued to develop his skill in *erhu* playing. He soon took over the role as its *erhu* instructor and principal player. He then travelled on a concert tour to Malaysia, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Beijing and Tianjin with the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts City Chinese Orchestra.

In 1993, Ling pursued his study at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music under a National Arts Council scholarship, majoring in *erhu* and violin, where he learns under the tutelage of *erhu* master, Wang Yong De and violinist Zhao Dan Qing. Upon graduating in 1998, he embarked on his performing career with a well-received concert in Shanghai. Ling is currently a professional *erhu* performer with the Singapore Chinese Orchestra and taught various school orchestras.

CHENG CHUN HSIEN *(zhonghu player)*

Cheng had his early *erhu* training from an *erhu* specialist, Lim Ah Leck, while in primary school in Singapore. He became the Concertmaster of the Singapore Youth Chinese Orchestra in 1979 and the Kampong Chai Chee Community Centre Chinese Orchestra, after he completed his education at a local secondary school. His involvement in these orchestras led him to the many opportunities of performing abroad in Hawaii, United States of America, Canada and Malaysia.

In 1987, Cheng participated in the National Music Competition and emerged the champion for the *erhu* in the open category. He was commended by Liu Ming Yuan (ibid) as a *huqin* performer of great potential. With the sponsorship of the Singapore Cultural Fund, Cheng studied at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music in 1989 under Xiang Zu Ying and Min Hui Fen. On his return he learnt the fine art of *erhu* playing from Wang Guo Tong.

Currently, he is a member of the Singapore Chinese Orchestra as well as instructor and conductor of several secondary schools Chinese orchestras.

POH YEE LUH *(gehu player)*

Poh began his musical training on the violin and later the violoncello during his secondary school days. His instructors were Leslie Tan and Hermina A. Ilano. Poh became the principal cellist attached to the Singapore Youth Orchestra. This led to his participation in the ASEAN Music Festival in Indonesia in 1991, as well as the ASEAN Composers' Music Workshop in Kuala Lumpur. In 1992, he was also involved in the Singapore Arts Festival New Music Forum.

His versatility as a string player saw him actively free-lancing and teaching in both the Chinese and Western orchestras. At present, he serves as the cellist with the Singapore Chinese Orchestra, coaching the National Technological University (NTU) String Ensemble and occasionally performing with the Singapore Lyric Theatre's Orchestra.

Members of the Singapore Huqin Quartet. From left: Ling Hock Siang, Chiang Kum Mun, Cheng Chung Hsien and Poh Yee Luh.

Photo 2.1

2.2 INTERVIEW WITH THE SINGAPORE HUQIN QUARTET'S MANAGER, TERENCE HO.

Issues of marketing and audience numbers are a constant concern for the SHQ's manager, who is working in a commercial environment with an experimental new ensemble form. In a recent interview with Terence Ho Wee San, the manager of Singapore Huqin Quartet, he mentioned that the SHQ is the first *huqin* ensemble in the world. He believes that the SHQ will contribute to the development of the cultural scene in Singapore as long as it remains marketable. A look at Singapore's musical heritage mentioned earlier in this chapter would paint a clearer picture of this nation's drawing of the West and Chinese, as well as its unity in diversity. I asked Ho about the other key concepts that were important to the SHQ when it was first introduced. Ho pointed out that

> The SHQ was formed by four 'Great Minds,' who think and feel alike with their passion and enthusiasm for chamber music. With their strong desire to achieve artistic excellence, I certainly felt that they would put their best effort together to make the Quartet develop, in Singapore and beyond.

At first glance, it may be assumed that the cultural scene in Singapore is not as significant as the modern IT, industrial, trading and business world that Singaporeans avail themselves. However, the government is recognizing the needs of its citizens to have some degree of cultural identity, be it for tourism, the development of c.q (cultural quotient)[29], self-expression and others. Singapore's policy of discipline and 'clean living' is reiterated by a Singaporean whom I had met, and who had mentioned that they are from a 'fine society'[30].

Reflecting on the current state of music making in Singapore, as discussed on pages 22 to 23, I asked Mr Ho whether the SHQ's direction is in line with the nation's aspiration of unity in diversity as well as authenticity. Has its members recognized its government's policy of cultural well-being, and accepted the nation's call for musical diversity, along with the preservation of its own musical heritage? Perhaps foremost, Ho elaborated that the SHQ is very much in its infancy stage and is

> treading on an uncharted territory, by working on music on an experimental basis. The SHQ is very committed and working very hard in developing the different strategies needed for each of their performances. They had to look into preserving the *huqin's* tone production, that is the real colour of the instrument, as well as interpreting their authentic or traditional form with Liu Tian Hua as their model, [See Chapter Five], as it is the most important aspect for international performances.

Singapore's musician and music scholar, Lee Tong Soon, mentioned that "cultural coexistence, and therefore musical variety, is Singapore's strength and identity, reflecting the national goal-unity in diversity" (Lee, 1998, p.525). This supports musicologist Robert P. Morgan's statement, that "the traditional concept of culture as

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[29] Cultural quotient denotes the ratio of a person's cultural exposure and standards in terms of cultural well-being to the statistical norm.

[30] This is in fact a common joke for the words, "fine society" that is 'paying fines' for any forms of misdemeanour.

a unified complex of elements that work together to create an integrated, homogeneous whole, has thus been abandoned in favour of one allowing for high levels of diversity and instability" (Morgan, 1992, p.58).

The SHQ is busy with invitations to perform at local concert halls and festivals abroad. It performed in Wellington for the 10th New Zealand International Arts Festival in March 2004. Ho believes that the New Zealand tour and festivals are in line with the cultural motivation of the music industry in Singapore, and a musical experience with comparative perspective for the SHQ.

Whilst discussing the melding of two varied sources from the Chinese musical hemisphere and that of Western art, it can be said that they are actually musical preferences creating a repertory that deals with a pentatonic framework over underlying Western modal features. It is without argument that with the vast musical background that the SHQ possesses on Chinese music and *huqin* playing, the establishment of different sets of methods and musical attitudes could surface easily.

I asked Ho whether the SHQ faced any difficulties whilst it was set up. Ho says that the members encountered teething problems with the balancing of voices of their *huqin* instruments. He further pointed out that

> many people considered it not possible for *huqin* to sound harmoniously together, but the SHQ had successfully engineered this. Its formation had been an unprecedented milestone in Chinese music scene, with the introduction of different musical elements of traditional and Western, which indulges on a spectrum of showcase of their repertoire.

However, that did not deter them from venturing abroad and working on refining their own characteristic playing, away from the trappings associated with being a solo performer, as well as performing a solely contemporary repertoire.

I was interested to know whether the SHQ's repertoire mesmerizes and wins plaudits from the audience. Ho says that one of Singapore Huqin Quartet's advisors, Phoon Yew Tien, an accomplished local composer and Cultural Medallion recipient[31], specially tailored the group's first composition entitled "Thunder Storm and Drought" for the group to perform. The SHQ has so far received favourable responses from an appreciative audience regarding this piece, and he believes that it has achieved its aim of reaching out to the public since its first inception in June 1999. Ethnomusicologist Martin Stokes states that "the significance of a composer, a style or a projected multi-ethnic national musical identity emerges under specific ideological circumstances" (Stokes, 1994, p.14) is demonstrated by the Singapore's policies of supporting promising composers and their works.

The SHQ is working with the popularity of Western music by playing string quartet classics but also exploring the *erhu* repertoire. It is fair to say that the influence on urban music-making in Singapore is focused on a Western tailored idiom or elements

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[31] The Singapore Cultural medallion is a prestigious award given to a Singaporean musician or composer in recognition of his/her achievements and contributions to the local cultural scene in the island.

of music from the Western orchestra. Individual tuition in musical instruments, notably the piano, violin and the electronic organ, for young Singaporeans and music enthusiasts is very popular. More people are taking private instrumental lessons than in the 1960s. Young children receive their early childhood music education through private music establishments or music studios, and "more advanced musicians are guided through examinations conducted by foreign institutions (such as the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, London)" (Lee, 1998, p.524) until most recently by other examination boards which included the Guildhall School of Music to name just two. Musicians and composers also received Western music training at the Singapore School of Education.

This leads to the next relevant question. Does the music scene in Singapore encourage Chinese traditional music and does it opens its doors to the many possibilities of musical events? Ho mentioned that Western classical music may be the most popular form of music taught in Singapore, but schools here are also actively involved in the Chinese orchestra. The strategy is to cultivate interest and create awareness, signifying to a certain extent the whole continuum of Chinese music. Drawing from a Taiwanese example, relevant also to Singapore, Liang pointed out that "in the face of growing commercialism in music [as in Taiwan], and a culture saturated with Western ideas and styles, the fate of traditional Chinese music [will be] tenuous" (Liang, 1985, p.165). On the one hand, the introduction of the Chinese orchestra into schools, associations or guilds is widely welcomed by the locals, compared with the past when "many urban Chinese [labelled] their traditional music as 'backward,' and less 'scientific' than Western music" (Jones, 1995, p.62). Liang confirmed this with the statement that "overseas Chinese communities, such as those in Singapore, value the continuation of the [Chinese] traditional arts [or music]" (Liang, 1985, p.160).

Ho further said: "Our aim is also to highlight the many new directions that are taking place in the Singaporean scene within the various art forms such as dance, theatre, instrumental, singing and ensembles." He mentioned the group's learning initiative with regards to the various aspects of collaboration between different artists. They also attended forums, conferences and conventions to achieve and gather better and wider elements for the pieces they perform.

Another question that I posed was how does the Singapore Huqin Quartet prepare for a performance of this genre? Ho stresses that they usually start off with a repertoire selection, and work on the technique and the musical elements involved, as well as the traditional playing techniques. Members of the quartet then engaged themselves in a score reading session and played for the composers to assist them to interpret, transcribe and write for the SHQ. Local Singapore compositions are included in the repertoire to reflect its multi-cultural roots.

Composers Ting Chu San, Leong Yoon Pin and Bernard Tan mentioned that "one of the weaknesses of the Singapore cultural scene is the paucity of interaction between the different artistic disciplines [that] will clearly benefit from more communication" (Ting, Leong and Tan, 1990, p.113) between composers and musicians. Ho explains,

> the Singapore Huqin Quartet routinely meets with the composers of their music to exchange notes and ideas about interpretation. This is often not

> possible in other musical genres. Thus, the growth of Singapore Huqin Quartet's repertory and new playing idiom suggests a cohesive performer-composer relationship. This enables the composer to understand what is musically possible on the *huqin* and is reciprocated with accurate delivery of what is intended.

I asked how transcriptions are applied by the SHQ which interestingly enough, uses both Western and Chinese notations. The cipher notation system, or *jianpu,* is transcribed to a prescriptive Western notation system encompassing pitch, rhythms and other elements of music. Members of the Singapore Huqin Quartet believe that the incorporation of a new idiom of score transcriptions is carried out without losing sight of the traditional elements and characteristics of the instruments.

As ethnomusicologist Ter Ellingson notes, [one] can still hear echoes of the nineteenth-century Eurocentrism in the late twentieth century of writers who comment negatively on supposed deficiencies of non-European notations, taking the features of European notation as an implicit standard of what a notation system should represent (Ellingson, 1992, p.153). Such hierarchical thoughts on cross-cultural transcription would perhaps impress on some groups with the notion of a superior form of musical notation. However, the SHQ's composers have assimilated both the iconic and abstract musical symbols (refer Chapter Four) with ease as they are trained in Western conservatoria and possess vast experience in Chinese instrumentation. While Ellingson notes, "cross-cultural transcription began as a tool of colonial acquisitiveness" as both Western and Chinese notations are useful to the SHQ when used in conjunction with composer consultation (Ellingson, 1992, p.110).

It would be worthwhile to know whether the SHQ concentrates only on new works depicting its own version of traditional and Western idiom. Ho explains that basically, it still preserves the music of Liu Tian Hua (ibid) and the voice of the instrument. It performs works that range from the contemporary to the traditional, works that articulate the situation between the Chinese diaspora and the artists, whose creations reflect culture and traditions beyond their own. The ideology expounded was by no means the first, as many earlier composers had indulged in creating popular music with fusion of Western elements in the 1920s, especially during the time when Shanghai's film industry was thriving. Ho further elaborates that a prominent actress-singer Zhou Xuan (1918-1957), who sang the famous "Full Moon and Blooming Flowers," composed by Yan Hua, could be found in a host of records and even compact discs of today, reminiscing the singing style of yesteryear. I continued with the discussion on Yan Hua's style of writing, which adopted a Western scale tonality along with the modification of traditional music. Yan Hua's compositions are romantic, lyrical and also glaringly evident in composer Li Jin Hui's (1891-1967) writings. Ho and I shared the views of composer Xu Yi Hue who was interviewed by Stock in 1992 saying, "[Li Jin Hui's] music was essentially a kind of off-beat or sinified jazz, which fused Western instrumentation and harmony with largely pentatonic Chinese folk melodies."

I asked Ho what were the steps undertaken by the quartet to realize its aim and the rationale that initiated this prospect. Ho said that it is a learning process based on how the Singapore Huqin Quartet was set up, as it dwells on the integrity, cohesiveness and integration of this quartet. One of the aims of the SHQ is to create a

wide-ranging repertoire for future performances. At present, with their limited works made available to the public, music students and teachers, it is crucial that once technical demands are met, a wide repertoire will follow.

The other aim is to create interest for similar *huqin* quartets and ensembles to be set up and to explore the different kinds of art form on an experimental basis. This exerts the musical meaning of what new ensembles could explore and not just cliché or imitations *per se*.

As the SHQ wants to be commercially and artistically successful and is a business in the field of the arts, a demand and supply must be created. As scholar R.A.Sharpe has pointed out, "existing music will influence the next generation of composers and it will do so only through the creation of a listening public, of which the young composer is a member" (Sharpe, 2000). So this begins with creating awareness through participation. Ho further reiterated that, if there is a larger arts market, there will be more participants. Upon graduating from colleges, conservatoria or universities music students would create their own musical identity and further help develop the market forces that promote human development. As in all fields of the arts, music belongs to the milieu of the music industry, the pedagogical and the performing arts world. I am inclined to disparage the use of "business" but that plays an essential role in the livelihood of musicians and other performing artists. Ho's assumption that the "demand and supply which must be created" considers the many measures to be taken in order to be versatile, business or market oriented. With a progressive, financially steadfast and politically stable nation, the SHQ could generate cultural interest through the government's policies and by winning its support. This in turn will create the "demand" through socio-economic and political innovations.

The SHQ's attempt to meet the "supply" requirements is stimulating enough to arouse interest in the many possibilities of music-making that are economical, vibrant, of national prominence and distinctively Chinese or multi-ethnic.

2.3 INTERVIEWS WITH MEMBERS OF THE SINGAPORE HUQIN QUARTET

It was a pleasure to pose some questions to the four members of the Singapore Huqin Quartet on their aims for the ensemble. Poh said they are offering a new form of Chinese chamber music series and they hope to promote and expand the SHQ's repertoire. They are also aiming to promote musical awareness and interest to the general public and instil in them the richness and potential of their traditional heritage, as well as many new ideas and concepts, be they local or Western, that could be applied to the music of Singapore today. This is acknowledged by ethnomusicologist Harrison Ryker's[32] statement that Singapore and Hong Kong are two countries in South-East Asia that "produce[s] composers seeking ways to join their Asian musical heritage with Western techniques and styles," (Ryker, as quoted in Miller and Williams, 1998, p.127), and perhaps cultural imperialism *per se,*

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[32] See Ryker, Harrison, (1991). *New Music in the Orient.* Netherlands: Frits Knuf.

returning full circle to the quest for the growth and success of experimental ensemble groups. With the incorporation of the knowledge, arrangements and performing skills that they had acquired locally and abroad so far, Poh hoped that future ventures would prove beneficial and fruitful for their nation.

This prompted questions regarding the group's initial and future plans which were explained by Cheng, who said that their initial plan was to participate actively in local and international music and arts festivals, as well as performance visits to the homes of charitable organizations. He further mentioned that audience reaction has been positive and they would continue to strive for more meaningful and creative performances.

Ling echoed Cheng's views and spoke about their future plans of working on the incorporation of a combination of different instruments, such as *pipa*, piano, guitar and others, and they hoped to have a regular series of two concerts a year. They were also happy to be able to work together as a group, travelling and performing more than they thought they would when the quartet was initially formed. The paradigm here, as Nettl has observed, is that musical and cultural diversity is very much alive, and has not been eradicated or destroyed by the impact of syncretization of world music. He further pointed out that with the ever-changing national or global interactions amongst people, "the [new] sound [scape] has changed more than social context, behaviour or ideas" (Nettl, 1985, p.163).

Chiang hoped that they would be able to promote local composers and arrangers for premières of new works in this basic format as well as the local talented amateur players, for participation in the group's chamber music concerts. What are "new" and unexplored in this string chamber idiom are the vast possibilities of syncretism of Western and Chinese music, as well as being unique in its instrumental make-up. Chiang further pointed out that they do perform a wide range of modern and even film music, to entice the audience with little knowledge or appreciation of music, to still be able to relate to it, before deepening their understanding of a new form or style of music.

Nettl suggested that "the most important avenue of acculturation has been the passing of elements of Western music and musical culture to other cultures; and indeed, one might consider the coming of Western music to all cultures to be the most significant event in world music history of the twentieth century" (Nettl, 1992, p.381). It is undeniable that the recognition of musical changes, so much as to explore "new" musical territories, must be precipitated by the composer's desire and decision to realize that. This also requires the appropriate group, ensemble or orchestra to perpetuate such an interest. In so far as to ascertain any form of syncretism or innovation, a diachronic perspective must be employed to trace the historical process. This culmination of such a process dictates the musical view of the people. The community's definitions of new ensemble idiom acting upon their cultural knowledge, and how they relate to it, will signify that transcendence of syncretism denoting changes to their musical environment.

Considering the above, an understanding of the SHQ's aspirations is important to the development of this genre for this quartet. Cheng stated that they aspire to promote

local talent, home-grown musicians and collaboration with foreign musicians and artists in each project or performance they are participating in. For Cheng, it was truly inspiring to be able to learn from each experience they had as a quartet, as he considered it as a life-long learning process.

This led to a poignant discussion about the appointment of 'master' teachers for the *erhu* and various Chinese instruments in conservatoria and universities in Singapore and Malaysia, which hinged on the academic qualifications rather than solely on their musical ability. Generally speaking, the requirements stipulated by the Education Ministry and the Accreditation Board of Singapore and Malaysia for public and private institutions of higher learning spell out these prerequisites for a relevant Bachelor or Masters degree to all teachers or lecturing staff, as criteria for teaching designations. In mainland China, folk musicians had long gained recognition as professional musicians securing teaching positions with or without any form of formal education and/or the status quo. Cheng believed that in doing so, it would impede and de-emphasize the teaching and learning strengths and methods, due to curtailed expertise, necessary for shaping the student's musical proficiency.

With these thoughts in mind, Ling hoped that their group will be successful enough to be a new stimulus for Chinese instrumental string music among Asia's Chinese orchestra scene. He said it is starting to take shape in Singapore now, and he hoped that perhaps in a few years, there would be some adaptations in the context of musical development. Anthony Seeger considers the rationale of music-makers such as the SHQ when he says, "members of ethnic groups may see the character and defence of their group identity in a musical form, while nation-builders may see a pan-ethnic national character emerging in the same forms" (A.Seeger, 1992, p.90). Seeger speaks well of the Singapore situation, and indeed sums up the avowed purpose of the musical culture of an advancing nation.

Cheng sums up with their goal: "To fulfil the Singaporean government's policies to nurture its people's entrepreneurship spirit with the establishment of new ideas, a vision and new frontier world into which the government encourages them to venture. As a consequence of this, as part of its' contribution to the music education of young Singaporeans, the Singapore Huqin Quartet had made several visits to the INSEAD College, a leading institution of higher learning, as part of a case study for a group of international students undertaking an MBA course. This included educational concerts on campus, where a rapport is built between the students and members of the Singapore Huqin Quartet. As ethnomusicologist Andy Nercessian has pointed out:

> Musical cultures – are increasingly in contact with distant musics, musical elements, perspectives, et cetera, and are shaped by the impact of this contact, which can, to varying degrees, reflect the nature of cultural change locally (Nercessian, 2002, p. 23).

The points drawn from the interviews indicate that musical change and cultural interactions are not a recent phenomenon and are still happening in Singapore. The SHQ see themselves as pioneers of new ideas and vision, creating a new musical frontier by incorporating Western music and re-inventing Chinese music. As such, cultural boundaries are not a major marker for the dissemination of any idiom of

musical language that had been and was being introduced to this nation. As Lee Tong Soon had pointed out, "music performances as varied as jazz, bagpipes, karaoke, professional brass bands, school military bands, and religious music coexist with multitudinous forms of traditional and [Western] music" (Lee, 1998, p. 524-5).

The preservation of past traditional forms of music is the leitmotif to the present form of syncretism in the works composed by Phoon (to be introduced in the next section) and other exponents of this art, and is communicated through a medium such as the Singapore Huqin Quartet (see photo 2.2).

From left : Ling Hock Siang (erhu player), Chiang Kum Mun (gaohu player), Poh Yee Luh (gehu player) and Cheng Chung Hsien (zhonghu player) are the members of Singapore Huqin Quartet.

Photo. 2.2

2.4 DIALOGUE WITH COLLABORATIVE MUSICIAN MATTHEW MARSHALL

I had the pleasure of an interview with Matthew Marshall who is an Associate Professor and Head of the Conservatorium of Music at Massey University. He participated in the New Zealand International Arts Festival as a guitarist with the Singapore Huqin Quartet at the Ilott Theatre in Wellington on March 14, 2004. Marshall is New Zealand's leading classical guitarist whose career as a performer has included many solo performances in Britain, Germany, USA, Mexico, Russia, Australia, China, Malaysia and New Zealand. Despite his tight schedule as an academic and performer, Matthew Marshall travels widely to give masterclasses as well.

I questioned Matthew Marshall on his involvement with the SHQ and received some insightful comments on how the ensemble functions, its rehearsals and incorporation of cross-cultural ideas into practice. During the concert two pieces were performed by Matthew Marshall and the SHQ entitled "Guitar Concerto in D" RV 93 by Antonio Vivaldi and "Dance of the Yi Tribe" which was composed by Wang Hui Ran.

The first issue we discussed was his experience whilst working with other musical cultures. Matthew Marshall said:

> This is my first encounter playing with a string ensemble comprising Chinese musical instruments as in the SHQ. It is also the SHQ's first experiment on a Vivaldi piece as well as a Chinese folk piece, the "Dance of the Yi Tribe" being arranged for the guitar and the four *huqin* instruments. I did enjoy the rhythmic and musical possibilities that stretched the traditional limits of this genre by partaking with the SHQ in this performance.

I asked Matthew Marshall whether he encountered any difficulties working with the group.

> They were all very professional and gracious. I was given ample allowance to interpret, improvise and make changes to the music score arranged by Poh to suit the character of the guitar. As the "Dance of the Yi Tribe" was originally a twentieth-century Chinese music classic composed for the *pipa* (Chinese lute), its technical demands are different. For instance, I used an unconventional method of producing a tremolo. The application of the thumb and index finger by stroking the strings of my guitar and not the circular downward strokes of the conventional *pipa* playing are employed. We worked on the middle part of the "Dance of the Yi Tribe," as it was too fast and not feasible for the guitar, thereby reducing it to a reasonably fast tempo. Basically, the *huqin* instruments are constructed to be played with much agility and versatility which serves to augment the energy and spirit of folk tribes dance melodies.

The discussion moved on to how the rehearsal process worked. Matthew Marshall said they began by rehearsing in unison sectionally and then in parts. "The crucial aspect was to identify the cues and take turns to appear for each part or part-playing. The SHQ members were helpful in their explanations and this worked comfortably well amongst them and their guest soloist."

This led to another question on how he practised in anticipation for the concert. Matthew Marshall pointed out that the SHQ had sent him a compact disc of the *pipa* with the orchestra for the piece the "Dance of the Yi Tribe". Initially, he had some difficulty fully understanding the style of the Yi tribe folk song which begins with a melody in G minor and ends in G Major. These key changes were recomposed by Poh to create key tension and reinforce the musical theoretical affiliation to Western music. When Matthew Marshall was given the digital video disc to view, everything fell into a clearer perspective. What he gathered from the music is its depiction of customary merry-making of the young people of the Yi tribe dancing through the night around a campfire behind a picturesque background.

This prompted my next question on how Matthew Marshall felt as an observer of another piece 'Distant Reflections' by Joshua Chan written for the soprano

saxophone and piano which the Singapore Huqin Quartet performed during the same concert. Matthew Marshall said:

> the SHQ is more musically convincing in pieces written specifically in syncretic form or a Western contemporary piece. The balance in the SHQ playing, being less resonant in volume and in which the *zhonghu* is distinctively overshadowed by the *gehu* posed a challenge for the SHQ. The soprano saxophone and strings went well but the piano did not sound quite right and although the performer was superb, the timbre of the piano, however, compositionally seemed out of character with the other instruments in the ensemble.

I asked Matthew Marshall if the Singapore Huqin Quartet should play exclusively Chinese music on their *huqin* to keep the traditional Chinese pieces in its authentic or pure form or it was appropriate for them to reach out to include the Western forms.

> I am not a purist. I do not see it as a compromise at all. For the art of music to grow and develop, syncretism is important as it has dissolved musical boundaries, considering that musical aesthetics and influences have been happening as long as music existed. One can be both a serious soloist and manage a diverse musical style of genres as well. There is potential in both Chinese and Western instruments to be combined together and such mixing and matching requires instrumentation skills and an interactive idiom.

It is hoped that the possibility of a future concert together with the SHQ will materialize. Matthew Marshall echoed this sentiment and said that there will be such a possibility if he travels to Singapore. Matthew Marshall further mentioned that, "it would be interesting to explore a composition for a guitar soloist using two different guitars, an acoustic guitar and a 'prepared guitar' to imitate the sound of the *huqin* instruments."

It is the relationship between various kinds of crossover or formal syncretization and ideological Western aspects of classical music that accounts for the SHQ's choice of composition. The use of a Western instrument like the guitar indicates the different ways in which the *huqin* instruments and guitar can be treated. In this it mirrors the corresponding transformation into a musical product or genre serving as appropriate models for future musical interpretations. As composer Christopher Norris said: Music holds out the promise of a radical transformation, not only in our habits of aesthetic response but in every sphere of thought - ethics and politics included – where the relation between knower and known is a field potentially open for creative reimagining" (Norris, 1989, p.312).

2.5 COMPOSER PHOON YEW TIEN'S PROFILE

Phoon Yew Tien is one of Singapore's leading composers. He writes for both Western and Chinese orchestras, theatre music and dance drama. He has written eight pieces for the SHQ. Phoon blends Chinese and Western idioms to create new ones. He was born on August 21, 1952 in Singapore. He has a musical background that revolves round Chinese orchestras and its instruments, and lived in a traditional atmosphere and had a very oriental upbringing. He started learning to play the piano and flute whilst in secondary school, and is mainly self-taught. Phoon is a typical

Chinese Singaporean musician as he has undergone a mixture of Chinese and Western music education (see photo 2.3, p.38).

His significant output of works has gained him a reputation in Singapore as the most prolific and innovative composer amongst his contemporaries. He is known for his outstanding compositions and is highly sought after as a classical music composer. Phoon's mastery of both Chinese and Western symphonic music enables him to cover a host of cross-cultural musical styles through various genres of his compositions.

Phoon started his career by winning the Distinguished Prize in the National Song Writing Competition for his vocal compositions 'Our Song' (1977), 'Nanyang University' (1978) and 'Song for Workers' (1979). In 1980, Phoon secured a scholarship offered by Singapore Symphony Orchestra to pursue his music study at the Queensland Conservatorium of Music, Australia, majoring in Composition and Flute. He was then exposed to contemporary Western and classical forms of music. Whilst studying there, he was awarded the Dulcie Robertson Prize for the best composition of the year in 1980, 1981 and 1983.

In 1984 Phoon was awarded the prestigious Yoshiro Irino Memorial Prize for Composition by the Asian Composers League, a coveted award given to an upcoming young Asian composer. He was recognized for his contribution to the local music scene with the top Local Serious Music Award by the Singapore Composer and Authors Society (COMPASS). This was followed by another prestigious award, the Singapore Cultural Medallion Award in 1996.

Some of Phoon's principal works include: 'Han Shi' (1983) for Chinese Orchestra, which was commissioned and premiered by the Hong Kong Philharmonic Chinese Orchestra; 'Ping Diao' (1984) was commissioned and performed by the Singapore Symphony Orchestra; Autumn (1984) for strings, percussion and harp, was first performed at the Asia Pacific Festival in New Zealand in 1984, as well as at the Asian Composers League Conference; 'Meditations of a Poet' for chamber orchestra was showcased at the New Music Forum in 1987, and performed during the 1st International Chinese Composer Conference in Taiwan; 'Dances of Singapore' (1990) for mixed orchestra, was commissioned by the People's Association of Singapore; *Yangqin* concerto 'Di Nu Hua' for *yangqin* and Chinese Orchestra, is very empowering, and was performed at the Beijing Concert Hall.

Phoon has amassed a wide array of works for theatre music, which include 'Kopi Tiam' (1986), 'Lao Jin' (1990), 'Evening Climb' (1992), 'Fishing Eagle' (1994), 'Descendent of the Eunuch Admiral' (1995), 'The Spirits Play' (1998), '100 Years In Waiting' (2001). These compositions had been performed by various groups in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, Malaysia, England, New Zealand, Australia, France, Italy and the United States of America.

The highlight of his career so far has been his music for a dance drama 'Nu Wa', choreographed by a leading Singaporean choreographer Goh Lay Kuan in conjunction with the Singapore Festival of Arts in 1988. It was described as "one of the most substantially large-scale works of music Singapore has ever produced," in a

programme write-up about his compositions.

As mentioned earlier, Phoon has composed eight pieces so far for the Singapore Huqin Quartet and also certain pieces that incorporate other instruments such as flute and harp. His compositions for the SHQ can be classified as both Western and Chinese, but with fragments of each element, for example, the 'Concord'. 'Australian Encore' is an arrangement by Phoon combining Western and Chinese art music. The 'Three Cantonese Tunes' in three movements is definitely inclined towards some Chinese rhythm and folk melodies, but with organized Western idioms in terms of scalar structures and arrangements. Phoon is perhaps an example of the composer Blacking is referring to when he said: "The existence of learned responses in any culture enables a composer to communicate with music, by skilfully employing culturally significant sounds[33] together or in juxtaposition" (Blacking, 1995, p.41). Phoon composed the *Yue Qu San Zhang* for the Singapore Huqin Quartet's inaugural concert at the Jubilee Hall in December 1999 and which premiered in Australia and New Zealand in October 2000. Another piece, 'Sextet in Two Movements' for the Singapore Huqin Quartet, Chinese flute and Chinese harp, was composed for the quartet's maiden performance. 'Concord' and the 'Australia Encore' were first heard during the Quartet's concert tour to Australia and New Zealand in 2000.

In 2000 his 'Variants on an Ancient Tune' was taken to the stage by the Singapore Symphony Orchestra to mark its 20th anniversary. His latest rendition 'Confucius,' a Secular Cantata for Chinese orchestra, choir, children's choir and soloists, commissioned by the National Arts Council for the Singapore Arts Festival 2001, received an overwhelming response and interest from the public, for its ingenuity and musical meaning (see discography, p.127).

From 1993 to 1996, Phoon served as the Head of Music Department of the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts. He was a committee member of the Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts in 1988, and served on numerous bursary and scholarship committees. When Phoon acted as Singapore Chinese Orchestra's Assistant and Associate Conductor from 1984 to 1992, he was actively performing locally and overseas as a conductor, introducing and showcasing his own compositions as well as those of others. He has been the Arts Advisor to the Singapore Arts Council from 1998 until today. In 2002, he was appointed by the Singapore government to rearrange the National Anthem (in seven versions), which the author recently had the pleasure of listening to in Phoon's music room.

I was interested to discover how Phoon designed and organized his prolific output of various spectrums of works, (approximately 107 compositions). His works are fine combinations of Chinese and Western idioms, depicting local and contemporary styles and interpretation. He does not attempt to embellish his works too much and chooses to portray a transparent, sparse texture whilst carefully utilizing effective tone colour.

I had the pleasure of having an interview with Phoon Yew Tien at his home on

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[33] Culturally significant sounds were from certain timbres or tone qualities with patterns of melody or harmony, or of groups of instruments which did not have absolute meaning by themselves, as it was assigned to them by society and by people from different cultural background.

October 11, 2003 and was interested to find out what this creative musician thinks of his own compositions, his experiences as a performer, academic, composer, his ideas, modes of expression, social and political environment, and matters related to his development and transmission of his new musical idiom of thoughts and disposition.

The composer Phoon Yew Tien, at his workplace in Singapore, where he resides.

Photo 2.3

2.6 INTERVIEW WITH PHOON YEW TIEN

The interview with composer Phoon Yew Tien touched on his thoughts and ambitions; the role and efforts of the Singapore Huqin Quartet; various techniques of composing; improvisation and the different characteristics between Chinese and Western music (see photo 2.4, p.43).

I asked Phoon to share his experiences as a composer. In the 1970s, when he was a struggling music arranger, the music that he listened to influenced him tremendously. He elaborated on how Gershwin had to establish his own stylistic approach to his work before being taken seriously by music buffs of his era, as classical music was revered while other forms were viewed condescendingly. Phoon was afraid to go a step beyond that boundary of Chinese and Western music. The search for freedom of expression lingered on for him. Singapore at that time was short of resources and over a period of time he decided to write what he liked best and discovered "variations". He quoted a saying: "If you can compose variations, you can compose anything" and this proved true for him. For Phoon, variations are a metaphor of life. He believes that certain things do not change, such as the character of a person; and through the voyage of life, values are ingrained and will remain when external features have changed. He applies this ethos to his composing. As Merriam has pointed out, a nation's music culture rests on the shoulders of the people themselves

– their ideas, actions, and the sounds they produce (Merriam, 1964).

He discussed the thoughts and inspirations he experiences when he works on a composition for the Singapore Huqin Quartet. He mentioned that when he wrote the 'Concord' for the SHQ, he found that the idiom is similar to the Western string quartet that he had already written for.

> I felt at ease with this tool of writing, as it was not much different from writing for Western string quartet, which I was familiar with. My working philosophy was simply to strive hard, and not wait for inspiration to come. First and foremost, I would choose a theme to start off with, and then design a form or structure for a piece in my thoughts. However, the end result may be different from what I envisaged earlier.

Such flexibility is a trademark of Phoon whose works envelope multiple styles and genres. Phoon acknowledges the apparent concept of a Western string quartet in the SHQ. However, he pointed out that the *huqin* are different instruments altogether, with a diverse playing technique which produces different tone colours. He further indicated that there would be many limitations in their performance outcome if the Singapore Huqin Quartet was to imitate fully the music of the Western string quartet. When he composes, he thinks of ways to bring out the best in them as this process is still at an experimental stage. He felt that only through the passing of time, could one tell whether Chinese ensembles and orchestras would remain important with their own identity, espoused by their historical development. He emphasized the idea of the need for the difference, as traditional instruments would prove to be an indispensable tool, for social formation in any particular society. To a certain degree, Phoon agrees with music scholar Shen Sin Yan's analogous concept about string quartets, and of Chinese instruments or quartets, in that they should not be labelled as similar in musical characteristics.

We then discussed how the Chinese orchestra and the Singapore Huqin Quartet serve both the initiated audiences and the uninitiated. He voiced his satisfaction regarding

> the high standard of Chinese orchestra in schools in Singapore to begin with, is due to the government support through sponsorship. It also depended very much on the Ministry of Culture's policy. Competitions were held to raise the standard of the orchestra, and this paved the way for a larger following and interest. I believed that the Singapore Huqin Quartet had embarked on the right trail, and was a fine example of the island's governmental and cultural development.

Phoon has drawn conspicuously on some aspects of Daoist approach in his creative life. Simplicity was one of the ideologies of Daoist teachings. This non-ethereal approach was advocated by Laozi who said: "Great music has fewer notes". Such simplicity marked the relevancy of Chinese music in the past, when simplicity was denoted as a natural ethos, a variable that possesses an intrinsic value of its own. Phoon's compositions reflect this ethos. He does not use many embellishments either melodically or harmonically. They are rather simple and straightforward. When he composes, he thinks laterally and vertically.

Most of his compositions have a different musical language from that of mainland China, whose performers were conservatory trained. Such musicians were exposed to

modern concepts of music with emphasis on technical virtuosity and a more uniform, esoteric nature of interpretation. However, these urban professionals have distanced themselves from the traditional rural musicians who performed ceremonial and authentic traditional music. Musicologist Li Huang Zhi has noted: "Musical composition should not be limited by traditions and that [composers] must strive for innovation. Innovation in art is a natural consequence and [a] requirement for historic development" (Li, 1990 p.209).

Phoon was quite content to compose in his own way as it served him better to use his own language. Morgan testified that musicians, who understood multi-musical language and also the framework of the cultural norm, would [thus] "produce a culture of tolerance and broad understanding. [However], differences [would] still matter and standards of excellence [would] still apply, [and where] a pluralistic musical culture could flourish, [by] offering adequate provisions for different and divergent lines of development" (Morgan, 1992, p.61).

As mentioned in Chapter One, around 1920, the *erhu* and other *huqin* had become institutionalized, with its traditional or folk music blended by a concoction of Western musical elements such as tempered tuning and ensemble playing. Western art had much influence during the Republican period in China, and even up until today. The non-*laissez faire* nature of government policies of the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) had eroded and endangered the tradition long held by the people. The pervasiveness of the Cultural Revolution drew the final curtain on any forms of cultural movement at that time.

Erhu music has traditionally been improvised. On the subject of improvisation, I asked Phoon how much he allowed musicians to display moments of improvisation. He stated: "It entirely depended on what the nature of the work is. In the past, it is common to do that at the performer's discretion. I was more adventurous in the 1980s, and probably more conservative or [matured] in the 1990s, and anachronistic perhaps. I believed I reserved the right to do that, as I had been searching all this while."

Phoon believed the amount of improvisation used by players today seemed less before the 1950s. Compared with the present day, musicians then working on Chinese music could expound it as non-static. Its rhythmical, melodic, dynamic contexts and interpretation allowed room for recomposition or improvisation. The performer's salient purpose was to extemporize by applying his or her personal experiences and interpretation, educated or otherwise; the tempo, dynamics, various spectrums of ornamentations, and an elaborated or trimmed version of some of its thematic materials. It was not unusual that the musical results were quite different from the composer's original intention, except for its title, time-signature and thematic representations. An accomplished musician's reputation hinged on his/her ability to personify the polychronomistic[34] nature found predominantly in compositions from the second half of the twentieth century.

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[34] Polychronomism is a variable sense of tempo or concept of beats, that was performed by musicians in accordance to the socio-cultural, political scenario and influence during the pre-1950s in China.

However, some current performers deplore the limitations of the premeditated static approach, and continue unabashed by music critics and composers to convince their audience using the versatility and gift of their art with unreserved improvisation. As for improvising simultaneously in ensemble pieces, the art of re-creating and re-interpreting, especially those found in *sizhu* music is contrary, *vis a vis* to the Western style of ensemble playing.

I noticed with interest the vast output of principal works that Phoon had written. I asked him whether he had encountered any difficulties with this workload. Phoon mentioned that he did experience some difficulties writing his debut composition for the Singapore Symphony Orchestra, as he had high expectations for himself when he first returned after tertiary study in Australia. "The starting point in writing composition is a common stumbling block and when it is overcome, things will move smoothly. This is when one can save the good parts of writing, and abandon the scaffolding," says Phoon.

I was interested to note whether, when composing for full Western or Chinese orchestras, Phoon could hear all the notes on the score as he read it, for example in the form of orchestration. Phoon was of the opinion that one could imagine the sound. It was, however, necessary to listen to it, because the orchestra produces different effects. In order to be foolproof, and that was where my interest lay, something unexpected may happen, which made composing more enthralling and appealing. It could also be disastrous if an orchestra was not well rehearsed or of a poor standard. It is sometimes difficult for the conductor to analyse a piece or composition. As John Blacking noted, "performers, composers, audiences and conductors as well do not, in fact, have complete control over musical situations and their interpretations" (Blacking, 1995, p.152). What is pertinent is that the beauty of music, in so far as the intricate and expressive emotions of the composers, aroused the feelings and aesthetic merits enjoyed by the listener.

Among musicians in Singapore today, there has been a great deal of discussion on the effect of Western orchestras presenting Chinese works, and what the impact would be on the changes made to traditional music. Phoon does not think that it poses a problem. He has composed works for the Western orchestra using a standard form of notation. His expectations are rather conservative, as his compositions are not complex. The outcome of the performances would be based on how serious the musicians were, and the efforts of the conductor. Just as Nicholas Cook has stated, when a composer writes down music, he relies heavily on the reader's musical ear and imagination in supplying the precise intervallic, rhythmic and dynamic values that the notation omits, just as he had to contribute sonorous, dramatic and emotional values that cannot possibly be specified in the score (Cook, 1987, p.227).

As pointed out by ethnomusicologist David B. Coplan, "the realization that traditional music inevitably changes in response to encompassing social and cultural movements, is hardly a comforting one" (Coplan, 1993, p.36). In considering the melting-pot of cosmopolitan Singapore City, which has thrived on all variants of musical culture, the transformation of contrasting and conflicting styles within a genre did not warrant a disguise. It was apparent that musical changes were inevitable, and one must not be disillusioned by seemingly dramatic or radical

changes within a society. Music-making played a role in social changes, and time constituted the change. "Conversely, an absence of musical change may reflect a retreat from challenging social issues, or a determination to face them and adapt to them," (Blacking, 1995, p.151). Until now, the relevant authorities have endeavoured to promote traditional music as well as adapting to the new varieties of musical investments and happenings in Singapore.

The discussion continued with Phoon's idea about the balance of tones, texture, tempo, rhythm and melody. He mentioned:

> It fully depended on the skills of the conductor. He would begin by analyzing and reading the score, whilst gathering some idea of the music before conducting it. The designation of instrumentation parts allowed much flexibility, as musical texture was not concentrated on monophonic or heterophony alone, as in the past. The conductor's experience should enable him/her to manage the overall balance and sonic profile of the orchestra.

Further elaboration followed on polychronomism (ibid), which was an integral part of Chinese music in the pre-1950s. Its tempo was very personalized, and much less accurate than its Western counterpart which generally used a uniform or constant beat. In Chinese music, rhythm is often curtailed by dominant melodic patterns which also play a subsidiary role in its intrinsic musical frame work. The rhythmic impact was overshadowed by the melodic structure that encompassed a piece of music, because of its overlapping or asymmetrical rhythmic character. Phoon also emphasized the use of poly-temperament in ensembles that produced an "out of pitch" effect in the past, which was unbecoming in present day ensembles, where the equal-tempered scale was deployed.

Generally, he agreed that Chinese music did not project an exuberance as the Western art of music, except for some gradual indicated tempo compositions. However, when a political propaganda piece was being aired in mainland China, some people may find it to be ambivalent, while others will hear a throbbing, dynamic energy moving at a fast and motoric tempo. These feelings are in turn related to political fervour or patriotism. Such audible changes in music in our society today are the effects of the socio-cultural and political connotations of our time.

I asked Phoon about the identity and common use of the *erhu* in traditional music for solo and ensemble playing in the Singapore music scene. Phoon pointed out that

> Singapore is quite equal. The *erhu* playing traditional Chinese music is on par with other forms of ensemble or groups. The rationale behind this is that, it is cheaper to maintain the Chinese traditional instruments as compared to Western instruments. *The erhu* had and will be a prominent feature in Chinese orchestra, ensembles and as a solo instrument.

We discussed further the importation of the *erhu* from foreign regions and culture such as Mongolia, which has been assimilated into Han Chinese culture since the Zhou Dynasty about two thousand years ago. It had become part and parcel of organological synthesization which was widely accepted due to the esoteric and exoteric cultural clutter of mainland China. The function of the *erhu* was congruous to the identity of traditional Chinese instruments, and continued throughout these

millennia to excite audiences with its refined tone production, and perhaps a redefined status, as part of a creation of ensembles.

Musicologist Kuhn's idea that, "a [paradigm] shift begins, from a preoccupation with the history and analysis of 'works,' [to a point that] view[ed] musical activity as [a] cultural practice," (Kuhn, as quoted in Martin, 2000) was most apt and germane in this study. What is simply stated by Phoon is that musical activity was pertinent as a conspicuous preoccupation to the progress of music and its making, rather than mere musicological or analytical focus on compositions alone. He had chosen to be proactive with his works and authorship, which obviated his task on time spent in discussing his output.

To conclude the dialogue with Phoon, he candidly mentioned that he did not have particularly a favourite composer, but he enjoyed Vaughan Williams' music because it reminded him of life in Australia.

On the left is the composer Phoon Yew Tien with the author in the midst of discussion regarding his compositions for the Singapore Huqin Quartet

Photo 2.4

CHAPTER THREE

3.1 FAMILY OF THE *HUQIN*

This chapter introduces the different instruments found in the Singapore Huqin Quartet. I will also explain where the *huqin* instruments fit into the Chinese music classification system known as the *bayin* (refer p.50) and show similarities between the *bayin* system and the Western orchestral instruments' systems.

String instruments dominate the entire family of Chinese musical instruments, there being well over a hundred bowed, plucked or struck string instruments altogether. Amongst the thirty-six types of bowed Chinese traditional instruments classified under a generic term *huqin* are *jinghu, gaohu, erhu, zhonghu, banhu, gehu* and *da gehu. Banhu* and *erhu* have a long history; whereas the rest of the *'hu'* are all new types, which have developed in the last hundred years. They could also be classified under two categories, based on the material used for their resonators, which are either a wooden soundboard or snake-skin covered resonator.

Details of the individual instruments of the *huqin* family comprise *jinghu, banhu* and *da gehu.* The rest are instruments played in the Singapore Huqin Quartet which include *erhu, gaohu, zhonghu* and *gehu.* The details about the *erhu* have been discussed in Chapter One.

Instruments that belong to the *hu* family are as below:

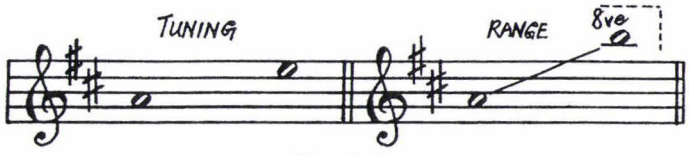
3.1.1 Jinghu

The *erhu* and the *banhu* were originally the two *huqin* found in an opera orchestra. However, the *jinghu* has replaced the *banhu* and is constructed similarly to the *erhu* (except that it is higher-pitched). It became the chief accompanying instrument for the Beijing opera, (Peking opera as known in the past) and the Han Opera which was developed in the Qing Dynasty around 1790. It was used to accompany male singers who usually sing an octave higher, whilst the *erhu* accompanied the female singers, usually an octave lower. While Chinese opera is an acquired taste musically, "it is dominated solely by the bowed string accompaniment of the *jinghu* (a sort of sawn-off *erhu*), which is suitable to the tense, guttural and high-pitched singing styles from both men and women" singers of the Chinese opera (Jones, 2000, p.39). The *jinghu* is basically a melodic instrument, and despite its small size and lightweight features, is able to produce a tremendously loud and rather piercing tone. Its function as an ensemble instrument is considered suitable only for the Chinese opera melodies because of its brightness, energetic and forceful tone quality. This instrument is primarily known for its embellishments which include trills over the ends of long notes, tremolos, grace notes, bowed accents on downbeats, pizzicatos as well as the shorter trills on fixed valued notes.

The *jinghu,* unlike all other bowed lute instruments, possesses a neck that is constructed of bamboo and measures about 45 cm in length. Its tube resonator is also made with bamboo of about 8 cm diameter, and left open on one end. The other end is stretched across with snakeskin (see photo 3.1, p.53).

The *jinghu* is held vertically on the player's lap while seated, with the resonator rested on it. Tone production occurs when the bow in the right hand is "pushed and pulled" on the strings to create the necessary tension for the desired tone. As in most *huqin*, it does not have a fingerboard, and responds to the varying tension whilst the string is being depressed to obtain a favourable note.

The range of the *jinghu* is the highest amongst all the *huqin* instruments. A unique feature of this instrument is that it is capable of marathon playing, as the rosin is melted against the upper part of the tube resonator, and provides effective application to the bow hair when it is in use.



Ex. 3.1

The flexible temperament of Chinese music is evident in the *jinghu,* as it has an open string tuning of an augmented fifth interval, which is a semitone more than the usual perfect fifth interval. As above, (see ex. 3.1). This acts as a neutral interval notably for the Peking opera music. It facilitates the demands of key changes or modes for each act in the Peking opera, without having to retune the open strings, in this non-tempered key structure (Liang, 1985).

3.1.2 Banhu

Banhu's name is derived from the wooden half-globular resonator (*ban* which means flat wooden board and *hu,* a barbaric lute)[35]. This was at the beginning of the Qing Dynasty, the *banhu* made its appearance around the 1640s in the *Bangzi* or "clapper operas", as the leading accompanying instrument. The *banhu* is also popular in ballads in the north-western part of China and also in operas in the Henan province of Central China.

The function and structure of the *banhu* is similar to the *erhu,* except for its smaller size of about 70 cm in length. The soundboard is covered entirely with a thin ply of wood unlike the bamboo, rosewood or python (or any snake) skin found in other members of the *huqin.* Its bow is either made of wood, bamboo or bronze. The *qianjin* is replaced by a "waist-bridge" or *yaoma,* which is a wedge-shaped wood typical of the *banhu* family (Shen, 1998) (see photo 3.2). The *banhu* usually sounds an octave, perfect fourth or fifth higher than the *erhu.* It is tuned in $D^2 - A^2$ for *soprano banhu*, $G^1 - D^2$ for *mezzo soprano banhu* and $A^1 - E^2$ for *tenor banhu* (see ex. 3.2). One distinct playing technique of the *banhu* is that instead of changing hand positions, the fingers are extended to reach a high pitched tone. Its distinct characteristic lies in its use of glissando that sounds bright and strident. This technique is commonly used by the *Qinpai erhu* players in their pieces. Much of today's *erhu* exercises for fast bowing practice were inherited from the *banhu,* which emphasizes graceful finger work.

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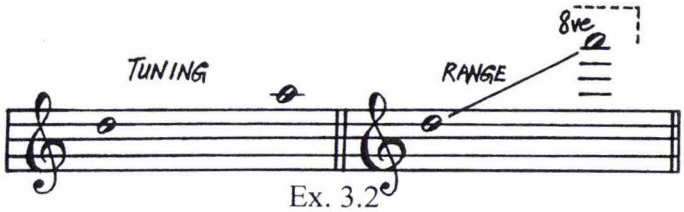
[35] *Banhu* is also known as *pang hu, qin hu, hu hu and da-xian.*



Ex. 3.2

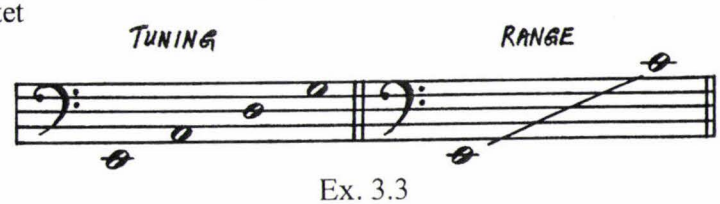
Similar to the *jinghu,* the *banhu* often appears in solo passages in the present-day Chinese orchestra as it is deemed too bright, clarion and high pitched to function as tutti in the orchestra. Its tonal characteristic depicts a typical Chinese musical flavour that tends towards passionate, joyful and unrestrained fervour. These tonal qualities are well suited for local operas. Such stage productions as Peking opera, Lue opera, Yue opera, Qin opera and others are commonly found in Sanxi Kanxu and Shanxi Provinces. Interestingly, in the 1930s the *banhu* and the *erhu* were replaced by violin and saxophone in the Cantonese opera. It has since reverted to its traditional style of performance today, when scholars and musicians regained their Chinese cultural identity after the Cultural Revolution. An example of *banhu* playing the lead in an ensemble is 'Moon Crescent before Dawn'. Typical of the northern *soprano banhu* in this piece was its use of "upward glide to *mi* and downward glide to *la,* along with its huge glide of intervals *sol-mi"* (Shen, 1998, p.46).

The *banhu* became a member of the accompanying ensemble of the *Qinqiang* (ibid) in the 1930s. The ensemble's first appearance at its maiden performance in Xian, Shaanxi Province by Zhang Yu Qin on the *erhu*, marked an important occasion for the *banhu.* It became the lead instrument of this ensemble, under the leadership of Jing Sheng Yan and later Wang Dong Sheng in the 1950s. After 1949 Zhang Chang Cheng, in turn made the *banhu* a solo instrument in its own right with his acclaimed performances (Huehns, 2000).

As Colin Huehns noted: "Even today, many *Qinpai erhu* pieces are interchangeable, performed on either the *erhu* or the *banhu.* This would be unthinkable for most other sections of the *erhu* repertory, most notably the works for Liu Tian Hua and *sizhu* music from southern China; the robust tones of the *banhu* would be an anathema to this music; not so to *Qinpai erhu* music" (Huehns, 2000, p.99).

3.1.3 Da Gehu

The *da gehu* or *diyin gehu* (*bass gehu*) is much larger in size than the *gehu.* It is tuned in perfect fourths E, A, D, G, like the double bass (see ex. 3.3). Even though its playing technique is similar, the timbre produced is different from the contra or double bass because of its *da gehu* distinct features. Generally all the *huqin* have a similar set-up as found in a string orchestra, or in an ensemble like the Singapore Huqin Quartet



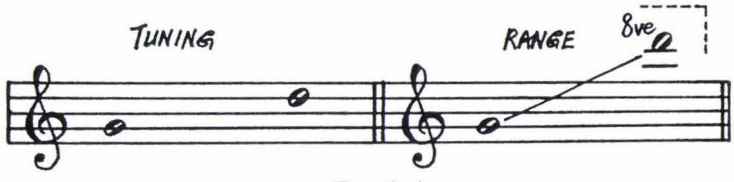
Ex. 3.3

The *bass gehu* is a remnant of the modern influx of Western music and culture. The *bass gehu* is ear-marked for development in the music scene in more advanced and developing countries today. Moreover, the introduction of the *da gehu* and the *gehu* is also due to the growing awareness of the voice parts of soprano, alto, tenor and bass in instrumental playing, that was absent in the past. The language of traditional Chinese music then, was concentrated on the use of treble in instrumentation. Presently, more emphasis is being laid on the tenor and bass sonic effect in an orchestra. It does not play a role in the Singapore Huqin Quartet, due to its loud resonance which is not suitable for ensemble playing. The *da gehu* features are similar to the *gehu* as can be seen in the photo 3.5, except that it is larger in size.

Instruments that belong to the Singapore Huqin Quartet are as below:

3.1.4 Gaohu

The *gaohu* is the *soprano erhu* and is usually called high-pitched *erhu* or *yue hu.* It was developed by a famous musician Lui Man Shing in the 1920s. Similar in structure to the *erhu*, except for its shorter neck, the *gaohu* is a technically difficult instrument to master (see photo 3.3). It is best known for its vivid, brisk rhythms to complement the *erhu* with its higher, brighter and sonorous sound. Tuned in G^1 and D^2, a perfect fifth apart, the *gaohu* has a much louder tone than the *erhu* (see ex. 3.4).



Ex. 3.4

It was chiefly used as the leading instrument for accompaniment in Cantonese opera or solos for *quang dong ming yau yin yue* (Cantonese folk melodies), which penetrated the Chinese opera scene (Quang dong music made its first debut before 1910). Lu Wen Cheng popularized 'Autumn on the Lake' in the mid 1950s, a Cantonese piece worshipped by *gaohu* players. Another of his masterpieces is the 'Rainfalls on the Plantain.' For Cantonese music of the 1920s and '30s, *gaohu* and the *yangqin* (dulcimer), belonging to the local music tradition, was fused with jazz, adding saxophone, violin and xylophone to the Chinese instruments[36].

The *gaohu's* tube resonator is relatively small compared with the *erhu,* with the uncovered end shaped like a horn to produce much higher resonating frequencies. In order to produce a more delicate tone, it is played between the knees. However, players now use a modified version to control the shrill sound, and like the *erhu* can be rested on the thigh. As in other *huqin,* its bow hair is permanently inserted in between the two strings.

The effects of birds chirping and ornamented melodies have proven to be popular

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[36] Due to the development of the movie industry, "people in Shanghai, colonial Canton (Guangzhou) and nearby Hong Kong threw themselves into the craze for Western-style jazz and dance-halls" (Jones, 2002, p.33).

with players and audiences as well as the cantabile tone produced by the *gaohu.* These are reflective of the versatility of the instrument under the hands of *gaohu* master Liu Tian Yi (1910-1990). Currently, it plays the position of the first violin in the modern Chinese orchestra which is modelled after the Western orchestra.

3.1.5 Zhonghu

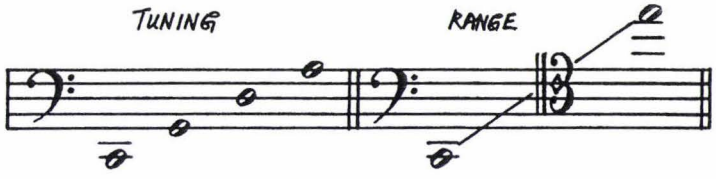
The *zhonghu* was developed from the *erhu* in the 1940s. It carries the abbreviated name *zhong* which means middle for a medium range *alto erhu.* It is similar in structure to the *erhu* except for a larger resonator which may be tubular, octagonal or hexagonal (see photo 3.4). Since it is newly developed from the prototype of *huqin, zhonghu's* role in the modern Chinese orchestra is confined to tutti and accompaniment with some occasional solos. Its function in the modern Chinese orchestra stems much from the influence of the viola, from the Western orchestra. Despite its deeper timbre, it is not as agile as the *erhu* but plays its part by extending the range of the orchestra.

An accomplished *zhonghu* and *banhu* composer and virtuosist, Liu Ming Yuan composed *Mu Ming Gui Lai* 'The Return of the Herdsmen' and 'On the Prairie,' deploying the use of minor third intervals and initiating a new musical expression on Chinese pastoral music. It is tuned a perfect fourth or fifth lower than the *erhu,* usually at $G - D^1$ or $A - E^1$ (see ex. 3.5). It is the alto of the *erhu* and is singable with a beautiful timbre quite similar to the violoncello.

Ex. 3.5

3.1.6 Gehu

The *gehu* received its name from the Chinese word *ge,* which means revolutionary and *hu,* a barbaric lute. It was invented in the 1920s by Yang Yu Sen, who experimented and made changes to this instrument. The *gehu* is a hybridization between a violoncello and *hu.* It has four strings tuned to C, G, D, A, a fingerboard, and a large drum-like resonator which is placed crosswise with the snakeskin across, one side. It has a wide range and possesses a resilient and distinct tone quality (see ex. 3.6). The curved cut on the resonator serves to allow the bow to be drawn across instead of between the strings. It has a similar playing technique to the violoncello. However, the sound produced is unlike the cello because of its banjo-like membrane which acts as the soundboard (see photo 3.5). A much larger snake skin parchment is needed for the *gehu* but is not easily obtainable and thus, the instrument is often replaced by the violoncello in countries such as Malaysia and Singapore (see photo 3.7). Besides this, the maintenance of the snake skin is also difficult as it is often damaged by humidity. Some other disadvantages of the *gehu* are its tendency to be off-pitch and the lack of volume at the upper positions. Thereby, two *gehu* often act as one cello to manage and maintain the same volume.



Ex. 3.6

The development of the *gehu* is a product of Chinese musicians' fascination with Western music. Since the 1950s the *gehu* has been used in ensemble playing as well as an accompanying instrument and sometimes for solo parts in the Chinese orchestra. Its impact and contributions to the modern Chinese orchestra, is largely due to the influence of Western thoughts in orchestration emulated by the present-day Chinese orchestra. With its wider and lower range, the *gehu* widens the textural scope for past and present interpretations.

3.2 Modern Chinese Orchestra

In response to a growing Western musical influence on Chinese performance, the modern Chinese orchestra developed in the 1930s. The modern Chinese "classical" orchestra evolved from the traditional southern Chinese instrumental ensemble previously known as "Silk and Bamboo" or *Jiangnan sizhu*. This instrumental ensemble comprised instruments such as *dong xiao* (end-blown flute), *dizi* (transverse flute), *yangqin* (dulcimer), *pipa* (plucked lute), *erhu* (two-stringed lute), *sheng* (mouth organ), *muyu* (carved wooden fish-like instrument) and *qin qin* (plucked lute).

The modern Chinese orchestra is made up of three sections or families which are very similar to a Western orchestra with the exclusion of the brass section. It has bowed and plucked-strings, woodwind and percussion sections. The bowed-string family comprises the *huqin* instruments mentioned above. The plucked-strings consist of *guqin (qin), guzheng, pipah, liuqin, konghou, ruan* and *sanxian*. Woodwind instruments are *dizi, guanzi, sheng* and *suona* (see photo 3.6 and 3.7, p.52). The percussion instruments are *paigu*, cymbals, gong and Chinese bells.

A few Western instruments have been added, for example the cello, double bass and timpani, to enhance the lower registers of the orchestra for better blending effect. After the modern influx of Western music, more new instruments like the *gaohu, zhonghu, gehu* and *da gehu* (bass sections of the *huqin*) as well as the *sheng* (mouth organ) were introduced into the orchestra. The *gehu* and *da gehu* are brand new inventions, adapted from the *erhu* but made to the size of a cello and double bass respectively as mentioned earlier in the Chapter. The normal size of a Chinese orchestra is fifty or more players, and these ensembles have since doubled due to the demands of Western orchestral scores with renditions which are popular to urban audiences.

Han and Mark note that in the Chinese orchestra, "the use of triadic chords, sequential melodies soon replaced the traditional unison playing of "silk and bamboo" with some heterophony effects mainly due to Western influence" (Han and Mark, 1983, p.20). Even though heterophony is most lucid with different tone quality for each part of the melodic lines, this heterophonic musical texture is not suitable for orchestral playing. As such, performers in the Chinese orchestra will only be concentrating on playing their

instrumental parts and reading their notated pieces or scores rather than tutti. The acoustical space of the Chinese orchestra is richer than the Western symphony as it has two fundamental spectrum groups: *shangquan* (reeds) and the *tanbo* (plucked strings) unlike the Western symphony orchestra which has only one fundamental spectrum group, the strings (Shen, 1988).

Further details on the modern Chinese orchestra will touch on the integration of the orchestral instruments into the ancient *bayin* system of instrumental classification. The new instruments were assimilated into the ancient *bayin* system of instrumental categorization. An example is the *da gehu* which is classified under the *huqin* and silk category. The classification of instruments was a penchant of the Chinese whose concept of the world included cosmic forces and elements. Chinese music instruments coincide with the modern Western classification system labelled in four categories: chordophones, membranophones, idiophones and aerophones. These categories are parallel with the Chinese timbral and material classification of silk, gourd, bamboo and clay, metal, stone, wood and skin. *Bayin*[37] "is by far the oldest and longest-lasting known character of instrument classification in the world" (Kartomi, 1990, p.37).

On the following page is a list of instruments that are categorized under the physical characteristics of sound production. The *bayin* classifications are written in brackets. Idiophones are based on "the substance of the instrument itself, owing to its solidity and elasticity and without requiring stretched membranes or strings;" membranophones are defined as instruments "excited by tightly stretched membranes;" chordophones as instruments "with one or more strings stretched between fixed points;" whilst aerophones are classified as instruments in which "the air itself is the vibrator in the primary sense" (Kartomi, 1990, p.169 based on Hornsbostel and Sachs, 1914, p.14, 17, 20, 24)[38 & 39].

The classification system on page 51 is drawn from a schema of both Chinese and Western instruments as used in contemporary China and Singapore. Kartomi notes that this classification resembles "Mahillon's classifications as well as Hornbostel and Sach's schemes in its division of percussion instruments into idiophones and membranophones" (Kartomi, 1990, p.49). The percussion instruments of the Chinese orchestra as classified are (1) idiophones such as *diaopo* (cymbals), *paiban* (clappers) and (2) membranophones such as *dagu* (kettle drums) and *jiangpu* (single-headed drum) which play similar role as the timpani in the Western orchestra.

Kartomi further observes that the system "is remarkable in that it divides stringed

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[37] Bayin systems of classifications are by the construction materials rather than sound production of the instruments.

[38] See Kartomi, *On Concepts and Classifications of Musical Instruments*, p.172 for further clarification about the subdivisions and classifications by Erich M. von Hornbostel (1877-1935) and Curt Sachs (1881-1959).

[39] This different classification of the structure of the instrument and also on how music is produced then set in vibration also draws an interesting note by Geneviéve Dournon. "The regrouping of idiophones into a class distinct from membranophones splits up the heterogeneous section of 'percussion' instruments, including instruments of any material functioning by various modes of sound production" (Dournon, 1992, p.250).

instruments into the plucked, bowed and struck varieties, and is even more remarkable in that it uses a different character of division for Chinese instruments, as opposed to Western, instruments" (Kartomi, 1990, p.49). Stringed instruments are categorized under three chordophones: plucked instruments, such as *pipa* (lute) and *ruan* (round-shaped lute); bowed instruments such as *erhu* (two-stringed lute) and other instruments of the *huqin* family; and struck instruments such as the *yangqin* (dulcimer). For the Western stringed instruments, the plucked chordophones would be the Western harp and the bowed chordophones, the violin and members of the string family.

The brass section was not added into the classification system even though it constituted a category amongst the aerophones. The rationale of the brass instruments being conspicuously absent in the *bayin* system of classification is that authentic Chinese brass instruments were not introduced into the modern Chinese orchestra. Often Chinese wind instruments are subdivided into two divisions: - (1) reedless, such as *xiao* (vertical bamboo flute) and *dizi* (tranverse flute); and (2) those with reeds, such as *sheng* (mouth organ), *suona* (shawm, oboe-like) and *guanzi* (small shawm). These belong to the aerophones category. It is a similar division to the reedless, single and double reeds of the wood-wind family.

BAYIN SYSTEM AND WESTERN ORCHESTRAL INSTRUMENTS CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM

String instruments (Silk)	**Wood-wind instruments (Gourd, bamboo and clay)**	**Percussion instruments (Metal, stone and wood) (Skin)**	
Chordophones	**Aerophones**	**Idiophones**	**Membranophones**
Plucked chordophones	*Suona*	*Muqin*	*Dagu*
Pipa	(shawm, oboe-like)	(xylophone)	(kettle drums)
(Plucked lute)	*Xiao*	*Diaopo*	*Jiangu*
Qin	(vertical bamboo flute)	(cymbals)	(single-headed
(Bridgeless zither)	*Xuan*	*Ban*	drums)
Sanxian	(ocarina)	(clappers)	*Taogu*
(Three-stringed lute)	*Sheng*	*Bianjing*	(an hour glass)
Guzheng	(mouth organ)	(stone chimes)	
(Bridged zither)	*Guan*	*Bianzhong*	
Kunghou	(double-reed flute)	(clapperless	
(Harp-like)	*Bangdi*	bells)	
Ruan	(piccolo)	*Paiban*	
(Round-shaped lute)	*Paixiao*	(clappers)	
Liuqin	(bamboo pipes)	*Luo*	
(Short-necked lute)	*Dizi*	*(gong)*	
Se	(transverse flute)	*Ba*	
(Movable bridged zither)	*Xun*	(paired cymbals)	
	(vessel flute)	*Yingjing*	
Bowed chordophones	*Guanzi*	(bells)	
Huqin	(small shawm)	*Fanxaing*	
(Two-stringed bowed lutes)		(brass chimes)	
		Muyu	
Struck chordophones		(carved wooden	
Yangqin (dulcimer)		fish-like instrument)	

Photo 3.6

As shown, the Darul Ridwan Secondary School's Chinese Orchestra in Taiping, Perak, Malaysia, was performing at a fund-raising concert for their Chinese Orchestra Society. On the left, in the last row there are three erhu players; in front of them, from the left, there are two gaohu and two zhonghu players. Four yangqin players took the centre stage with six dizi players in the back row. On the right, there are three liuqin players with three pipa players seated at the back. Other instruments such as the three ruan and plucked bass instruments are usually positioned behind the pipa as shown in the photo below. This is an example of a similar set-up for a small scale Chinese orchestra.

Photo 3.7

The bass section comprises two double basses and two violoncello players which are commonly found in a modern Chinese orchestra.

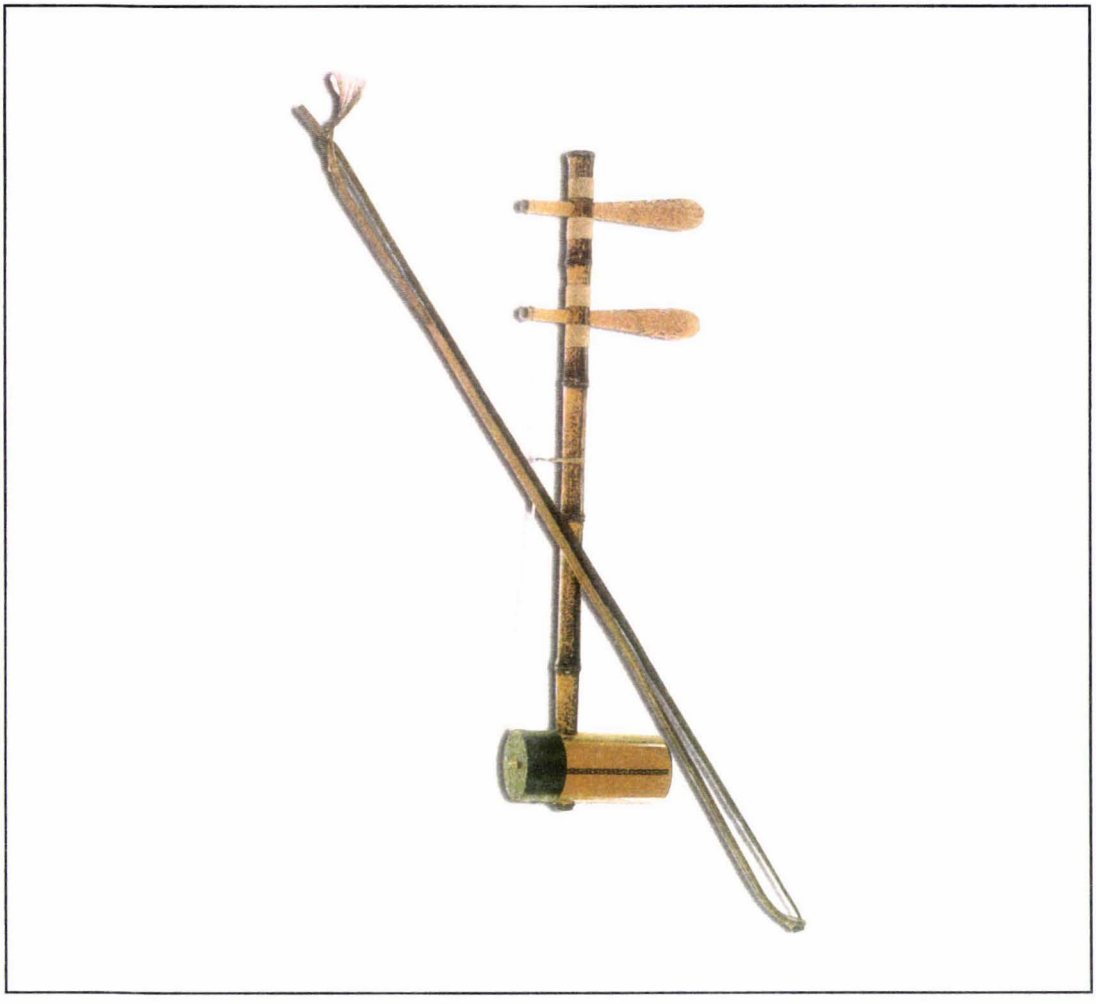


Photo 3.1 ***JINGHU***

Photo 3.2 BANHU

Photo 3.3 ***GAOHU***

Photo 3.4 ZHONGHU

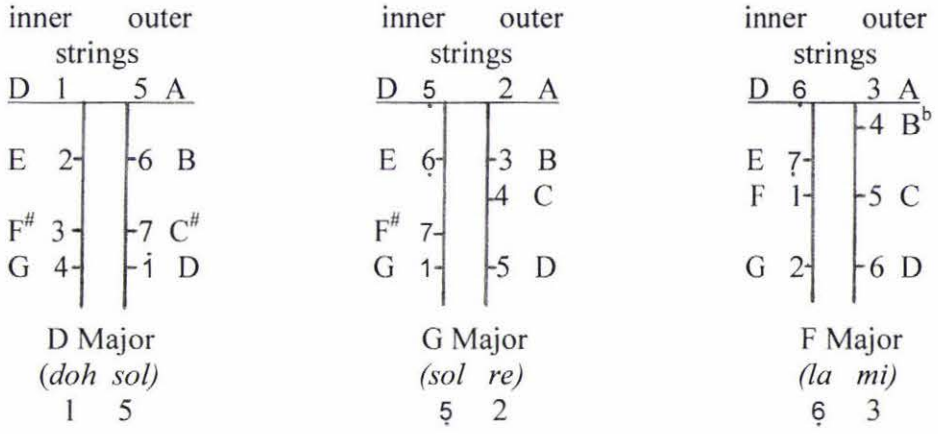
Photo 3.5 GEHU

CHAPTER FOUR

4.1 PERFORMANCE TECHNIQUES

4.1.1 TUNING OF THE *ERHU* FOR THE LEFT HAND WHILE SEATED

The inner and outer strings are tuned a perfect fifth apart. The inner string is tuned to *D* while the outer string is tuned to *A*. No further adjustments are required to play in any keys once the strings are tuned.



The keys of D Major or *doh-sol*, G Major or *sol-re* and F Major or *la-mi* are suitable for beginners of *erhu* playing (for further details on key changes, see appendix B.2). The dots below the cipher notations or Chinese numerical system denote an octave lower than the written notations, whilst the dots above the written cipher notations denote an octave higher. Below are further examples of fixed position for inner and outer strings on different keys.

Keys	inner outer strings
C	2-------6 D A
D	1-------5 D A
*E^b	7-------4 D A^b
F	6-------3 D A
G	5-------2 D A
A	4-------1 D A
B^b	3-------7 D A

*Since the Chinese pentatonic scales or keys do not possess the fourth and seventh degree of a scale, the D and A flat are not required to be played on open strings. Another reason is

that, for the key of E-flat major, the outer open string-A does not apply as this A note is not a diatonic of E flat major. However, the A flat can be produced as a fingered note.

4.1.2 FINGERINGS FOR THE *ERHU* IN DIFFERENT KEYS

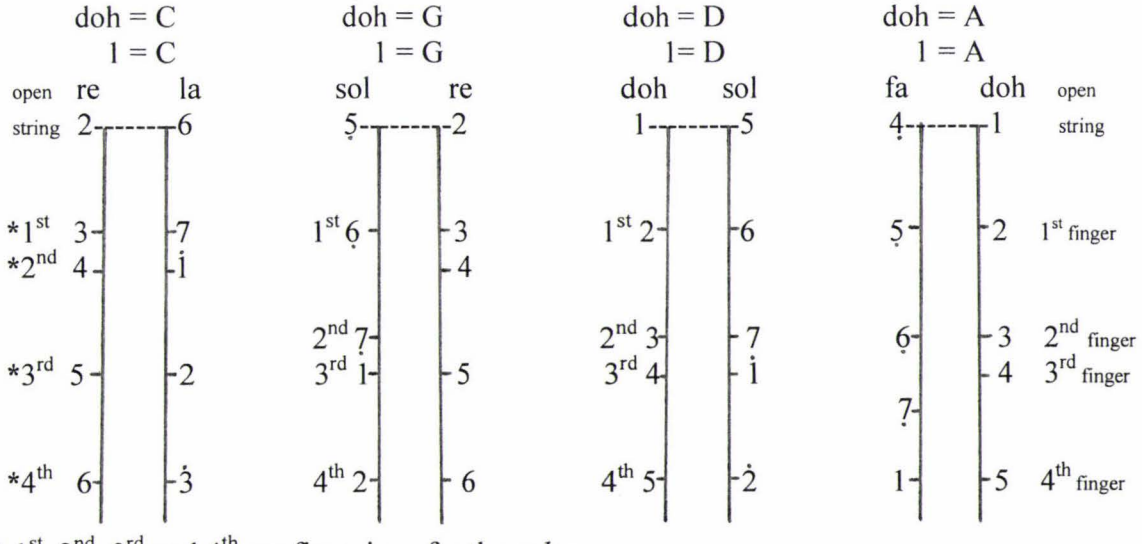
These are the explanations for the diagrams below.

For the key of C Major or *re-la* key, the inner string is *re* (lower) and the outer string is *la.* Depress the first finger on the inner string for *mi*, the second finger for *fa*, third for *sol* and the last finger for *la* or the alternative on the outer open string. For the outer string, the use of the first finger is on *ti*, the second on *doh* (upper), third is on *re* (upper) and last finger on *mi* (upper).

For the key of G Major or *sol-re* key, the inner string is *sol* (lower) and the outer string is *re*. To produce the *la* (lower), use the first finger on the inner string, *ti* (lower) on the second finger, *doh* on the third finger and *re* on the fourth finger or the alternative on the outer open string. As for the outer string, the first finger would be on mi, second finger on *fa*, third finger on *sol* and last finger on *la*.

For the key of D Major or *doh-sol* key, the inner string is *doh* and the outer string is *sol* on open strings. Depress the first finger on the inner string for *re*, the second finger for *mi*, the third finger for *fa* and fourth finger for *sol* or the alternative on the outer open string. As for the outer string, the use of the first finger is on *la*, the second on *ti*, third is on *doh* (upper) and last finger on *re* (upper).

For the key of A Major or *fa-doh* key, the inner string is *fa* (lower) and the outer string is *doh.* To produce the *sol* (lower) use the first finger on the inner string, *la* (lower) on the second finger, *ti* (lower) on the third finger and *doh* on the fourth finger or the alternative on the outer open string. As for the outer string, the first would be on *re*, second finger on *mi*, third finger on *fa* and last finger on *sol.*



* 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th are fingerings for the *erhu.*

4.1.3 FIRST FINGERING POSITION

For the key of D Major or *doh-sol* key, the inner string is *doh* and the outer string is *sol* on open strings. Depress the first finger on the inner string for *re*, the second finger for *mi*, the third finger for *fa* and the fourth finger for *sol* or the alternative on the outer open string. As for the outer string, the use of the first finger is on *la*, the second on *ti*, third is on *doh* (upper) and the last finger on *re* (upper).

For the key of G Major or *sol-re* key, the inner string is *sol* (lower) and the outer string is *re*. To produce the *la* (lower) use the first finger on the inner string, *ti* (lower) on the second finger, *doh* on the third finger and *re* on the fourth finger or the alternative on the outer open string. As for the outer string, the first finger will be on mi, second finger on *fa*, third finger on *sol* and the last finger on *la*.

For the key of F Major or *la-mi* key, the inner string is *la* (lower) and the outer string is *mi*. Depress the first finger on the inner string for *ti* (lower) and *doh*, the second finger for *re*, third for *mi* or the alternative on the outer open string. For the outer string, the use of the first finger is on *fa* and *sol*, the second on *la*, third is on *ti* and the last finger on *doh*[40 & 41] (http://members.optusnet.com.au).

4.1.4 SECOND FINGERING POSITION

The *erhu* has five positions for tone production. The first and second positions are usually taught to beginners, with gradual development of technical difficulties, and involving third to fifth position fingerings for more advanced students.

4.1.5 FUNCTIONS OF THIRD, FOURTH AND FIFTH FINGERING POSITIONS

4.1.5.1 For the *erhu*, the first and second positions can only produce eight notes. It is imperative the third, fourth and fifth positions are used to produce higher and lower notes rather than those in the first and second positions. In *Jiangnan sizhu erhu* playing however, the first position has a range of a major ninth and could be extended to a perfect twelfth in the second position when required of certain passages or pieces. These ranges of notes found under the fingers in the first and second positions are characteristics of *Jiangnan sizhu* style of playing.

4.1.5.2 The use of sliding action is a crucial technique for all *erhu* soloists and ensemble players, as the sliding up and down action can only be achieved by changes of positions[42]. This technique serves to produce the unique fine quality and displays the many shades of emotions and feelings that are found in the *erhu*.

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[40] See appendix C, picture 2.1. To show how the strings are depress using different fingerings.

[41] See appendix C, picture 2.2. View upfront to show the stretching of the last finger.

[42] See appendix C, picture 2.3. Diagram depicting the technique of hand sliding motion on the *erhu*.

4.1.5.3 These different fingering positions will enhance more expressive playing, with more possibilities of intonation.

4.1.6 TECHNIQUES OF PLAYING THE *ERHU*

General Techniques

The neck of the *erhu* is held between the thumb and palm of the left hand. The bow hair is hung loosely from the bow and held taut by the ring finger of the player's right hand. This is to facilitate the alternation of the bow stroking the outer and inner strings of the *erhu* through variations of tension on the horse-hair[43]. These crucial fingering actions of the right hand control the bow and determine the successful changes between the two strings. An *erhu* bow is different from the violin bow which tightens the bow hair at the end of the bow by means of a screw. This process of lifting and lowering the bow hair upon the two strings entails a degree of restriction on how the strings are to be bowed. The angle of the bow hair running against the string also determines the playing of embellishments and expressions. Occasionally, in fast passages, the second and third fingers of the right hand are crossed to gain momentum and further control.

Similar to the violinist, the *erhu* player will need to have a keen ear as no frets or indication marks are embedded on the spike or neck to act as visual aids. Tactile sense is just as, if not more important for the *erhu* player than it is for the violinist, though the trajectory of the bow stroke is along different planes, and the normal ebb and flow of muscle tension is in different directions (Huehns, 2000)[44].

A learner *erhu* player is taught from the very initial stage to listen to the transition between the alternation of the pushing and pulling effect of the bow. This should be done without changes of timbre but with smooth beginner transitions. Each stroke of the bow commands attention and needs to be properly executed. The tones produced may sound unpleasant and crude initially. A considerable amount of practice to achieve the desired effect is required.

The fixed position glissando frequently used by the blind *erhu* player Abing, has also been introduced to violin playing in mainland China. However, "the violin, unlike the *erhu* does not have equally prominent open-string overtones" (Shen, 1998, p.44). Liu further pointed out: "In addition, the expanded range of the modern repertoire requires *huanbawei*, [or the] shifting [of] the hand down the shaft in a manner similar to the third, fifth, and seventh positions on the violin" (Liu, 2002, p.176).

The *erhu* player uses the left hand techniques of vibrato, tremolo, portamento or pitch-bend effect similar to the violin. Others however are different. The wrist is

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[43] See appendix C, picture 2.4. The illustration shows how the bow is grasped and its bow hair tauted by the fingers to produce the desired tone.

[44] See appendix C, picture 2.5. An illustration to show how the *erhu* is held and played at different angles between the *erhu* and the performer.

used for a vibrato effect called "pressure vibrato", by pressing repeatedly with the finger on the string, thus changing the tension of the string through stretching and releasing. This technique is also often used by *Qinpai erhu* players. It is however different from the oscillating movement by the finger on the string of the violin. The sound produced on the violin is also different from the *erhu*, due to the lack of fingerboard on the *erhu*. Natural and artificial harmonics can be produced on the *erhu* for special effects. For further details on natural and artificial harmonics, see appendix B.3.

One exemplary international performer, Xu Ke, displayed his superb technique and deep understanding of the *erhu* repertoire by expanding its range from two to more than four octaves. He has also developed techniques such as double stopping. The artificial harmonics he displayed are in high positions and with graduated prestissimo staccato as well (www.xuke.net.com). However, the technique of double stopping is currently not in the repertory of *erhu* music as it is deemed too difficult to execute on the *erhu,* for most players.

Techniques Specific to Qinpai Erhu School

A technique applied by the *Qinpai erhu* player[45] is the wide leaps that occur often in *Qinpai* music. This form of interpretation is not usually found in Liu Tian Hua's compositions which do not succumb to highly-charged emotional mannerisms. By contrast, Liu's works are influenced by the *Jiangnan sizhu* style of composing.

Other techniques include a striking "hugging" of the string technique by pressing with the second finger fixed on the string. This is to raise a pitch whilst the third and fourth finger warps the pitch by controlling the effect of pushing down on the string. A further technique taught in this school is the "flick" glissando, played with a flick of the left hand wrist as if teasing and touching the string in a flirtatious way as it passed along. The "flick" glissando is also commonly used to embellish five consecutive notes in descending order and returning to its tonal centre. This time however, it employs the whole arm instead of the wrist.

Techniques Specific to Jiangnan Sizhu

Jiangnan sizhu performers use a technique of a frozen right wrist when bowing. They use the fingertips of their left hand to articulate the strings. Occasionally the pads of the first, second or third joints of the left fingers are used to stop the vibrating strings. This technique is flexible enough for each player to initiate their own methods of playing for special effects. It is however noted that for fast passages, fingertips rather than knuckle joints would be most apt for the players to move with accuracy and dexterity. A special technique known as *zhifa* or a slide is used to raise and lower pitches[46]. *Zhifa* could also be applied by swinging the left

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[45] The *Qinpai* school of *erhu* playing created a new repertory for *erhu* music at the Xi-an Conservatory of Music in Shaanxi Province, which was established in October 10, 1949.

[46] See appendix C, picture 2.6. To demonstrate the technique of sliding up and down motion.

hand quickly back and forth once to obtain the difference of a semitone or more over a long note. This technique is often tailored with an ornament. Another common technique is the "padded glissando", where three fingers are simultaneously depressed and glided through the strings to produce a seamless or continuous glide.

4.1.7 PERFORMANCE SIGNS AND SYMBOLS

Below is a chart of some examples of a mixture of Chinese characters and Western music signs, with additions of articulatory notations or symbols marked with an *. Both Chinese and Western markings are routinely used on scores or staves and also in cipher notations (see highlighted symbols in appendix D, examples 2-7).

Left hand fingering in Chinese numerals

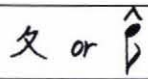
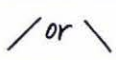
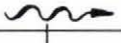
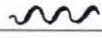
一	Numeral 1	Stopped string with index (first) finger
二	Numeral 2	Stopped string with middle (second) finger
三	Numeral 3	Stopped string with ring (third) finger
四	Numeral 4	Stopped string with small (fourth) finger

Bowing techniques *

勺	Play with open string
内	Play inner string (lower pitch)
外	Play outer string (higher pitch)
V	Push with the bow
⊓	Pull with the bow

Musical signs and symbols

○	Natural harmonic (open string)
◇	Artificial harmonic (stopped string)
'	Staccato
⌒	Repeated staccatos
//	Tremolo or *changong*[47 (p. 62)]
九	Spiccato
—	Sustained note at full volume
,	Cue, cut-offs
𝄐	Fermata
⌒	Tie or slur
打	Pulled-off
勹	Pizzicato (Plucking with the right hand)
+	Pizzicato (Plucking with the left hand)
∿	Inverted mordent
tr or	Trill – Played rapidly by stopping and releasing a string on the required note.

	Short trill – Played quickly and briefly on an open or stopped string usually beginning on the auxiliary note.
	Glissando (Ascending sliding note) *shanghuayin*[48]
	Glissando (Returning sliding note) *huihuayin*[49]
	"Rocking" glissando – Fourth or third finger to first finger extended back with a rocking movement via the second or third fingers.
	"Flick" glissando – A flick of the left hand wrist with the use of the whole arm.
	Extreme vibrato (with more than 3 steps or tones) sliding quickly up and down in an ascending slide.
	Extreme vibrato (with more than 3 steps or tones) sliding quickly up and down in a descending slide.
	Sliding without moving first finger
	Sliding towards a fixed first finger
	Vibrato on a depressed string
	Sliding with a vibrato
	Padded finger sliding note or *dianzhi huayin*[50]
	Wave note or *langyin*[51]
	Covered note or *menyin*[52]
	Appearing note or *touyin*[53]
	Left-side note or *zuoceyin*[54 (p.63)]

[47] *Changong* is a quick movement produced on the bow by moving back and forth, and could be found in Abing's *erhu* pieces.

[48] *Shanghuayin* usually begins from a preceding indefinite pitch note that is quick, narrow and sliding upwards.

[49] *Huihuayin* is usually no more than a semitone sliding rather slowly, from a note lower than the starting note and then returning to the original pitch.

[50] *Dianzhi huayin* or *daiyin* 'leading-note' is a glissando or sliding effect, usually beginning from one of the notes stopped by the last finger in first position (A^1 or E^2). This is further taken over by the third and fourth finger with left wrist tilted upwards. It is ultimately stopped by the third finger, where the glissando takes effect, usually a minor third lower than the original pitch.

[51] *Langyin* uses the pulling stroke of the bow while moving up and down on a wavy slow movement over a long sustained note.

[52] *Menyin* is quite similar to *huihuayin,* except for the extra pressure on the left hand that pushes the string towards the neck while a finger on the left again moves up and down along the string. It sounded like a beat being divided over a sustained note, due to the let-up of pressure which resulted in a lowered or altered pitch.

[53] *Touyin* usually begins by sounding the ornamental note preceding the next and then stopping the string with the second finger. The resultant effect of a 'hammered' sound, similar to being struck against the fingerboard is produced.

4.1.8 NOTATION SYSTEMS *(PU)*

The *erhu* has been written in pitched notation since the first quarter of the twentieth century. The notation often appears simple as it is written in cipher notations or simplified numerical notations known as *jianpu* (see appendix D, 1 to 3, 6 and 7). The numbers corresponded with the degrees of a diatonic scale from one to seven and are dotted above the notes for an octave higher, and below for an octave lower. However, it does not necessarily represent the Western diatonic mode with the implication of a heptatonic scale formulated by its seven degrees of the *diao* (scale). It is also known as the 'movable *doh*' scheme where scales or keys begin with their respective tonics or *gong* without a fixed pitch. Fast changes of keys are challenging between measures and the player needs to focus throughout.

Nonetheless, the cipher notations are easily readable by anyone as most *erhu* pieces do keep to a certain key centre in their entirety or sectionally. Liu Tian Hua's *nan hu* notation uses "some of the same number characters as *qin* notation or tablature notation but with reference to the pitches of a scale rather than to string and stop numbers" (Ellington, 1992, p.158). These acoustic or cipher notations are similar to the Western notation as to how the pitch and duration are treated.

Only later in the twentieth century was written transmission for Chinese music transcribed as music scores and/or bound in a book or sheets. So the transition from an oral music to a notated one was gradual. Ethnomusicologist Philip Bohlman commented: "Oral and written traditions dovetail in music, one undergirding the other; what notations do not capture with its inscription of the surface, the deeper structures of style communicate" (Bohlman, 2000, p.646). The notations are thus disseminated into the various genres of compositions which were formulated through the traits of the music by folklorists and latter day composers.

4.2 TEACHING AND LEARNING

As for the learning of the *erhu*, Chinese instrumental teachers are usually very strict and have a certain infallibility, that observers often suggest stems from Confucian values. Without sparing the pupil's feelings, to the encouragement of on-looking parents, faults are ruthlessly exposed (Huehns, 2000). It is apparently not so in Malaysia and Singapore where *erhu* teachers are encouraging and supportive when dealing with students. The trend of today's learner *erhu* players is that they respond to constructive criticism, reasoning, and discovery. Today's methods include both imitation that is, through the oral tradition using rote methods or parodying their teachers as well as through a process known as *dapu* that is, through one's own personal expression. The success of the lessons depends on the teacher-student relationship and whether the students can grasp the complexity of any given piece.

In China, before the 1930s a learner student was not encouraged to interpret the tablature himself. There were two methods of non-written transmission, either solo

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[54] *Zuoceyin* indicates a rapid glissando ensuing with a raised wrist movement towards the left, and using the second and last finger on different strings, moving usually an octave apart downwards (Liang, 1985).

learning through listening or through interactive teaching with a teacher. One process is through listening to the music and interpreting the sound known as *xinshou* or aural transmission. The other process was *kouchuan* that is, oral music transmission from teacher to pupil. This is by means of verbal explanation, demonstrating the proper performance technique and interpretation as well as cultivating an awareness and knowledge of the oral literature and philosophy of the music that is being taught.

As for the pupils, they are required to memorize and imitate their teachers as best as they can through the oral transmission from teacher to pupil. Even with the availability of notation, tradition dictates that a teacher is necessary to give "life" to otherwise "dead" notes. A teacher was considered [the] most important [person] to direct the many subtleties of temporal, rhythmic and phrasal interpretations of music (Liang, 1985, p.186). Early this century, a performer needed to be mature in playing, age, and an established master before they could deviate from the tradition passed on by his/her own teacher.

The art of decorating or embellishing a melody or *caiqiang* is introduced to a learner *erhu* player at an early stage. *Caiqiang* is an important aspect of *erhu* music which requires substantial practice. Decorations or *jiahua* determines the success of the piece being played and it is a matter of one's opinion whether a "teacher should allow the musician "latitude" *yudi* to develop his [/her] own style of bringing the melody to life" (Jones, 1995, p.126).

As Confucian philosophy states that, art entails beauty and embodies morality. Therefore, to be a performing artist one will possess high morals. The master-musician teacher is revered for his/her role in imparting these values. The art of teaching involves the traditional practice of the Skinnerian principles of modelling, shaping and imitation which is similar to current teaching methods in China. Talented and modelled students undergo the traditional manner of acquiring musicianship through *bazhe shou jiao* – "teaching by holding the hand" (Campbell, 1991, p.195) as in the Skinnerian method.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.1 EMINENT FIGURES IN *ERHU* MUSIC

5.1.1 LIU TIAN HUA (1895–1932)

Endowed with the knowledge and understanding of both Western and Chinese mode of music and playing techniques, Liu Tian Hua created a new medium easily assimilated by receptive urban audiences ready to accept both Chinese and Western styles. Following Liu's legacy, the Singapore Huqin Quartet combines elements of both Chinese and Western music. The SHQ is a fine example of how modern classical repertoire is employed, encompassing both Western classical and Chinese folk music, specifically arranged or composed for this Chinese ensemble.

Liu Tian Hua, an *erhu* and *pipa* player, musical innovator as well as a prolific folk music composer, played an important role in the conception of a new national music for China (see picture 5.1). For him, this was Chinese instrumental folk music mixed with Western elements. Known for his down-to-earth attitude, a biographical entry about Liu Tian Hua from the dictionary notes indicates, "his practical approach to folk-music collecting, which was influential in music circles" (*Zhongguo Yinyue Cidian,* Dictionary of Chinese Music, 1930). Liu initiated a collection campaign and spent many years visiting rural areas to collect samples of folk songs. In doing so, he influenced his students and the folk musician specialists who followed.

Liu Tian Hua raised the status of the *erhu,* which had been used traditionally and predominantly by priests and street musicians to that of a concert hall instrument. With his Western violin training, Liu introduced a variety of bowing and fingering techniques, as well as a wider range of three octaves, departing from the conventional one-and-a-half octaves. Liu's[55] ten *erhu* solos and technical exercises (see appendix D, example 3), remain the standard repertoire for both professional and amateur players. He studied folk music and its composers as well as investigating and interpreting folk music for music establishments and higher institutions of music learning.

Liu Tian Hua was a native of Jiangyin in the Southern Province of Jiangsu of the People's Republic of China. In 1909 at the age of fourteen, he began his studies of Western brass instruments at the Changzhou Secondary School. He soon found himself involved in the anti-Qing Dynasty Youth organization as a brass player. Although born into a family of intellectuals, due to their poor background, he terminated his studies after graduating from high school in 1911 but returned to his alma mater as a teacher in 1914. From high school, he studied briefly in Shanghai and became a member of the *Kaiming* Drama Society. During his sojourn in Shanghai, he also joined another group called the "Enlightened Troupe" who

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[55] Liu founded the Chinese Music Innovation Society in 1927, compiled and published a music magazine and took part in the setting up *Ai Mei* Music Society. He also collected and collated many musical scores, arranged and wrote fifteen studies for the *pipa* and forty-seven studies of the *erhu* which have formed the foundation for professional performance practice and compositions (www.home.pacific.net.sg).

proved to be the impetus for his future efforts in the musical arts. During this time, Liu studied the *erhu, pipa* and later the *guqin* from folk musicians and Chinese monks around Shanghai. At a local market, he bought an *erhu* and began composing his illustrious *erhu* solo, 'Moonlit Night'.

In 1917 Liu began his study of the *erhu* under the tutelage of Zhou Shao Mei (1885-1938), a "*Jiangnan sizhu*[56] master" and virtuosic *erhu* player. Liu was inspired by him to do his utmost to encourage the proliferation of the *erhu* at conservatories and academic institutions instead of keeping the *erhu* in the folk domain[57]. Zhou Shao Mei's favourite piece, *Xu Feng Qu,* is still a classic in the *erhu* repertory. In *Xu Feng Qu,* we find a special style of playing the *erhu* in which separate bowing with *Jiangnan* styled embellishments adds local flavour to the musical expressions (Shen, 1998 p.27). Zhou's influence on Liu marked the cornerstone of his solo *erhu* pieces where he incorporates "non pentatonic scale degrees (often mistakenly perceived as innovative or Western-influenced), which in some cases are similar to the modal shifts found in traditional *Jiangnan sizhu* melodies" (Witzleben, 1995, p.21).

In 1922 Cai Yuan Pei[58] (1867–1940), who was the first Chancellor of Beijing National University or *Beida,* invited Liu to be a member of the music faculty. By then a renowned player of traditional folk music, Liu Tian Hua joined his elder

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[56] *Jiangnan sizhu* (ibid) is a musical genre in which silk stringed and bamboo wind instruments are of primary importance and played in the musical style of the Jiangnan area (Witzleben, 1995, p.58). It comprises plucked string instruments such as a *pipa*, one or two *sanxian*, and a *qin qin*. The bowed strings are one or two *erhu* and the struck stringed instrument is the *yangqin*. As for the 'bamboo' instruments, they comprise a *dizi*, a *xiao*, and a *sheng*. It may include some percussion instruments such as the *ban* or clapper, a small flat drum known as the *gu*, a *muyu* or carved wooden-fish instrument and lastly, *pongzhong* which is a pair of hand-bells. This genre is also regarded as one of the most pentatonic of Chinese music.

[57] These academic institutions or conservatories in later years produced some outstanding and excellent performers of international standing. They are Jiang Feng Zhi (1908-1986), Wu Zhi Min (b.1932), Wang Guo Tong (b.1939), Min Hui Fen (b.1932) and those of others (see appendix B.4). Notwithstanding, Jiang Jin Hua (b.1961) after the "Gang of Four" and Liu Wen Jin's 'Fantasy on the Sanmen Gorge', took the *erhu* to its highest peak in *erhu* music of that century. Ming Hui Fen did justice to Liu's *erhu* concerto, "Great Wall Capriccio" written in 1982. Notably, the majority of the composers originated from the Jiangsu Province and later established their careers in Beijing and other parts of China. The 1960s also saw Wang Li Li (b.1968) conquering the podium with her dazzling command of the *erhu*, after winning the national *erhu* competition in 1992. Since then, many concert pieces have been composed for this instrument and its variants.

"Gang of Four" which includes Yao Wen Yuan who wrote an editorial entitled "A Novel and Unique Opinion," commented critically on Debussy's *Monsieur Croche Antidilettante*. The Director of the Shanghai Conservatory He Lu Ding and many others fell into the trap of revealing how they felt about the write-up. It turned out to be a calculated strategy to flush them out, "and then systematically eliminate them during the coming Cultural Revolution" (He Lu Ding, 1981, p.183-187).

[58] Cai was knowledgeable in Confucianism and Western ideologies and philosophies and strongly believed that cultural syncretism was the answer to modernization of China. With this strong conviction, he set forth to recruit local and Western teachers which included Xiao You Mei (1884-1940), a composer who had conservatoire training in Germany and Japan.

brother Liu Fu (1891–1934) who is also the leader in the "1918 Folk Song Campaign"[59]. This reform group founded in 1916 contributed substantially to the expansion of *Beida's* department of music known as *Beijing Daxue Yinyue Chuanxi Suo* (Institute of Music Transmission and Practice of Beijing National University). This department offered courses in both Chinese and Western vocal and instrumental performance. This group of intellectuals comprising music lecturers founded a Bureau for the collection of folk songs or the *Geyao Zhengjichu.* Subsequently, this led to the formation of *Geyao Yanjiuhui,* also called the Folk Song Research Society. The successful collections of nearly 14,000 song texts were not from a full-scale exercise of fieldwork or research carried out by the staff, but from sympathetic private individuals who contributed through the *Geyao Zhoukan* or Folklore Weekly magazine. The collection of folk songs were not overtly politically motivated but created a machinery of "folklore", easily utilized for social propaganda. This propaganda was aimed at changing the mindset and social attitudes of urban Chinese. Its other purpose was to invoke camaraderie, friendship and cohesiveness amongst the intellectuals and the common people (Schimmelpenninck, 1997).

Liu Tian Hua's participation and encouragement of the collection of folk music can be viewed as an important influence on his parallel interest - music composing. "Liu can thus be credited for having enlarged the scope of the Folk Song Campaign giving it a more cohesive focus" (Zhongguo Yinyue Cidian, 1984, p.138). His prowess and commitment as a protagonist of the Folk Song Campaign, "led the way to the urban-professional ethos [for the folk musicians as] he was thoroughly [well]-versed in folk-literati style, and undertook research in several traditional genres" (Jones, 1995, p.40) on Chinese instruments and musicology.

While teaching at another *Beida* faculty, the Beijing Art School for Women, Liu also found time to learn the violin and Western music theory which included harmony and composition. As a result of the influence of these music lessons as well as his developing *Jiangnan sizhu* style on the *erhu*, Liu gave his first public performance of his completed 'Moonlit Night' in 1924. It proved successful and has had a following of appreciative audiences to the present day. Some of his ten principal works for the *erhu* are 'Bird's Song in a Desolate Gorge', 'The Sound of Agony', 'Night Song', 'Groaning in Illness', 'The Flickering of the Candle Flame', and those of others for *erhu* solo are landmarks in Chinese and *erhu* music. For *pipa,* he wrote his 'March for the Betterment', 'From the Opera', and 'Fake Greed' (see appendix D, example 1) as well as etudes or technical exercises (see appendix D, example 3). As for the ensembles, 'Variations on a Traditional Tune' found a place in the hearts of many in terms of Chinese orchestration. The titles themselves are sometimes extraneous to the music but could be directly representative of the piece. These representative thoughts are synonymous to all Chinese art and music,

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[59] The Folk Song Campaign was an iconoclastic movement. Its aim was to formulate a new national vernacular by gathering folk song texts from peasants who represented the "voice and spirit" of the Chinese people (Hung, 1985). In the course of collecting the folk songs, the *Beida* students discovered the creative value and the quality of bucolic and village music. They made every effort to collect them systematically for future research. Eventually, in the later stages, the collection of music became part of the Folk Song Campaign. The Folk Song Campaign also accelerated the reformation of the Chinese vernacular language, deviating from the orthodox literary and complex Chinese character and language.

and comes from the pictorial images of the *jianpu* notation that is used for *pipa* (see appendix D, example 2).

The *erhu* emerged in the 1920s as a solo concert hall instrument amongst a plethora of regional instruments. Liu's mastery of both Chinese instruments and the Western violin enabled him to successfully blend Western violin technique with Chinese melody. His trademark was a combination of the above together with the incorporation of Northern folk elements, evident in narrative music[60]. This distinctive approach has become an icon in present-day Chinese music. Liu's contribution as an archetypal composer and leader in the Folk Song Campaign saw the development of the modern field of Chinese musicology. This, along with the discontinuation of the use of the cumbersome literary Chinese as the primary language of literature and scholarship, are the resultant impact of Liu's efforts.

Furthermore, Liu was the first musician to use Western methods of music scoring to transcribe Chinese folk music pieces, and also pioneered the introduction of chords into traditional melodies. "The chords were not necessarily used functionally, however; [rather as] an accompaniment [that] would shadow a tune heterophonically, playing 'chords' only at moments of particular emphasis" (Fletcher, 2001, p.356).

Liu Tian Hua succumbed to scarlet fever in 1932, during a field trip to Beijing to collect musical scores for gong and drum music. The world had lost one of the greatest leaders in the field of Chinese music.

5.1.2 LIU TIAN HUA'S MUSIC.

Liu's compositions portray him as a distinguished *erhu* composer and innovator. Below is a list of his early works which are programmatic and have evocative titles.

- 'The Song of Agony', known also as Joy in Bitterness is the epitome of Liu's feelings in his struggle in adverse circumstances to aid the survival of Chinese folk music. This piece also depicts the disillusionment of intellectuals who despaired of the gloomy state of the arts in China during the first half of the twentieth century.

- 'Night Song' is a tranquil piece by Liu who wrote it while enjoying a calm and peaceful nocturnal ambience, whilst gazing at the moonlit sky. The music explores how it affected him emotionally, and it took him six years to write the piece after this brief encounter.

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[60] Narrative music comprises two kinds of forms as in *Tanci* from Suzhou and *Dagu* from Peking. They each have a storyline with different inflexions of speech. *Tanci* is sung by blind musicians with an audience where as *Dagu* is a harvesting song sung by field workers.

- 'Flickering of the Candle Flame'. The flickering of happiness and the flame of life is well represented in this dance-like theme and variations. Liu wrote this last piece characterized by well-pronounced oscillations and a lively, vivid tune.

- 'Song of Staying Idle'. Liu employed the use of overtones to extend the melodic range and agility of the *erhu* instrument. This piece maintains a subtle lingering tune with vast opportunities for tonal manipulation and embellishments. It tells of the brief happy moments in life when all matters are fine.

- 'The Song of Sadness'. Liu was a composer of many moods. His compositions ranged from noble to peasant simplicity; from elegance to lyrical means. In this piece, he successfully blends elements of Western music and the fine playing technique of the *erhu,* coherently with a rhythmic clapper.

- 'Bird's Song in a Desolate Gorge'. Here, the melodies are characterized by the effects of a variety of birds chirping in the gorge through repeated acciaccatura notes. It is technically demanding and musically appealing with its distinctive character. Duple time is generally used. Note the original 2/8 time in cipher notation had been interpreted and changed to 2/4 time when transcribed. It assimilates the duple time of the coda found in the original piece. The transcribed notation using 2/4 time is to facilitate a clear definition of the time-value structure of melodic writing, equating constraint and equilibrium (see appendix D, example 5 in Western transcribed notations extracting excerpts from section 2 and 5 and also appendix D, example 6 in cipher notation of excerpts from section 1 to 5 from the 'Bird's Song in a Desolate Gorge').

5.1.3 ABING or HUA YAN JUN (1893–1950)

A contemporary of Liu Tian Hua is a performer of the *erhu* known as Abing. Although his tragic life found him living far from the institutions of music frequented by Liu, his influence on the development of the *erhu* was no less important. The influence by musicians of his era as in *Jiangnan Sizhu* technique, paved way for the changes in his style of playing and open up new possibilities of authentic and syncretic forms. Many of Abing's compositions have been arranged for Chinese instrumental ensemble and Western string quartets. The Singapore Huqin Quartet players grew up learning Abing's compositions and play them as part of their concert repertoire.

Transcriptions of his transcribed 'Moon Reflected on the Second Springs' or *Erquan ying yue* (see appendix D, example 7 in cipher notation) is now performed widely using various interpretations and arrangements. His other two *erhu* pieces are 'Cold Spring Wind', *Han Chun Feng Qu* and 'Listening to the Pines', *Ting Song.* The descriptive notations and expressions on the score of 'Moon Reflected on the Second Springs' itself are only suggestive and not absolutely fixed which leaves much room for varied interpretations. It is usually accompanied by *yangqin* (dulcimer) in a spectrum of flexible tempos and drama. 'Listening to the Pines' was

composed in 1939 and exudes reverberating melodic punctuations, compelling rhythmic drive and much ornamentation. Techniques used to play this piece stretched the construction capabilities of the *erhu*. *Ting Song* leaves a strong impression on musicians who attempt it in different arrangements.

Born in the 1890s, the exact birthdate and details about Abing's life are vague as there was no documentation at that time. We do know that he was born in Wuxi of Jiangsu Province in East China and orphaned at a very young age. After his adoption by the local master of Leizudian Temple, Hua Qing He, Abing followed in his adoptive father's footsteps and became a Daoist apprentice (Stock, 1996). Abing was shunned by locals; however, because he had similar features to his "adopted" father; they suspected that he was illegitimate[61]. Abing's flair for music was apparent early in his life when he absorbed quickly whatever music he was taught. He learned to play many Chinese instruments at the Daoist temple including bamboo flute (*di* and *xiao)*, the three-stringed lute *sanxian*, *erhu*, *pipa*, *luogu* and *ban* (gongs and drums). Initially, he belonged to the local *chuigu* ensemble[62]. He was later ousted from the group because of his so called "frivolous" acts of playing at weddings and funeral processions. These were considered a humiliation for the ensemble as it went against the conformities of the Daoist position of reverence. He was left with no choice but to be a freelance "*chuigu* player", roaming the streets and earning a meagre living.

Abing's sufferings remain controversial today. Other plausible explanations for his expulsion include Nationalist Miao Bin[63], a local scoundrel who allegedly accused Abing of defamation to the Daoist group. Abing appears to have been a scapegoat for internal problems faced by the Daoist sect. Seemingly, these biographical discrepancies arose from the much disseminated information by Yang Ying Liu through his writings (Stock, 1996).

Further confusion comes from Du Ya Xiong's biography of Abing. He mentioned Abing's habitual opium smoking and his frequent visits to brothels. He claimed that Abing had sold off two of the three houses that he inherited from his adoptive father, and also some religious objects and paraphernalia (Stock, 1996). Prominent British ethnomusicologist Stock frequently refers to Yang's biography which refrains from any mention about Abing's social ills and stigma including the rationale for his expulsion from the Daoist group. This is perhaps suggestive of Yang's inconsistencies in his biography of Abing. Suffice to say, the historical account of Abing's life from his roots until his death contains many uncertainties, as he was highlighted as a revolutionary, a romantic, a drug user, a promiscuous old man and an ardent Daoist. These assumptions are being challenged as to their accountability especially considering the conflict-ridden, social and political innuendos of that time.

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[61] Du Ya Xiong, a writer cum musician, as revealed in his writing suspected that Abing was an illegitimate son. (Du, 1981, p.79), Abing *zhuanlue*. Nanyi xuebao.

[62] Chuigu ensemble was a highly respected wind and percussion ensemble of the Daoist sect highly respected for their *Sunan Chuide Yue* - reed and percussion music of Southern Jiangsu.

[63] Miao Bin (1902-1946) was executed by a firing squad and was a member of the Nationalist Party.

Abing's marriage to Dong Cuidi in 1932 lasted for twenty-years. Cuidi had four children by her previous marriage whilst Abing and Cuidi did not have any of their own. Tragically, Abing became blind at the age of thirty-five, through not seeking treatment for an eye disease. "*Xiazi* Abing" or "blind Abing," as he was known by many, began to be treated like a beggar and social outcast. Jonathan Stock suggested he was immortalized as an "archetypal, downtrodden street musician" and the *erhu* "functions for many Chinese as an emblem and reminder of Abing's blindness" (Stock, 1996, p.62).

Abing made an impact as a performer and composer despite his infirmity. The *erhu* had been likened to a blind man's 'rice bowl', as reiterated by Louis Laloy who commented on how "this instrument is reserved for street singers and mendicants who scrape it mercilessly" (Laloy, 1909, p.78). Furthermore, Georges Soulie stated that fiddle playing by blind vagabonds was used in various parts of China to indicate that they are approaching (Soulie as quoted by Stock, 1996). Today people still associate the *erhu* with the blind and the impoverished[64].

Stock further noted: "Du Ya Xiong asserts that it was only through Abing's fall to the most abject level of human existence, that he was able to become – through music, his one true companion – the voice of the downtrodden masses" (Stock, 1996, p.43). In reality, Abing was not a typical 'beggar' as he did not solicit any forms of payment and only took what was due to him. Nevertheless, Abing was treated with suspicion because of his use of anti-Japanese lyrics that he had coined whilst singing and accompanying with his *erhu*. Furthermore, the Communist Party made it clear that street people were not a desirable part of new national China.

According to one of Abing's biographers, the Chinese musicologist and historian Yang Yin Liu, Mao Zedong considered people with a low cast status to be classified as "social parasites". Mao's speech at Yan'an on Literature and Art in 1942, initiated that street and wandering musicians were considered epitomes of an unhealthy culture which was rendered undesirable and of no positive value to the communist ideologists. Abing unfortunately fell into this category; hence his work was highly "persecuted".

When Abing was near the end of his performing career, his biographer Yang was able to persuade him to be recorded by a group of visiting musicologists led by Yang himself, Cao An-He and Zhu Shi Kuang (1915) at a school hall in Wuxi during field research in August 1950. Arguments have since arisen as to whether his performance was a memorized series of rehearsed improvisational pieces or tuneful on-the-spot creations. The fact is he was given three days in advance to prepare for the recording as compared to the impromptu street playing of his usual

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[64] Conversations with Liu Mei Yu confirmed that even today, she associated *erhu* music with the blind and the impoverished, the moment I inquired about her understanding of Abing and his influence in her homeland.

Liu, whose home country is the province of Shenyang in China, is currently studying at Massey University in Wellington, undertaking her first degree in Business Management. She was randomly chosen to express her ideas about *erhu* music in China, and being a novice in *erhu* music does serve its purpose of translating an authentic opinion from the people of mainland China, even if it was an isolated case.

routine. Nevertheless, the recordings are a valuable record of Abing's talent.

Soon afterwards, Abing passed away. The recorded six pieces which included three for the *erhu* and another three for the *pipa* (four-stringed lute) were later musically notated as "appetizers" in the publications of music repertoires. These "appetizers" became instrumental solo transcriptions for conservatories and institutions of higher learning in music. Compared with Liu Tian Hua, it is demonstrated in these recorded works that Abing was not influenced by Western music during the time when Chinese music conservatories were adopting Western models for the transformation of a nationalistic music.

Abing was an extraordinary musician whose background as a Daoist priest gave him traditional models of performance technique. He chose to indulge himself in developing them, yet simultaneously preserving them. For example, his use of the high register (up to six positions) is suggestive of the influence of Cantonese music[63] that uses high-pitched *huqin* which were popular during his lifetime. Abing learned this genre of music from Li Song Shu, a musician, as stated by Zhang Zhen Ji (Zhang, 1980). This genre of music is basically mono-sectional in form with a slow beginning and fast ending. Abing's adaptation of the music of other stringed instruments such as *pipa*, *sanxian* and those of others for the *erhu*, may be a possible explanation for his many shifts of fingering positions. These techniques were not commonly practiced during his time by others. Moreover, he indulges in composing long and lyrical melodic lines departing from the conventional sequential phrase markings of that time. His works are often characterized by *Jiangnan sizhu* styled ornamentations.

Abing's versatility and expertise on *Jiangnan sizhu's* repertoire implicates his use of prolonged melodic expansion and his dexterity in improvisational playing as being poetical, mellifluous and legendary. He possessed an impeccable skill in ballad singing and was quick at conjuring a melody or an improvised version with the latest news or rumours he heard. He would sing this to the nearest willing listener. His music also helps us understand the traditions of both the rural and urban music culture. As Stock notes: "Abing occupies a central place in the affections of Chinese listeners and in the minds of the musicologists and performers who explain and re-create his music" (Stock, 1996, p.3).

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[63] Cantonese music was influential at the beginning of the twentieth century and had since developed from the *yueju* Cantonese opera for *gaohu* music.

PICTURE 5.1

Sketched by Lee Eng Fei

刘天华先生遗影

PORTRAIT OF LIU TIAN HUA

CHAPTER SIX

6.1 SOME CHARACTERISTIC DIFFERENCES BETWEEN WESTERN AND CHINESE MUSIC AESTHETICS

The Singapore Huqin Quartet has adopted the Western ensemble idiom of a quartet set-up. The members utilize their Chinese musical background in creating, reconstructing and developing a new kind of music. This process requires a concerted effort with the right mind set to reflect, learn, discuss and rectify any problems that may arise along the road of group and individual discovery.

Difficulties with a similar syncretic approach were encountered earlier this century by composer Chow Wen Chung[66]. For years he attempted to reconcile the differences between Chinese and Western music (Chang, 2001). He once attempted to graft a pentatonic mode onto a fugue. This was not deemed successful as it was developed in a heptatonic and triadic tradition and sounded like putting Chinese words into Bach's mouth. Some crucial points were noted by Chow about his interpretation of the general aesthetic values of Western and Chinese music. It was developed through his years of training in music as a composer with both Western and Chinese music. I will use his analysis as a model here.

Compared with Chinese music, some of the distinct characteristics that Chow found in Western music are the preference for straight tones as opposed to bent notes over a phrase or section. He also found little or no extemporization. In Western music the performer is obviously "in-charge" and has an overview of expected musical outcome. By contrast, Chinese music is heavily endowed with embellishments or bent notes over a regular or irregular phrase. Changes are made to pitch or melodic contours without tampering with its original metrical structure. In Chinese classical music there is no emphasis or accent on the first beat of each bar as is the characteristic of Western music. Rhythm is freely interpreted without rhythmic inhibitions on pulsation or drive. The music may sound rhapsodic and incomplete at times, as it reveals itself over time. This encourages creativity and leaves much to the discretion of the performer to extemporize without due concern with the outcome. Nonetheless, it captivates Chinese audiences with its hidden agenda to deliver the variant nuances that are commonly found in abstract pieces. Ethnomusicologist J. Lawrence Witzleben further said: "Recent compositions for Chinese instruments emphasize[d] extreme contrasts in volume, as well as in tempo, tonality, technique, and their elements" (Witzleben, 1995 p.132).

Witzleben has pointed out a major difference in performance stance, between Chinese and Western classical players (Witsleben, 1995). Chinese performers tend to express less 'physical' movements during a Chinese traditional music performance. For example, during performance practice Western players tend to look at the audience, toe tap and communicate through body movements, whereas Chinese

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[66] Chow Wen Chung is a composer and musician who once studied under Bohuslav Martinu and Edgar Varese and was a product of New England Conservatory in USA. He was brought up with a background in "classical Chinese literature, philosophy, fine arts, music and the temperament of a *wen ren* (the Confucian scholar-gentleman)" as he was taught the etiquette and behaviour of a gentleman of the gentry class (Chang, 2001, p.95).

players, in general, have more restrained body movements and lack facial expression.

With regard to the composers, Chinese traditional music derived its sources from folk or popular pieces whose composers remained anonymous, perhaps due to rearrangements made over older versions of compositions. By contrast, Western art music composers have long identified and made known the authorship of their works (Wong, 1997).

Another difference before the adoption of some Western practices is that a Chinese traditional composer of Chinese instruments would write a piece solely for himself and without an audience. He was the composer-performer-listener all wrapped up in one. The concept of listening remained as a composer-performer even if a close friend or a group of companions chose to be the participating audience. The role of this composer is to interpret through his personal musical experiences the pre-conceived notion and knowledge of expressive predicates ascribed in the properties and realm of music reflected in his own compositions. He is neither known as the "real creator, inventor" nor as an innovator in the Western understanding of a composer (Liu, 1985). The dichotomy above also encompassed musical philosophies[67] which arguably appeared more clearly in Western than traditional Chinese musical thoughts.

Another difference suggested by scholar Shen Sin Yan is multi voicing. Shen says: "It would be wrong to use many *erhu* at the same time as a voice, as composers would do in Western music as in chamber ensembles and in symphonies. It is thus clear from the orchestration point of view that, there is absolutely no analogy between the ensemble role of the *erhu* and the violin. They are completely different acoustically" (Shen, 1998, p.48). That is true because the *erhu* has distinct harmonic characteristics that "disappear" due to its similar features of skin-resonators and timbre when played in tutti. However, I am of the opinion there is a place for the *erhu* to be used as tutti in Chinese orchestra. Tutti playing does serve to achieve a richer and fuller monophonic texture. These comments are interesting considering the popularity of ensemble *erhu* playing today.

The SHQ members mentioned it is indeed an uphill task for them to find a comparable and uniform tone with a Western string quartet. The SHQ has resorted to having its *huqin* tailor made by a manufacturer in China. Ling Hock Siang's *erhu* is equipped with a flared sound barrel that will increase its volume and enhance the sound. He thinks further consideration is in order for the perfect blend with more ideas and modifications of the instruments required for a successful end result. Despite the difficulty, the SHQ's attempt of setting up this ensemble is to experiment with a new genre of syncretic ensemble music, which they knew would be challenging.

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[67] Musical philosophies are mutually interdependent [with] consistent ideas and definitions about formal, critical, and psychological aspects of music (Marshall, 1982, p.163).

6.2 COMPOSITION BY PHOON YEW TIEN FOR THE SINGAPORE HUQIN QUARTET

The aim of this musical analysis is to unpack the elements of and the influences drawn from, Western and Chinese music in 'Concord' by Phoon Yew Tien. In doing so I will unravel the SHQ's use of a syncretic idiom, for ensemble playing. In Phoon's work the roots of interdependence cannot be ignored between the Western and Chinese concepts of musical writing. Phoon's musical bi-lingual background in his compositions serves to illuminate such cross-cultural concepts.

It is fair to say that Chinese musicians do not tend to analyse their compositions as much as their Western counterparts. However, when one begins to analyse cross-cultural compositions, a few factors need to be taken into consideration. A relatively common approach by musicologists is to make a comparative analysis between two pieces to demonstrate the difference in style[68]. Different forms of measurement have been attempted by Schenkerian analysts and also ethnomusicologist Charles Adams who created a typology that analyses melodic contours that indicate pitch and time (Adams, 1976). Ethnomusicologists have also used a variety of analysis. For example, quantifiable data has been used for comparative cross-cultural understanding by New Zealand ethnomusicologist Mervyn McLean who initiated a graph that tabled intervals in relation to the tonic note in his study on the Maori music of New Zealand (McLean, 1966).

My system of analysis has been influenced by a mixture of Western musical analysis and Chinese theoretical understanding. The Western analysis is influenced by my knowledge of such forms as theme and variations and binary forms, etc. This is my approach in interpreting the music sampling in appendix A, p.83 entitled the 'Concord' composed by Phoon Yew Tien. Another author may interpret the piece differently. I shall begin with a "verbal description of the musical experience"[69] then follow with a symbolic categorization in terms of thematic development, motivic sections and scalar movements using Western theory of analysis, as reiterated by Nicholas Cook. He has pointed out that the early introduction of "symbols may lead to a premature precision which one's understanding of the music does not actually warrant" (Cook, 1987, p.231).

An attempt will be made to analyse Phoon's 'Concord' using objective methods while acknowledging the subjectivity of aesthetics in his composition. Pieter Toorn quoted Treitler's argument that "music scholarship in positivistic pursuit of fact and circumstance has too often neglected the fact which ignites our intellectual concerns, namely, the aesthetic experience"[70] (Treitler, as quoted in Toorn, 1995, p.67). Aesthetic here means a presupposition about epistemological beliefs about feelings,

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[68] 'Style' is also used as a synonym for 'type' where the description of a style specifies the techniques of construction that distinguish one type from others. It is [also] more likely to be acquired through inheritance rather than cultural exchange (Blum, 1992, pp. 168 and 173).

[69] Musical experiences are an extended thought or perception in which one creates, perform and listen to the music.

[70] Leo Treitler. (1969) The Present as History. *Perspectives of New Music 7*, No. 2 reprinted in Treitler, Music and the Historical Imagination, pp. 95-156.

perception, imagination, intuition and knowledge (Marshall, 1982). It should be noted that aesthetic discrimination can occur when differing music-cultures are judgemental about the organization of musical sound or voice, context of the music as well as how it is performed. Understanding the style of a piece of composition therefore hinges heavily on a specific music-culture's aesthetics.

A close investigation as to how the musical transformation is established in the creative process will be explored. I will analyse musical texture with descriptive voice parts, expressive qualities of the keys used, metre, ornamentations, style and other elements indicative of Western musical traits. Various sequences or motives evident in the metamorphosis of Phoon's works will be identified and marked on the music scores and furnished as a sampling in appendix A, p.83.

The 'Concord' may appear deceptively simple in its compositional technique but it has vitality as a result of the composer's personal expression. Phoon has created a vigorous, athletic, yet intrinsically beautiful piece. Its captivating musical language adds to the cultural prolix and diversity that it represents. It may be considered quintessentially Chinese in instrumentation with a mixture of Western features. It is an integrative melding of Chinese and Western identity in Singapore.

The piece encapsulates different versions of musical plausibility in interpretation. Listeners could sit back and enjoy this piece at a social situation without much concern about its structural make-up. The music is capable of describing emotions without having to announce its specific origin. It can easily set listeners to feel the appropriate emotional attitudes perceived in their individual cultural experience. I believe 'Concord' is invigorating, precise, concise and consistently communicative. This is the product of much thought in encapsulating the rubric of a syncretic idiom for the Singapore Huqin Quartet in chamber music.

Phoon said his primary intention with 'Concord' was to present four musical elements or motives. The structural layout is predictable in this piece which is typical of Phoon, as it conforms to the theme and variations form with four short melodic materials as thematic cores (see appendix A). Motivic contractions or diminutions suggesting an anticipation of a theme are employed from the very beginning and occur again on bars 134 to 138. The melodic first theme A, played on the lower register by the *da gehu* begins on bar 4. The interval of an augmented 2nd between A flat and B or in retrograde, is distinctively employed repeatedly on bars 25, 26, 61, 75, 76, 140 and again on bars 112 to 115. Bars 134 to 135 are equivalent to the melodic skeleton of the initial theme. Sporadic appearance of these motivic patterns can be found on bars 31 to 36 with emphasis of intervallic patterns on bars 135 to 138. Bars 76 to 79 illustrate the thematic material by outlining with semiquavers repetitive notes of G, A flat, B and D, thus reinforcing the melodic first theme A.

Phoon's use of an augmented 2nd in 'Concord' shows Western influence as it is only rarely used in the pentatonic scalar structure of Chinese music which is the basis of this piece. An example of this pentatonic scale can be found on bars 105 to 106 in its related C Major key in a descending scalar movement. The positioning of the fourth can be analysed in two ways. The fourth modal degree F on bars 94, 121, 132 and 133 towards the end are suggestive of passing or auxiliary notes. They are extraneous

to the principal pentatonic scale of the central C minor key. However, the fourth degree F can also be viewed as part of the Western tempered scale, just as fifths in Chinese modal system are not subjected to pitch alterations with its relative notes. This is an example of a successful fusion of Western and Chinese tonal hierarchies in this work.

The second melodic theme B is voiced by the *da gehu* on bar 10. This is followed by repetitive motives which occur through bar 15 for *zhonghu* and subsequently for the *erhu* and the *gaohu*. A replica of this theme emerges again on bars 97 to 102. The thematic organization is further announced, with the surfacing of new rhythmic insertions, by punctuating the first quaver notes that begin with the starting notes G, B, C and D. Materials taken from the second theme in bars 44 to 45 and 46 to half-bar 53 exemplify how the melodic themes or sequences are varied by partially repeating them or extending them throughout the piece. The recurrence of the second melodic theme in bars 60, 68 and 74 serves as a thematic expansion or development of the variations that follow. Bars 93 to 97 are easily recognized as a reappearance of the same theme. It ends with a cadential chord of the second melodic theme on bar 145.

The next noticeable feature that can be heard is the third melodic motive-C. It marks a similar hierarchical relationship in terms of the Western tonal and Chinese modal perspectives. The theme G, A, C and D commences on bar 15 and proceeds to the second half of the beat of bar 18, bars 83 to 84 and bars 102 to 106. In bars 62, 66, 67 and 69 it is arpeggiated over the tonal plan of its own theme and vertically aligns with itself at bar 73. Sequential repetition and expansion soon followed. A variant, and also in retrograde of this motivic framework is pronounced between bars 55 to 57, bars 80 to 81, bars 85 to 91 and 130.

The dual melodic and sub-melodic themes A flat, G, E flat and D as well as C, B and A flat first appear on the last note of bar 20 through bar 22 and bars 23 to 24. They form the fourth motivic theme D^1 and its associate sequential theme D^2. The melodic theme D^1 emerges again on the last beat of bar 107 to 111. This leads to the sequential theme D^2 which appears to be intersected and consequently merged with the first melodic theme A in retrograde style from bars 25 to 26 and bars 112 to 115. Thematic repetitions can be located from bars 117 to 120, thus further strengthening the alternations on repeated notes from bars 121 with the melodic theme B and C. Phoon's idea of repetitive occurrences of short motifs or sequences is an attempt to adopt similar motivic nomenclature throughout 'Concord'. It is also clear these directed melodic movements including those intertwined by prevailing octave ostinatos on bars 59 to 62 are evident in both the Western and Chinese theoretical approach in music. The aim of these accented ostinatos towards the end is to create incessant motivic movements which add excitement and energy to this piece.

An apparent unrelated musical ornament in the form of trills that appear once from bars 64 to 71, consolidating the G note in different registers, is actually typical in traditional Chinese music and practice. Trills producing mellifluous prolongations over long notes followed by portamento over wide leaps are also commonly found in the Western compositions. It reflects the composer's intention to create a functional backbone for the assimilation of both the Western and Chinese idiom. The

improvisatory and heterophonic textures of Chinese *erhu* music are absent in 'Concord'. Ornaments are also limited. This demonstrates the introduction of the Western style of composition for this ensemble work.

The movement of modulations from C minor to its related key of C major can be traced from bar 14 to the first half of bar 20, bars 36 to 51, bars 55 to 60, bar 62 to the second beat of bar 75 and bars 80 to 83. These modulatory occurrences take shape from bars 85 till the third beat of bar 107, bars 121 to 133 and end in C major. They are common practices in Western music. As the piece progresses, intensification of the use of modulations provokes the notion of emphasis on each composite theme and structure. Alternatively it can also be viewed as an option of a modal change and not a true modulation if one chooses to interpret as such. This is, however, based on the musical experience of the composer who seeks to justify and confirm this musical perception.

Motivic fragmentations of running semiquavers are juxtaposed by a delay of two semiquavers on the high register of the *gaohu* together with motivic components remaining incessantly repetitive from bars 25 to 26 and similarly from bars 112 to 115. An interchange of the motives from the middle to the lower register occurs from bar 27 to 28. These motives illuminate the process of melodic reductions and elaborate repetitions that tend to idensify the resultant textual patterns. These constitute a single sequential movement. These contour motions of rhythmic ostinatos are associated with both the Western and Chinese idiom of music. It is interesting to listen to the re-emergence of the four short melodic themes nearing the conclusion as it summarizes the underlying musical material and context of this form.

The many motivic connections, harmonic reductions and alignment of melodic contents point to the contrapuntal style of this composition. Viewing the entire piece one could observe the rigour with which Western traits have been adopted. For example, the use of the augmented 4^{th} on bars 20 to 23, bars 51, 75, 76, 110 and 111, to name a few, are usually not found in Chinese music. Phoon's use of augmented 4^{th} in varying degrees with the notes D and A^{b} draws expectation about how this piece is heard in multiple ways and seeks meaning behind the sounds. The interlocking melodic and intervallic principles act as a fundamental device for Phoon to exercise the cultural meaning in his musical choices. As Javier Perez de Cuellar from UNESCO writes: "If cultural diversity is "behind us, around us and before us" as Claude Levi-Strauss put it, we must learn how to let it lead not to clash of cultures, but to the fruitful coexistence . . . ." (Cuellar, 1996).

Intervals of diminished 4^{th} and 5^{th} can be found as well as augmented 2^{nd} on bars 34, 118 and 120. These ranges of intervals are elements of the Western fundamentals of music rather than Chinese music theory. It is also apparent that rising fifths representing the *yang* and the descending fourths the *yin* (refer p.13) are conspicuously disguised to exhaust the dominance of variables in pitch and intervals of Chinese musical elements in this piece.

Though the arguments of the existence of coterminous forms prevail, this piece 'Concord' however, does provide a clear definition of a theme and variations form. This piece also infers a distinction between the Western and Chinese approach and

the assertion in the assimilation of the syncretic process.

6.3 CONCLUSION

This thesis examined the *erhu* from China and its development as a vehicle for syncretic music-making in Singapore. The *erhu,* a member of the *huqin* string family, is introduced by exploring its historical heritage from Northern Mongolia until its "sinization" by the Han Chinese. The beginning chapter also viewed the political changes in mainland China which brought about the raising of status and the development of the *erhu.* This change affected the *erhu* which shifted from the instrumental ensemble of the "silk and bamboo" as well as vocal narrative accompaniment of the folk domain to a solo instrumental genre taught as a core subject at music conservatoria. With its many roles, the *erhu* was able to survive through tumultuous political events of the Communist Party in China during the early part of the twentieth century. They ignored the *erhu* at the beginning of the century and later used it as a symbol of the proletariat's "struggle". Thus, what was once considered a "beggars'" instrument developed into a valued instrument of the Chinese.

The music of the SHQ can be called syncretic. The SHQ's members have bi-musical experiences having learnt the Chinese and Western instruments that enabled them to perform traditional Chinese and syncretic works composed by overseas and Singaporean composers such as Phoon Yew Tien. Careful analysis of Phoon's music based on Chow Wen Chung's model reveals the fusion of elements of Chinese and Western music. The manager of the SHQ emphasized the quartet's role in Singapore society as a vibrant and viable music ensemble and an asset to local pride.

Members of the Singapore Huqin Quartet are concerned with artistic communication. They believe that musicians with open minds such as themselves, together with the media, policy makers and nation builders, can help maintain Singapore as a culturally rich nation through music. The SHQ feels that *huqin* music in any form will maintain its share of audiences in Singapore even though current preferences of electroacoustic instruments and pop culture are popular with young Singaporeans. The Singapore Huqin Quartet has contributed to their nation's vision of "unity in musical diversity" along with other traditional genres that constitute the nation's heritage. They express the hope that more musicians and composers will play an active role in developing syncretic musical language. Collaborative Western musicians who have worked with the Singapore Huqin Quartet found their syncretic musical products successful. New Zealand classical guitarist Matthew Marshall felt there are present and future possibilities for the growth of Chinese syncretic music, as played by the SHQ.

The SHQ uses four types of *huqin* in a string quartet ensemble. They play the *jinghu, erhu, zhonghu* and the *gehu.* Modifications to the instruments of the *huqin* family have occured in the twentieth century. These modifications have been exploited by the SHQ to fine-tune the blending possibilities of *huqin* instruments. An example is the *gehu* which was used in ensemble playing in the 1950s and is played in the SHQ today. The *gehu* is a cross between a cello and a *hu* and the main difference is its

strings being bowed across the four strings. This differs from the *erhu* where the bow sits between two strings. The larger *da gehu* was also invented later in the twentieth century but is used only when a double bass is absent. The rest of the *hu* also hold prominent positions in the modern Chinese orchestra, except for the *jinghu* which is occasionally added when required for the special high pitched effect.

Performance techniques are also explored in this study along with finger positions, notations and the use of ornaments. These techniques and elements form the basis from which new music can be performed through re-composed ornamentation and also from broad melodic and rhythmic interpretations. The use of *jianpu* or cipher notations in a "movable *doh*" or key-system is also found in *erhu* music. The *erhu* is taught differently in mainland China from in Singapore. In China, the *erhu* is learned through imitation of the teacher in the early stages or "*bazhe shou jiao*- teaching by holding the hand" whereas in Singapore a more liberal approach is generally practiced. Singapore teachers tend to encourage their students to perform through personal expressions and by parodying or imitating them.

The contribution of two *erhu* pioneers, Liu Tian Hua and Abing is their *erhu* music which is featured prominently in the repertory of conservatoria both in Singapore and China. The breakdown of barriers between the Chinese *erhu* music and the concept of Western music require the interactions of the two traditions. Liu Tian Hua has created fine examples for the initiated. Another point of interest drawn was Liu's involvement in academia where private instruction of the *erhu* was discouraged and viewed as a capitalist venture by the Communist ruling party of mainland China. This official policy however, does detract from the apparent eliticism present when outstanding students gain placements at conservatoria and elite schools or perform well on stage and in the music competition arena. The *erhu* continues to play a prominent traditional role in regional musical styles of mainland China through instrumental ensembles and as an accompaniment in Chinese operas and religious services.

The link of heritage between Liu Tian Hua and the SHQ is carried through Liu's traditional musical writing being incorporated into the repertoire of the SHQ. Liu Tian Hua can be considered one of China's early folklorists, collecting and transcribing pieces for the *erhu.* Folk musician Abing's contributions are through an oral medium transcribed by others. Arrangement of his works for modern Western orchestra is becoming known in Malaysia and Singapore. Abing's personal life mirrors the volatile status of the *erhu* in the early part of the twentieth century which now serves as an important instrument for the Chinese. He was both praised and persecuted by the Communist party who used him as a symbol of a "common man" but neglected him later in life.

The concluding chapter gives some examples of the aural interactions of syncretism. These shown interactions are through an analysis of a sample of the piece 'Concord' written for the SHQ by Phoon. This piece reflects musical subtleties, interpretations and style of a syncretic ensemble idiom. The thematic materials or the selection of 'Concord's development of a given theme is put together through significant variables of motives or sequences and imitations. Phoon's success as a composer can be attributed in part to his many attempts to apply syncretic compositional techniques

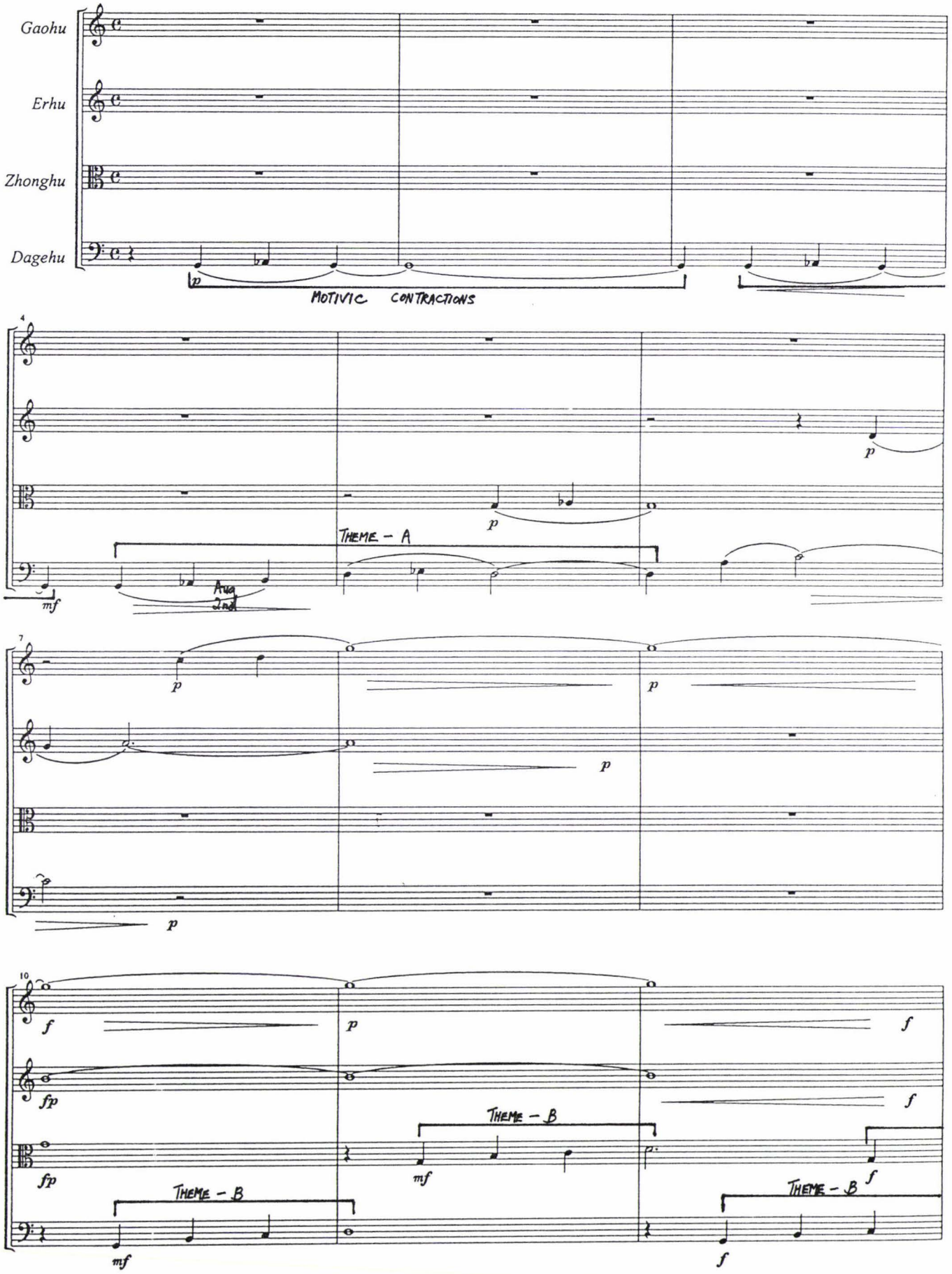
to his writing and to tap the audience's musical awareness, growth and maturation. The transmission of a new ensemble idiom and emergence of stylistic nuances through the SHQ has proven successful in a culturally literate nation like Singapore. I hope this study will serve to enlighten the younger generation about the *erhu* as well as those who had chosen to view *erhu* music as archaic and alien.

Concord

for Huqin Quartet

Allegro

Phoon Yew Tien



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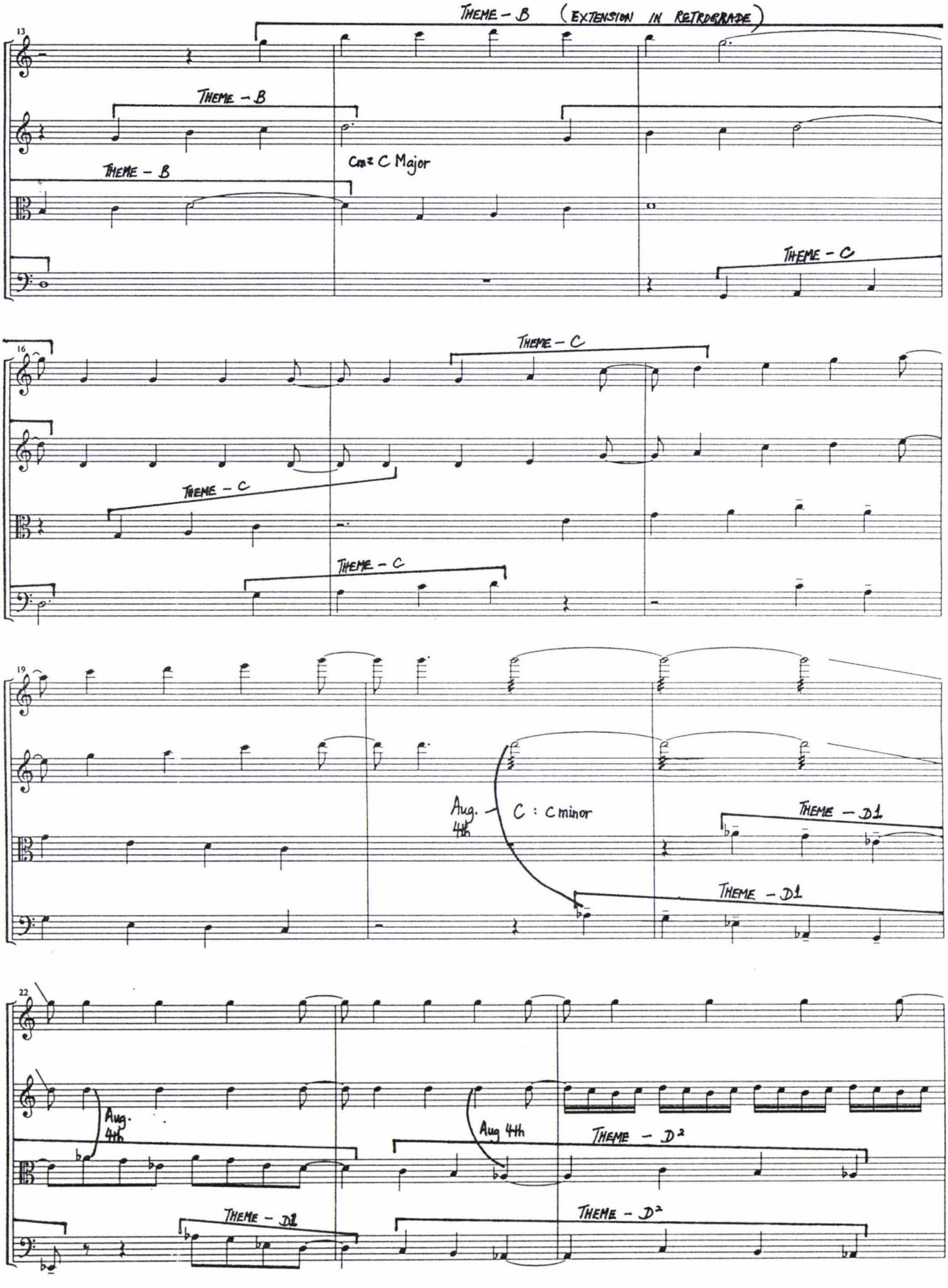
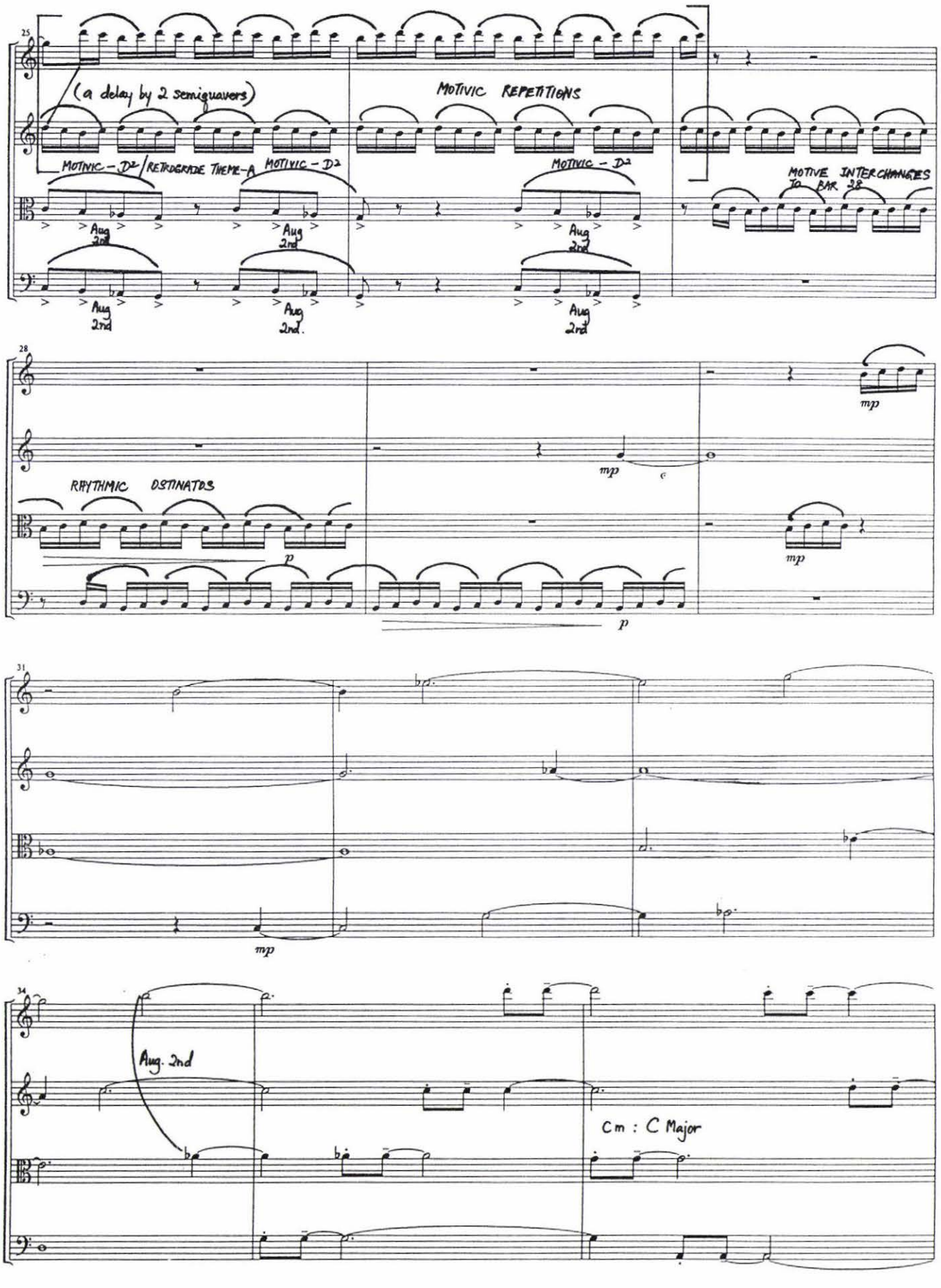
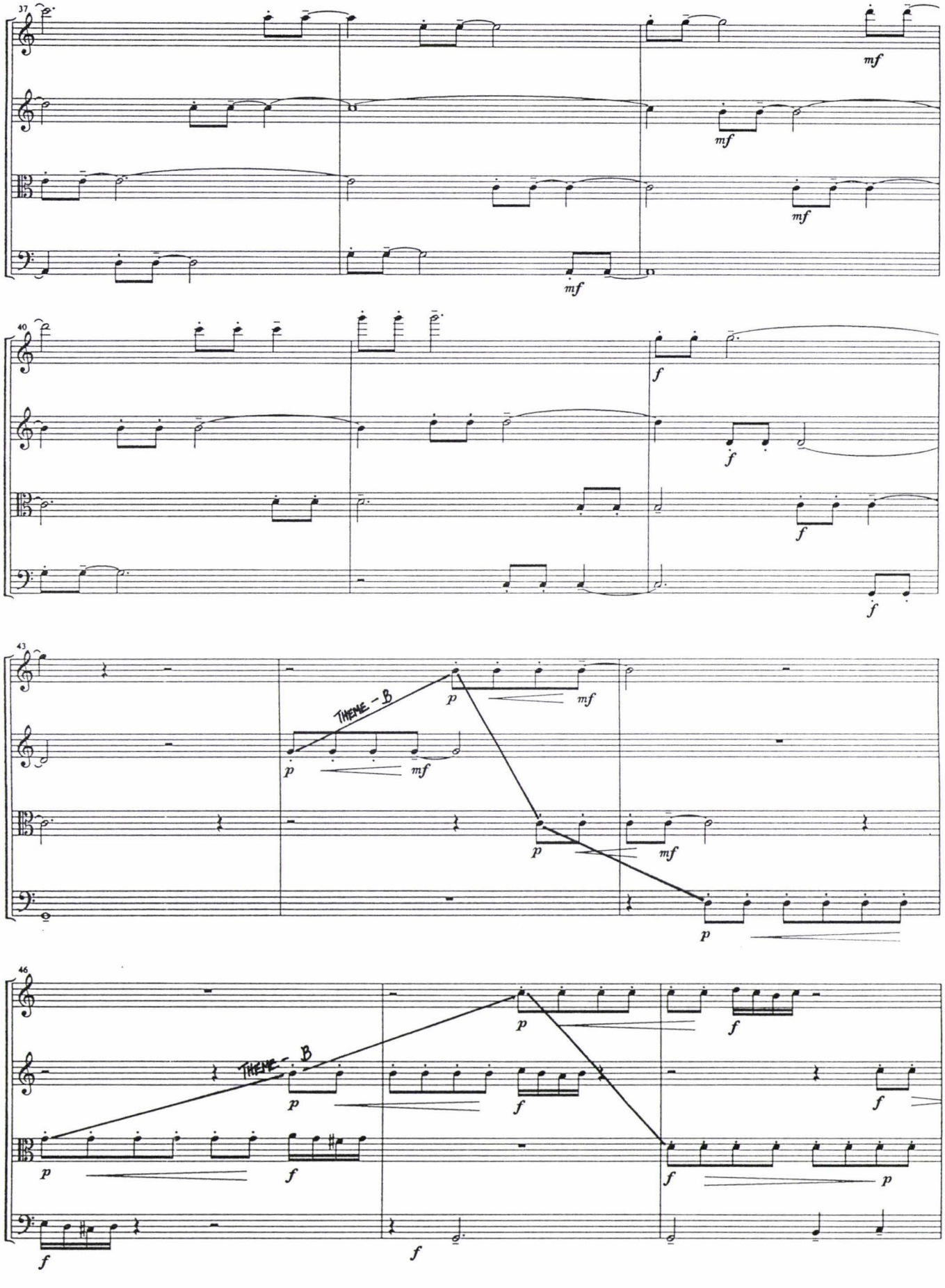
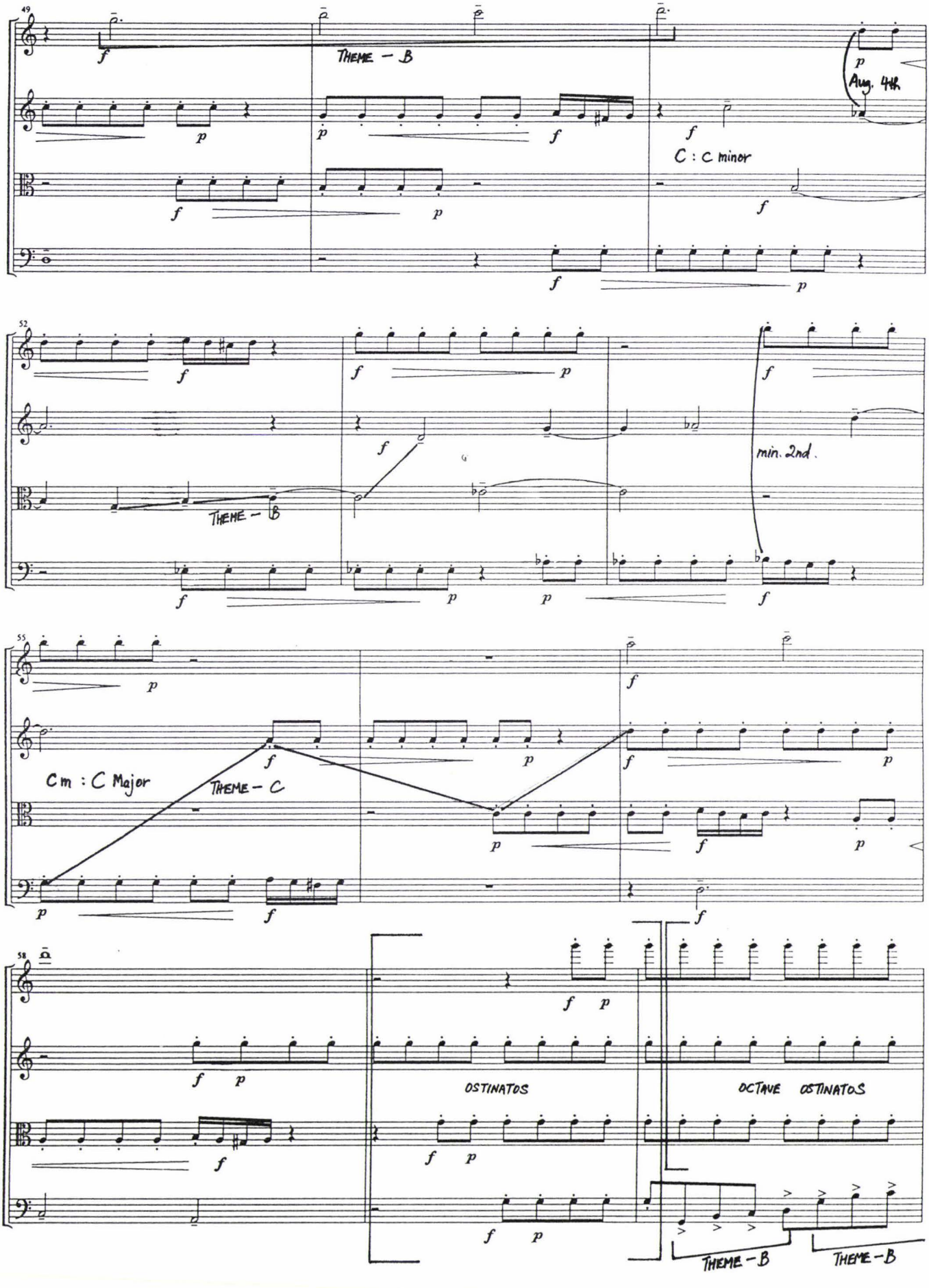
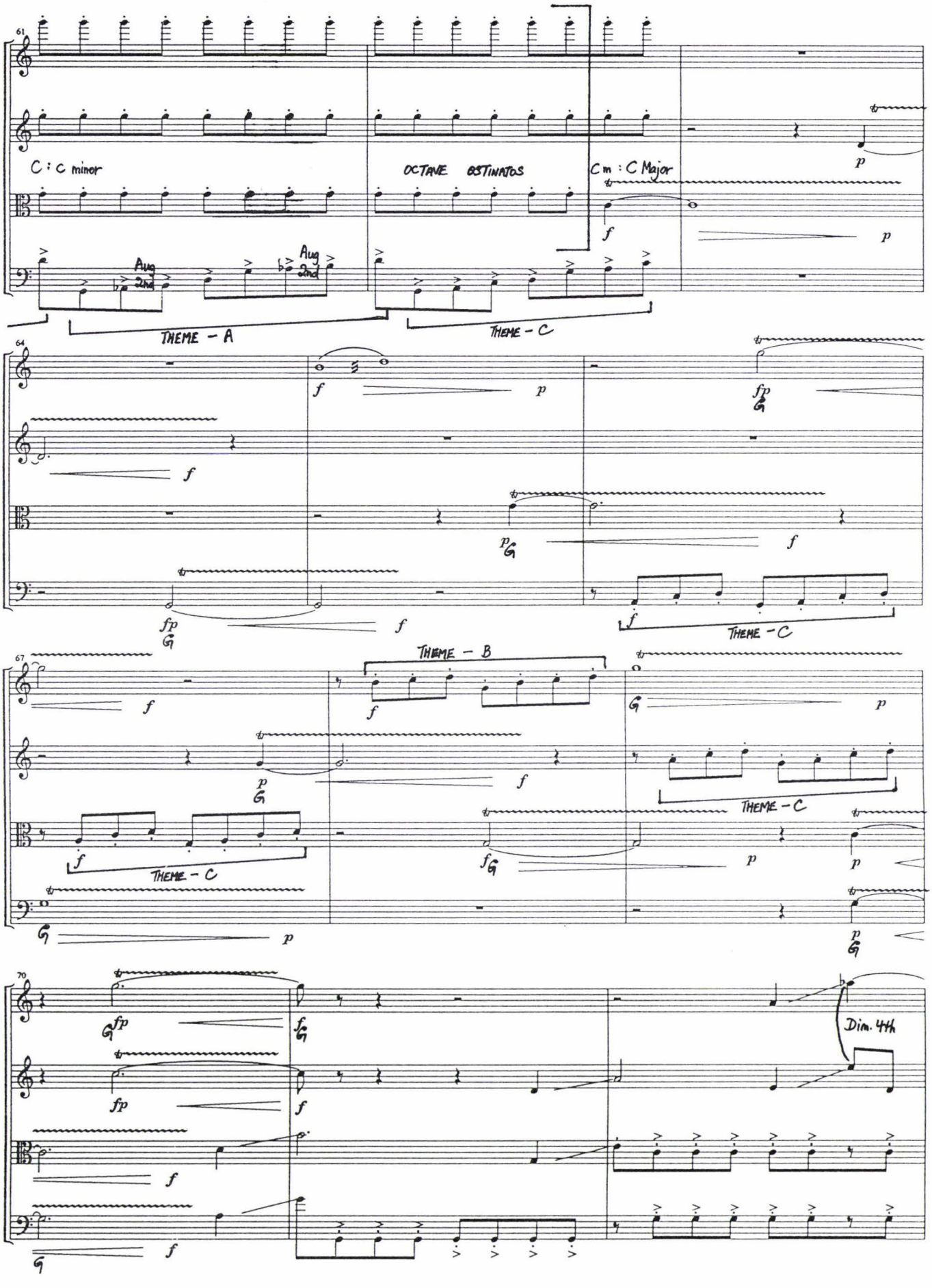
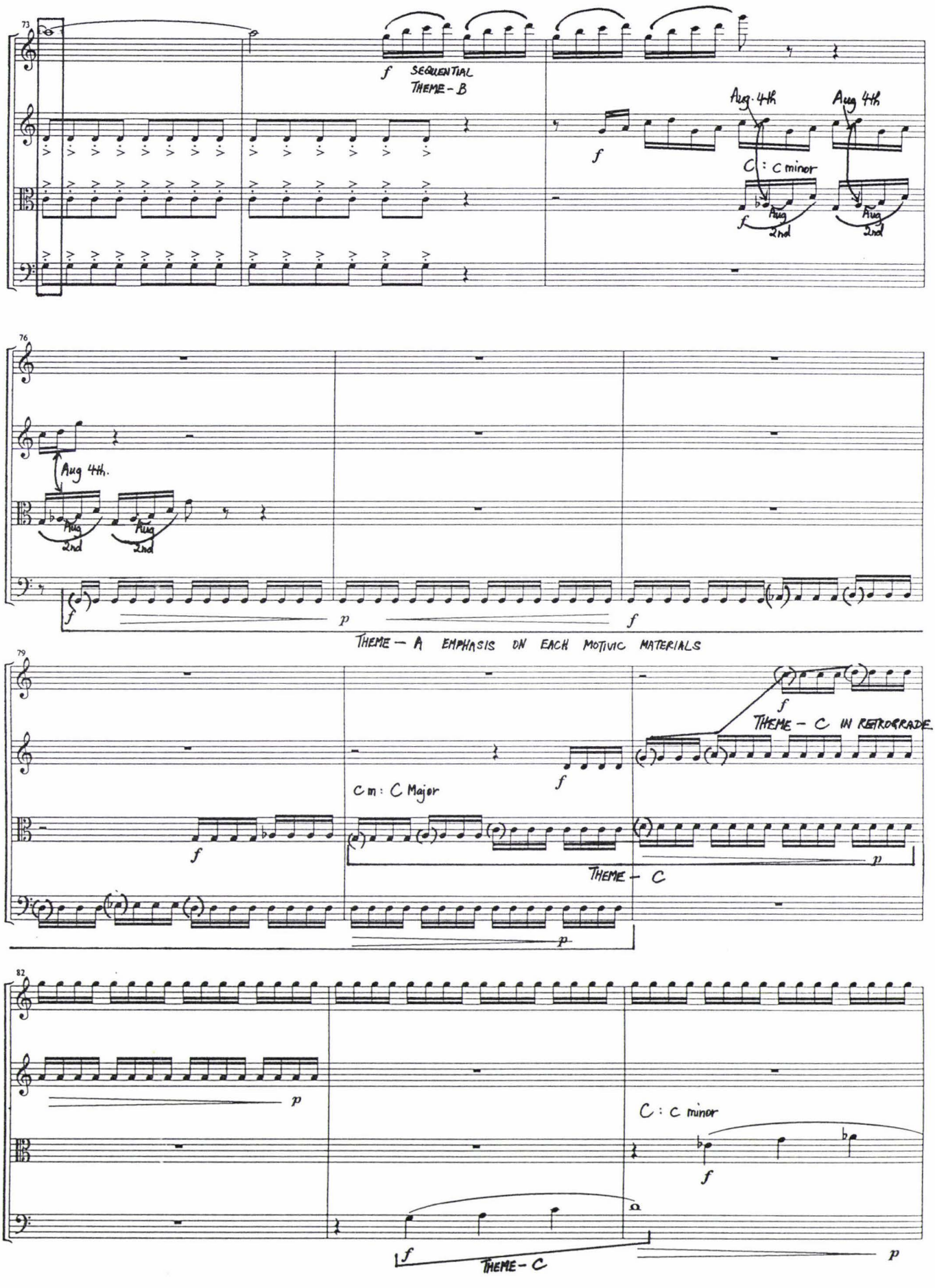

13
THEME – B (EXTENSION IN RETROGRADE)
THEME – B
THEME – B
C = C Major
THEME – C
16
THEME – C
THEME – C
THEME – C
19
Aug. 4th
C : C minor
THEME – D1
THEME – D1
22
Aug. 4th
Aug 4th
THEME – D²
THEME – D2
THEME – D²

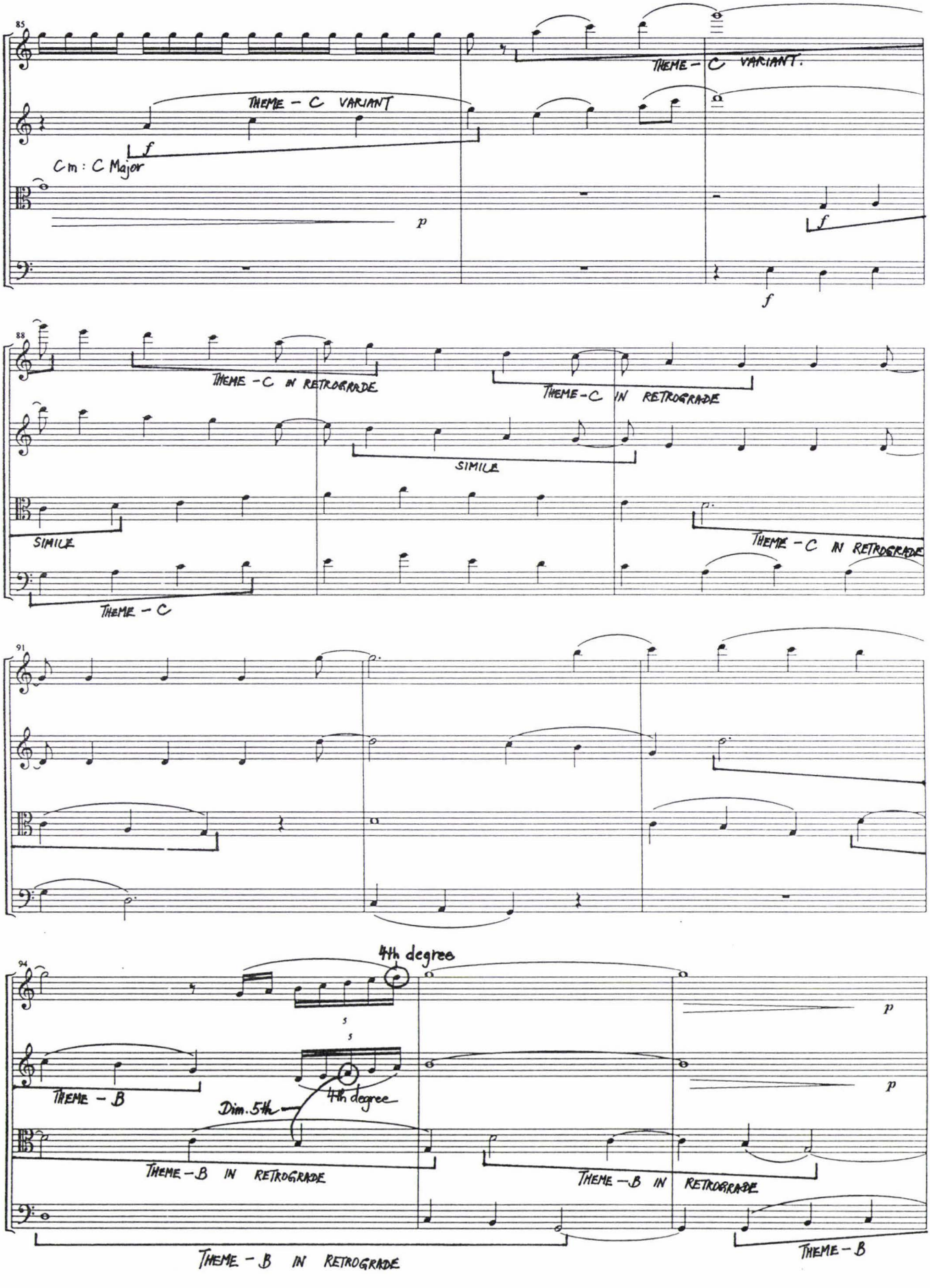

25
(a delay by 2 semiquavers)
MOTIVIC REPETITIONS
MOTIVIC – D² / RETROGRADE THEME-A
MOTIVIC – D²
MOTIVIC – D²
MOTIVE INTERCHANGES TO BAR 28
Aug 2nd
Aug 2nd
Aug 2nd
Aug 2nd.
Aug 2nd
28
RHYTHMIC OSTINATOS
mp
mp
mp
p
p
31
mp
34
Aug. 2nd
Cm : C Major

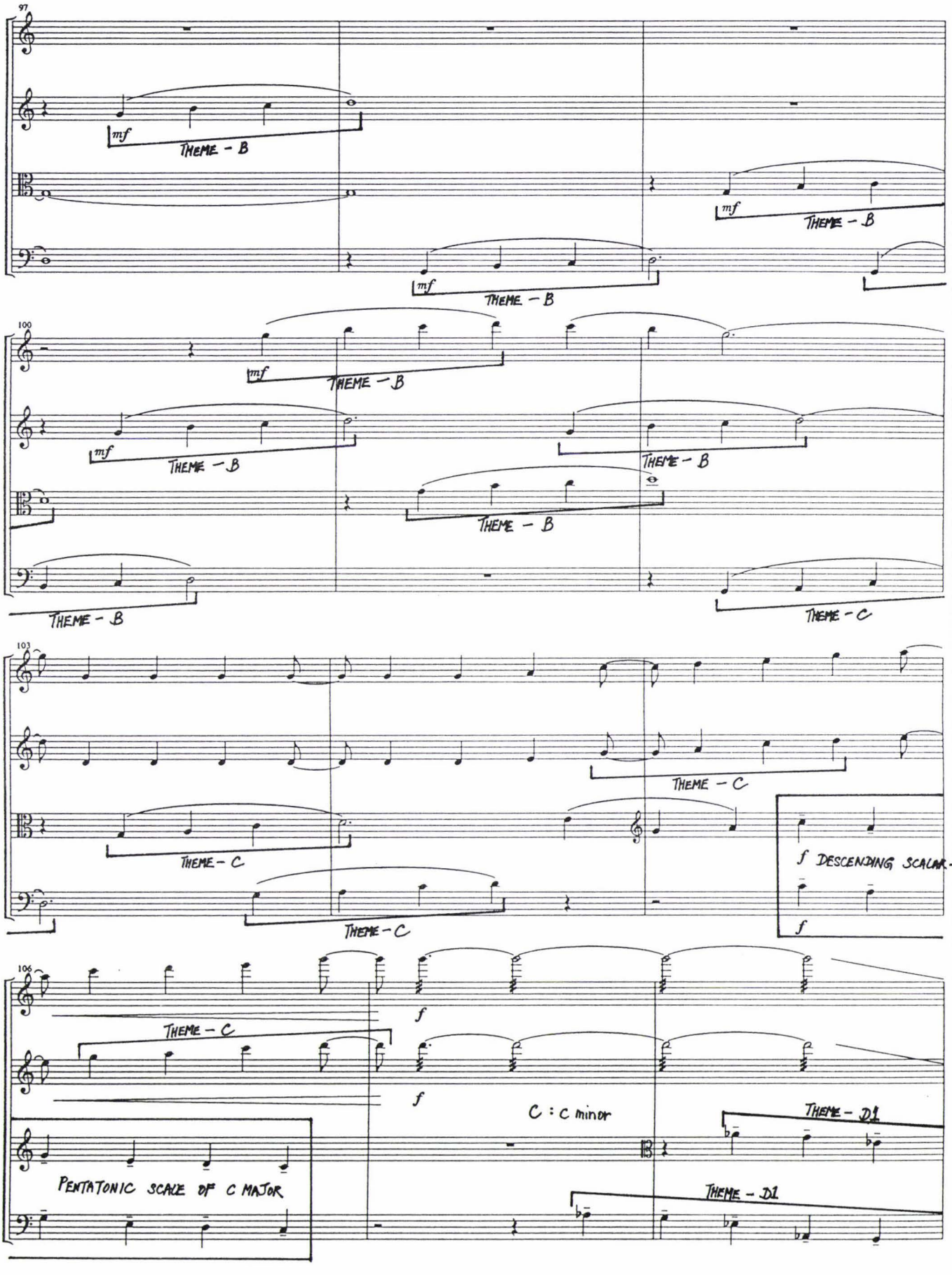

37
mf
mf
mf
mf
40
f
f
f
f
43
THEME - B
p
mf
p
mf
p
mf
p
46
THEME - B
p
f
p
f
f
f
f
f
f
p
f
f

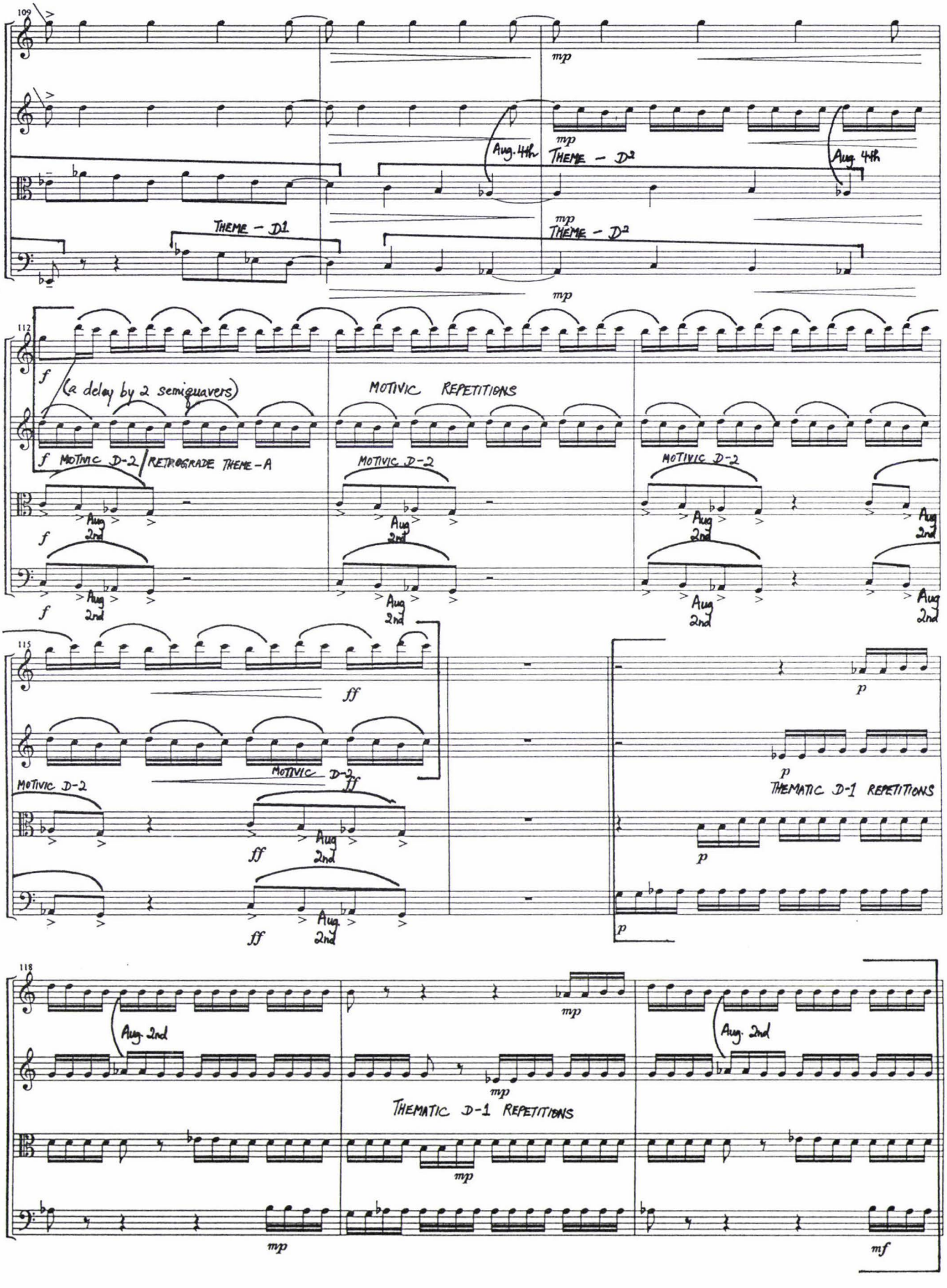

49
THEME – B
Aug. 4th
C : C minor
52
THEME – B
min. 2nd
55
Cm : C Major
THEME – C
58
OSTINATOS
OCTAVE OSTINATOS
THEME – B
THEME – B

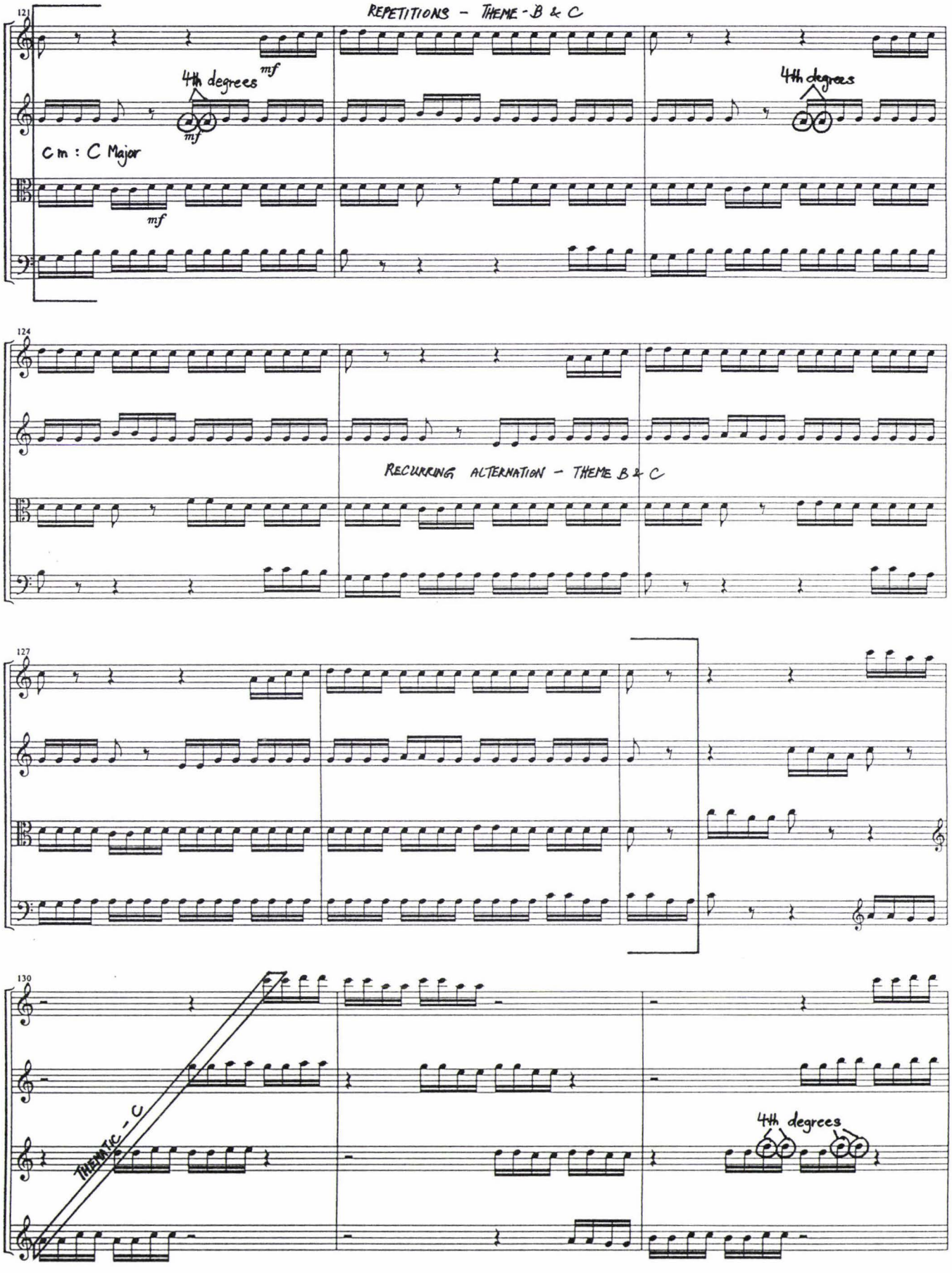

61
C : c minor
OCTAVE OSTINATOS
C m : C Major
Aug 2nd
Aug 2nd
THEME - A
THEME - C
64
THEME - C
67
THEME - B
THEME - C
THEME - C
70
Dim. 4th

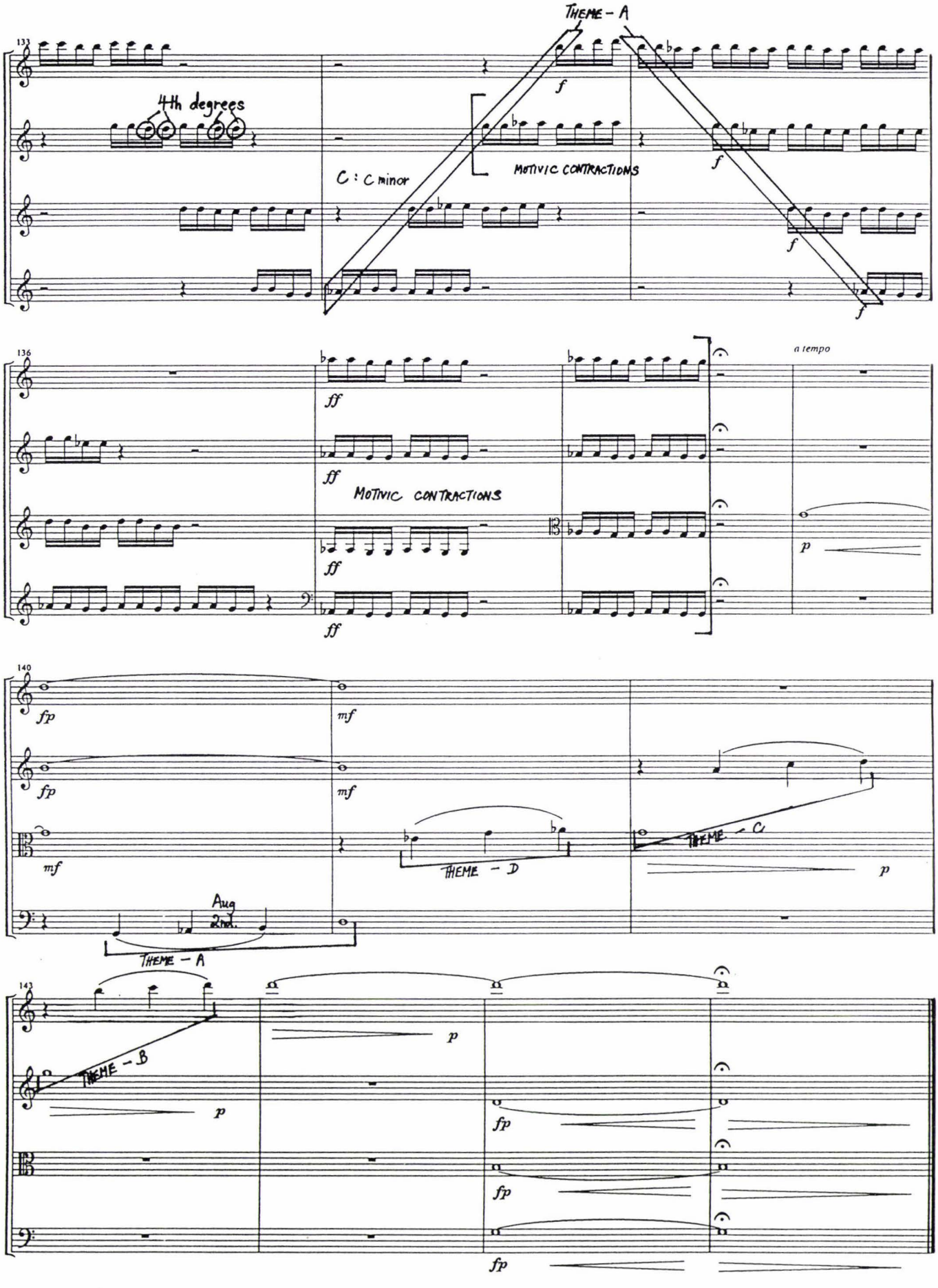

73
f SEQUENTIAL
THEME - B
Aug. 4th
Aug 4th
f
C : c minor
f
Aug
2nd
Aug
2nd
76
Aug 4th.
Aug
2nd
Aug
2nd
f
p
f
THEME — A EMPHASIS ON EACH MOTIVIC MATERIALS
79
f
THEME — C IN RETROGRADE
f
C m : C Major
f
THEME — C
p
p
82
p
C : c minor
f
f
THEME - C
p


85
THEME - C VARIANT
THEME - C VARIANT.
Cm : C Major
f
p
f
f
88
THEME - C IN RETROGRADE
THEME - C IN RETROGRADE
SIMILE
SIMILE
THEME - C IN RETROGRADE
THEME - C
91
94
4th degree
THEME - B
Dim. 5th
4th degree
THEME - B IN RETROGRADE
THEME - B IN RETROGRADE
THEME - B IN RETROGRADE
THEME - B
p
p


97
mf
THEME - B
mf
THEME - B
mf
THEME - B
100
mf
THEME - B
mf
THEME - B
THEME - B
THEME - B
THEME - B
THEME - C
103
THEME - C
THEME - C
f DESCENDING SCALAR
f
THEME - C
106
f
THEME - C
f
C : C minor
THEME - D1
PENTATONIC SCALE OF C MAJOR
THEME - D1


109
mp
Aug. 4th
THEME – D2
Aug. 4th
THEME – D1
mp
THEME – D2
mp
112
f
(a delay by 2 semiquavers)
MOTIVIC REPETITIONS
f MOTIVIC D-2 / RETROGRADE THEME-A
MOTIVIC D-2
MOTIVIC D-2
Aug 2nd
115
ff
MOTIVIC D-2
MOTIVIC D-2
ff
p
THEMATIC D-1 REPETITIONS
118
Aug. 2nd
mp
Aug. 2nd
THEMATIC D-1 REPETITIONS
mf


121
REPETITIONS - THEME - B & C
4th degrees
mf
mf
4th degrees
Cm : C Major
mf
124
RECURRING ALTERNATION - THEME B & C
127
130
THEMATIC - C
4th degrees


THEME - A
133
4th degrees
C : C minor
MOTIVIC CONTRACTIONS
136
a tempo
MOTIVIC CONTRACTIONS
140
Aug 2nd.
THEME - A
THEME - D
THEME - C
143
THEME - B

APPENDIX– B

APPENDIX – B.1

Below is a list in chronological order of dynasties and republics in the history of China that are covered in this thesis.

Dynasties	Dates
Shang	1523 – 1027 BC
Zhou	1027 – 250 BC
Qin	221 – 207 BC
Western Han	206 – 24 AD
Eastern Han	25 – 220
Three Kingdoms	220 – 265
Western Jin	265 – 316
Eastern Jin	317 – 420
Northern and Southern Dynasties	420 – 589
Sui	581 – 618
Tang	618 – 907
Five Dynasties	907 – 960
Son	960 – 1279
Jin	1115 – 1234
Yuan	1271 – 1368
Ming	1368 – 1644
Qing	1644 – 1911
Republic of China	1912 – 1949
People's Republic of China	1949 – present

APPENDIX B.2

CHANGES OF KEYS FOR THE *ERHU* AND OTHER *HUQIN* INSTRUMENTS.

Keys 1 – C	1 – G	1 – D	1 – A	1 – E	1 – B	1 – F#	1 – Db	1 – Ab	1 – Eb	1 – Bb	1 – F
Inner/ Outer Strings * (i)	Inner/ Outer Strings	Inner/ Outer Strings	Inner/ Outer Strings	Inner/ Outer Strings	Inner/ Outer Strings	Inner/ Outer Strings	Inner/ Outer Strings	Inner/ Outer Strings	Inner/ Outer Strings	Inner/ Outer Strings	Inner/ Outer Strings
3 7 E B	6 3 E B	2 6 E B	5 2 E B	1 5 E B	4 1 E B	b7 4 E B	#2 #6 E B	#5 #2 E B	#1 #5 E B	#4 #1 E B	7 #4 E B
#2 #6 D# A#	#5 #2 D# A#	#1 #5 D# A#	#4 #1 D# A#	7 #4 D# A#	3 7 D# A#	6 3 D# A#	2 6 Eb Bb	5 2 Eb Bb	1 5 Eb Bb	4 1 Eb Bb	b7 4 Eb Bb
(ii) 2 6 D A	5 2 D A	1 5 D A	4 1 D A	b7 4 D A	#2 #6 Cx Gx b3 b7 D A	#5 #2 Cx Gx b6 b3 D A	#1 #5 D A	#4 #1 D A	7 #4 D A	3 7 D A	6 3 D A
#1 #5 C# G#	#4 #1 C# G#	7 #4 C# G#	3 7 C# G#	6 3 C# G#	2 6 C# G#	5 2 C# G#	1 5 Db Ab	4 1 Db Ab	b7 4 Db Ab	#2 #6 C# G#	#5 #2 C# G#
1 5 C G	4 1 C G	b7 4 C G	#2 #6 B# Fx b3 b7 C G	#5 #2 B# Fx b6 b3 C G	#1 #5 B# Fx b2 b6 C G	#4 #1 B# Fx b5 b2 C G	7 #4 C G	3 7 C G	6 3 C G	2 6 C G	5 2 C G
7 #4 B F#	3 7 B F#	6 3 B F#	2 6 B F#	5 2 B F#	1 5 B F#	4 1 B F#	b7 4 Cb Gb	#2 #6 B F#	#5 #2 B F#	#1 #5 B F#	#4 #1 B F#
(iii) b7 4 Bb F	#2 #6 A# E#	#5 #2 A# E#	#1 #5 A# E#	#4 #1 A# E#	7 #4 A# E#	3 7 A# E#	6 3 Bb F	2 6 Bb F	5 2 Bb F	1 5 Bb F	4 1 Bb F
6 3 A E	2 6 A E	5 2 A E	1 5 A E	4 1 A E	b7 4 A E	#2 #6 Gx Dx b3 b7 A E	#5 #2 A E	#1 #5 A E	#4 #1 A E	7 #4 A E	3 7 A E
#5 #2 G# D#	#1 #5 G# D#	#4 #1 G# D#	7 #4 G# D#	3 7 G# D#	6 3 G# D#	2 6 G# D#	5 2 Ab Eb	1 5 Ab Eb	4 1 Ab Eb	b7 4 Ab Eb	#2 #6 G# D#
(iv) 5 2 G D	1 5 G D	4 1 G D	b7 4 G D	#2 #6 Fx Cx	#5 #2 Fx Cx	#1 #5 Fx Cx	#4 #1 G D	7 #4 G D	3 7 G D	6 3 G D	2 6 G D
#4 #1 F# C#	7 #4 F# C#	3 7 F# C#	6 3 F# C#	2 6 F# C#	5 2 F# C#	1 5 F# C#	4 1 Gb Db	b7 4 Gb Db	#2 #6 F# C#	#5 #2 F# C#	#1 #5 F# C#
4 1 F C	b7 4 F C	#2 #6 E# B#	#5 #2 E# B#	#1 #5 E# B#	#4 #1 E# B#	7 #4 E# B#	3 7 F C	6 3 F C	2 6 F C	5 2 F C	1 5 F C

(Soong, 1980, p.7)

* As shown on the table above:

(i) – Indicates open strings for the first column only (as shaded in blue).

(ii) – Indicates *erhu* for open string D – A

(iii) – Indicates *jinghu* for open string B^b – F

(iv) – Indicates *gaohu* and *zhonghu* for open string G – D

As highlighted in bold: Chinese simplified numerical or cipher notations.

As shaded in blue on the first column: Open strings for (ii) *erhu*, (iii) *jinghu,* (iv) *gaohu* and *zhonghu.*
As highlighted in blue on the third, fifth and eight rows: Another way of interpreting the cipher notations that is inclined towards the Western key system.

Erhu players use key changes as in the Western system. These Western key correlations with cipher notations or Chinese simplified numerical notations are shown on the table above. For each row, (as highlighted in bold) the top numbers represent cipher notations in movable *'dohs'*. This means the numbering starts in relation to the tonic of every key. The bottom letter-names represent Western notes. The first column (as shaded) indicating (ii) the *erhu*, (iii) *jinghu*, and (iv) *gaohu* and *zhonghu* are shown in the open strings and tuned a fifth apart. No further adjustments to the tuning of the strings are required for key changes in a similar or different piece of music once the open strings' pitches are tuned accordingly.

As indicated on the top row, 1 represents the various tonics which begin on the keys indicated on top of each column, 1=C or 1=G. This is not to be confused with the open strings. An example is (ii) *erhu* on row three, with the cipher or numerical notation of 2 and 6 (in open strings) for inner and outer strings respectively. When playing in the key of C Major, 2 means D or *re* and 6 means A or *la* with 1 as the tonic C note. As these are movable tonics or *dohs* the top row provides the starting note or tonic for each key or scale. That explains the second column for (ii) the *erhu* with 5, which means D or *sol* and 2 which means A or *re* in the key of G Major (refer 4.1.1 p.56).

(a) Further explanations for the table above. The dots above or below these cipher notations serve to indicate an octave higher or lower respectively than the written notations.
(b) Also note that accidentals are placed before the notes in the Chinese simplified numerical or cipher notations.
(c) Other less commonly found instruments amongst the *huqin* family made up the remainder of the instruments not mentioned in the shaded first column. The purpose of these columns is to facilitate in descending order an overall picture of the key structure of the *hu's* family in relation to the Western keys concept.
(d) Generally, the Chinese numerical system uses the pentatonic scales or keys which do not have a fourth and seventh degree in its scale.
(e) The rows clearly show different enharmonic musical notes on different rows that are written in Western letter-names or notes. The rationale is that *'doh'* is movable, thereby; the letter-names (Western system) remained enharmonically the same.
(f) Another point of interest about cipher notations for the different notes of the pentatonic scales is, chromatically they can be sharpened on any of the notes and flattened only on the seventh degree of the scale as shown on the table. Flattened accidentals on other notes can be inserted only when required of a piece. Modern *erhu* playing utilizes all the seven degrees of the scale.
(g) This table is inclined towards the Chinese key system for changes of keys for the *erhu* using the cipher notations. The Western key system is only indicated again, below the Chinese key system to show another way of interpreting the keys. This happens when the notated letter-names of the Western key system appeared not to correlate with all its key signatures in open strings of which it was often not employed (as highlighted in blue on the third, fifth and eighth rows).

APPENDIX – B.3

NATURAL AND ARTIFICIAL HARMONICS

Natural Harmonics Keys	1= A	1= A	1=D	1=D	1=G	1=G	1=C	1=C	1=F	1=F	1=B^b	1=B^b
Strings *	In	Out	In	Out	In	Out	In	Out	In	Out	In	Out
Open strings	4 D		1 D		5 D		2 D		6 D		3 D	
Distance Up 1/5	6 $F^{\#}$	6 $F^{\#}$	3 $F^{\#}$	3 $F^{\#}$	7 $F^{\#}$	7 $F^{\#}$	#4 $F^{\#}$	#4 $F^{\#}$	#1 $F^{\#}$	#1 $F^{\#}$	#5 $F^{\#}$	#5 $F^{\#}$
Up 1/4	b7 G	4 D	4 G	1 D	1 G	5 D	5 G	2 D	2 G	6 D	6 G	3 D
Up 1/3	1 A	1 A	5 A	5 A	2 A	2 A	6 A	6 A	3 A	3 A	7 A	7 A
Up 2/5	2 B	6 $F^{\#}$	6 B	3 $F^{\#}$	3 B	7 $F^{\#}$	7 B	#4 $F^{\#}$	#4 B	#1 $F^{\#}$	#1 B	#5 $F^{\#}$
1/2	4 D	4 D	1 D	1 D	5 D	5 D	2 D	2 D	6 D	6 D	3 D	3 D
Down 2/5	6 $F^{\#}$	6 $F^{\#}$	3 $F^{\#}$	3 $F^{\#}$	7 $F^{\#}$	7 $F^{\#}$	#4 $F^{\#}$	#4 $F^{\#}$	#1 $F^{\#}$	#1 $F^{\#}$	#5 $F^{\#}$	#5 $F^{\#}$
Down 1/3	1 A	1 A	5 A	5 A	2 A	2 A	6 A	6 A	3 A	3 A	7 A	7 A
Down 1/4	4 D	4 D	1 D	1 D	5 D	5 D	2 D	2 D	6 D	6 D	3 D	3 D
Down 1/5	6 $F^{\#}$	6 $F^{\#}$	3 $F^{\#}$	3 $F^{\#}$	7 $F^{\#}$	7 $F^{\#}$	#4 $F^{\#}$	#4 $F^{\#}$	#1 $F^{\#}$	#1 $F^{\#}$	#5 $F^{\#}$	#5 $F^{\#}$

(Soong, 1980, p.44)

* In – Abbreviation for Inner String Out – Abbreviation for Outer string

The table above serves as a guide on how artificial harmonics are produced. The first row on the table indicates keys in movable *'doh'* using the Chinese simplified numerical notations. The second and third row indicate open strings for inner and outer strings using different keys that are found (as shaded) in the first row. The first column on the left indicates the distance of the string on the *erhu*. An example, row two (up 1/5) means an interval of a perfect fifth higher will be achieved when the *erhu* player places both the first and fourth fingers firmly together without wobbling on the strings. The first finger will depress the string, whilst the fourth finger will play a perfect fifth higher by sliding on the string. As in other cases, a perfect fourth or fifth higher or lower, etc, can be played as shown on the distance intervals in the first column. Whilst sliding on the string, the actions are assisted by the quick and brisk bowing of the player.

The written notes in cipher or Chinese numerical notations (in bold) as indicated on each column, will produce the desired artificial harmonics, that is an octave higher than the written notes. This effect could only materialize when the notes are in D, C and F. All other notes will produce different intervals when harmonics are attempted. As this requires a higher level of technique, not every *erhu* player will be able to produce artificial harmonics successfully or easily. To ensure that artificial harmonics are effectively played, care and consideration must be taken regarding the *erhu's* maintenance. The strings, python skin, and the wooden resonance box must be in pristine condition, as it will mar the production of artificial harmonics.

APPENDIX – B.4

Some current renowned *erhu* performers in the global music scene are as mentioned below:

Min Hui Fen, Zhu Chang Yao, Chen Yao Xin, Chen Jun, Xiao Bai Rong, Jiang Jian Hua, George Gao Shao-Quing, Xu Ke, Ma Xiao Hui, Song Fei, Sunny Wong, Ma Xiang Hua and others.

Min Hui Fen: Min Hui Fen is China's leading *erhu* player. Her repertoire is extensive and she has a formidable technique and richness in style. In 1977 Seiji Ozawa was overwhelmed by her performance of 'Flowing River Water'. The principal commentator of Boston Symphony Orchestra hailed her through the press "as one of the greatest string players in the world". Personally, I have been deeply touched by her expertise and commitment in raising the standard of *erhu* playing and her courage in overcoming her health conditions.

Zhu Chang Yao: Besides being one of China's first class *erhu* performers, Zhu is the Chairman of Jiang Su Province Opera House. He is also the principal of Jiang Su Arts and Literature Association and a member and administrator of the Professional Cultural Chinese Orchestra. 'The Scenery from Jiangnan' is one of his famous works.

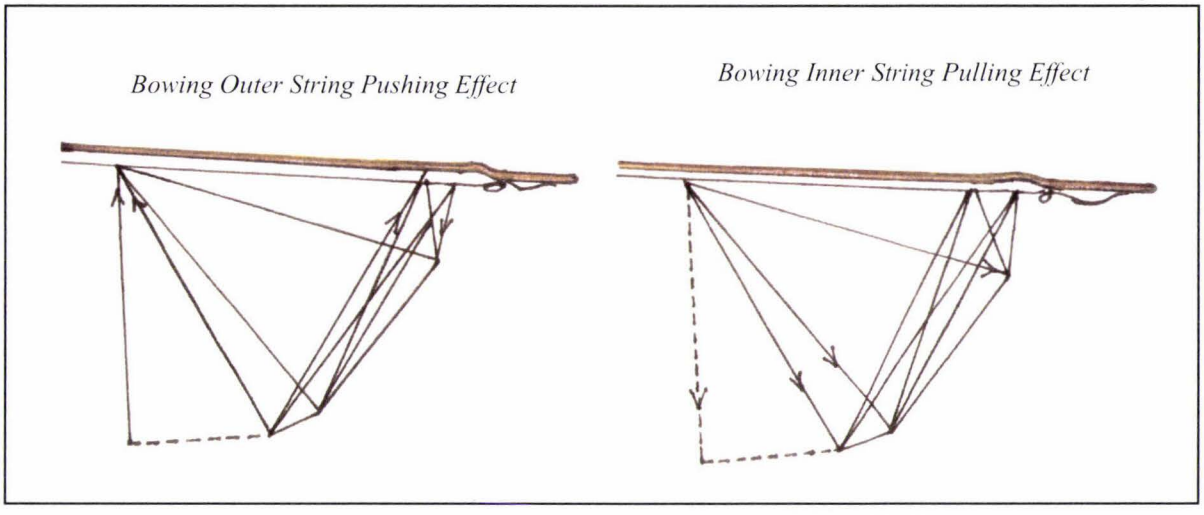
Chen Yao Xin: Chen Yao Xin is another distinguished *erhu* player known for innovating and developing many *erhu* techniques. These techniques enhance the expressiveness of the *erhu* especially in quick pieces and passages.

Chen Jun: The son of Yao Xin, Chen Jun, displays prowess parallel to his father in the art of *erhu* playing at a very young age. He has won many accolades in China and shows tremendous talent and potential that could surpass the best of today.

Xiao Bai Rong: Xiao Bai Rong is known for his "freestyle" methods of *erhu* playing. One moving performance was when he paid tribute to a famous singer Teressa Teng, who died of asthma in the same year.

APPENDIX C

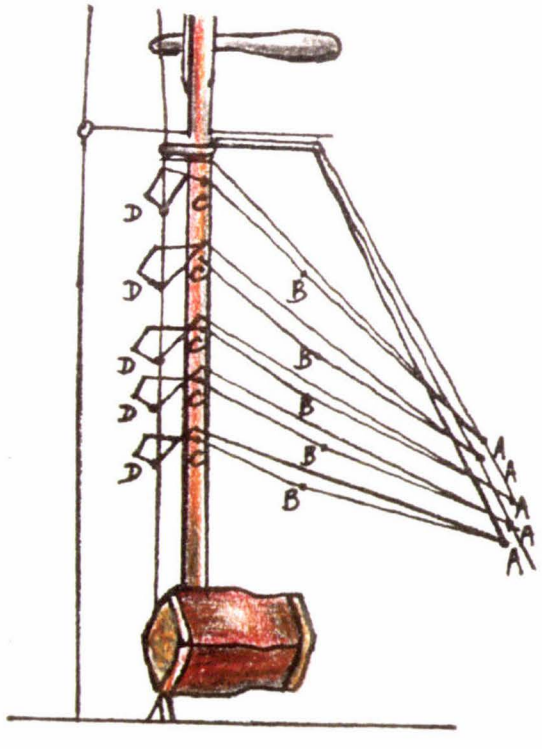
(Soong, 1980, p.46)



Picture 1.1 *The bow hair affects the sound and also the angle of hands movement which determines the tone produced.*

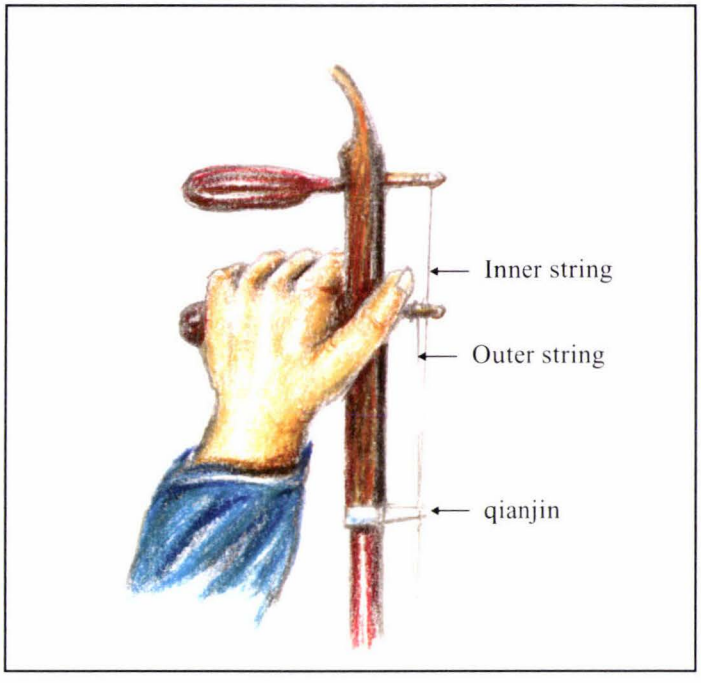
(Soong, 1980, p.28)

Picture 1.2



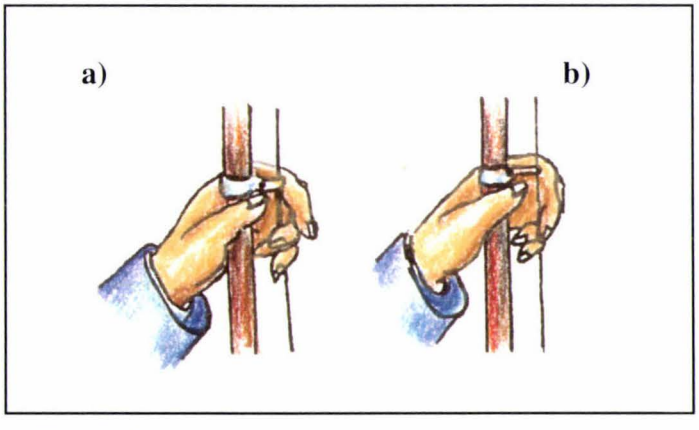
A. Left Hand Motion
B. Wrist
C. Finger works
D. Depress strings

(Soong, 1980, p.3)



Picture 1.3
Tuning the inner and outer strings by turning the pegs.
*The **qianjin** balanced the two strings.*

(Soong, 1980, p.16)



Picture 1.4
a) Left hand preparation and away from the string motion.
b) Depress the string motion.

Depress the string using the first finger.

Depress the string using the second finger.

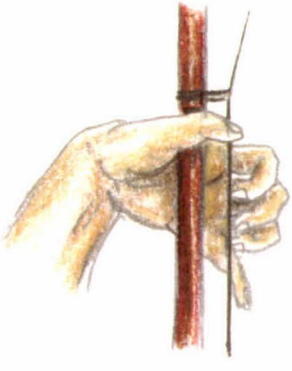
Depress the string using the third finger.

Picture 2.1

Depress the string using the fourth finger.
(Liu and Zhao, 2000, p.3)

(home.pacific.net.sg)

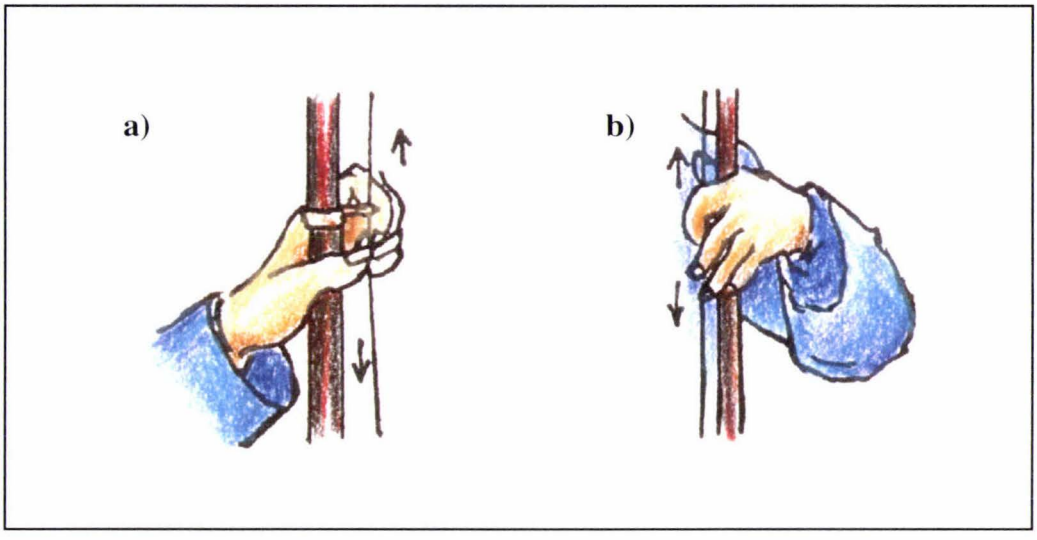
Picture 2.2



View upfront to show the stretching of the last finger and where the second phalange of the thumb is wedged against the erhu's neck.

Hand Sliding Motion

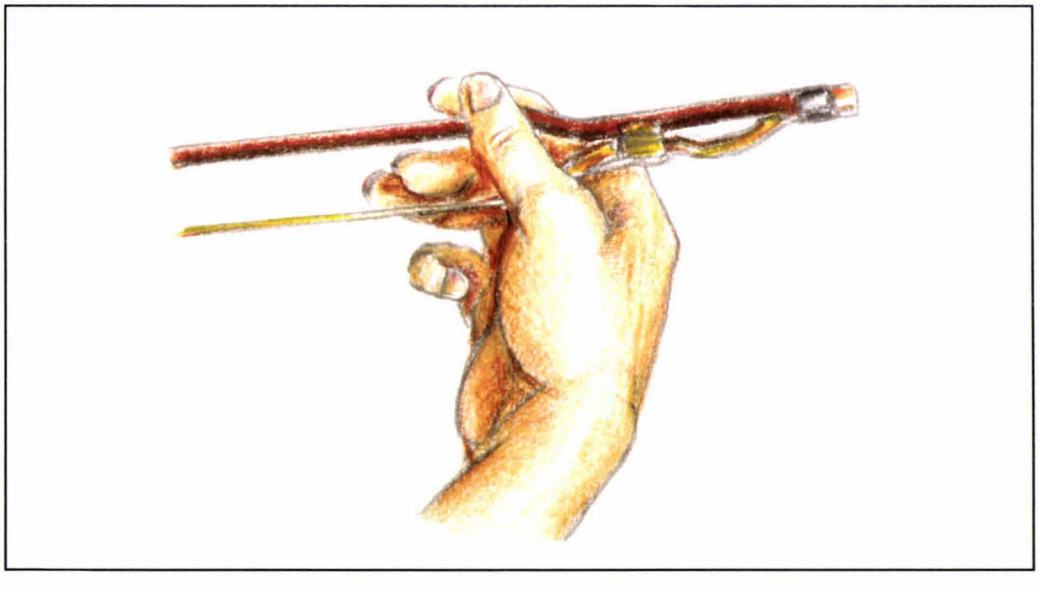
(Soong, 1980, p.36)



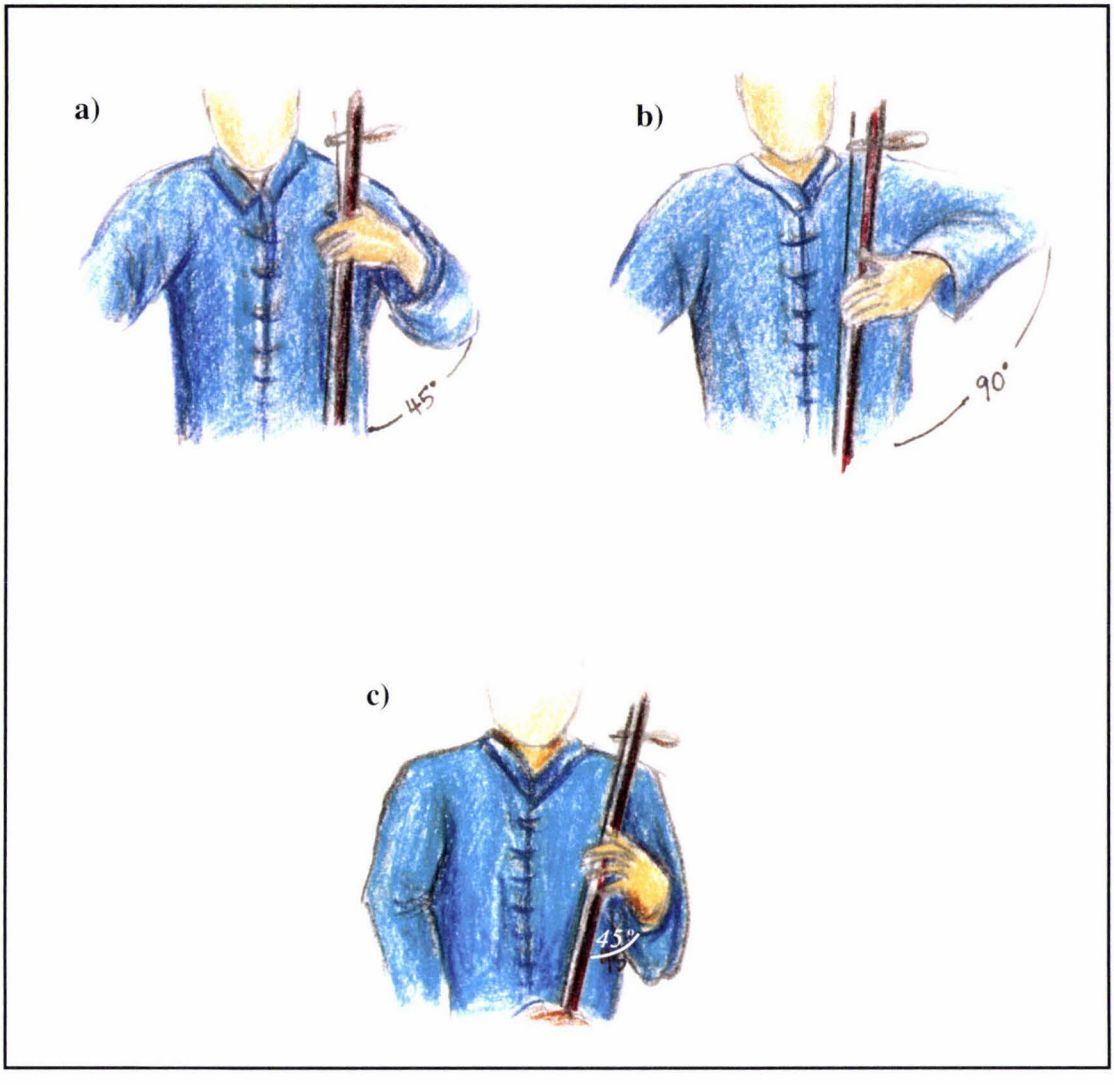
Picture 2.3 *Using the first finger to depress the string and shifting downwards to the second position.*

Using the third finger to depress the string and shifting from third position to first or second positions.

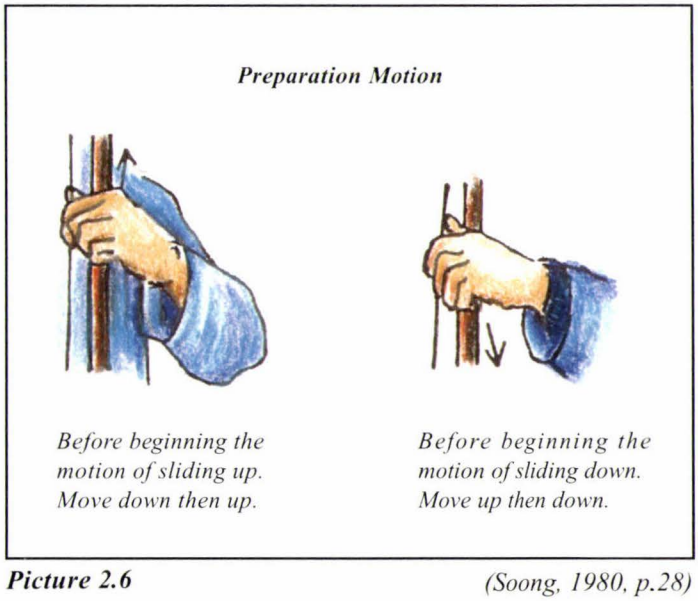
(home.pacific.net.sg)



Picture 2.4 *This pose is likened to holding a pair of chopsticks with the palm of the right-hand facing upwards whilst the other fingers grasp the bow and taut.*



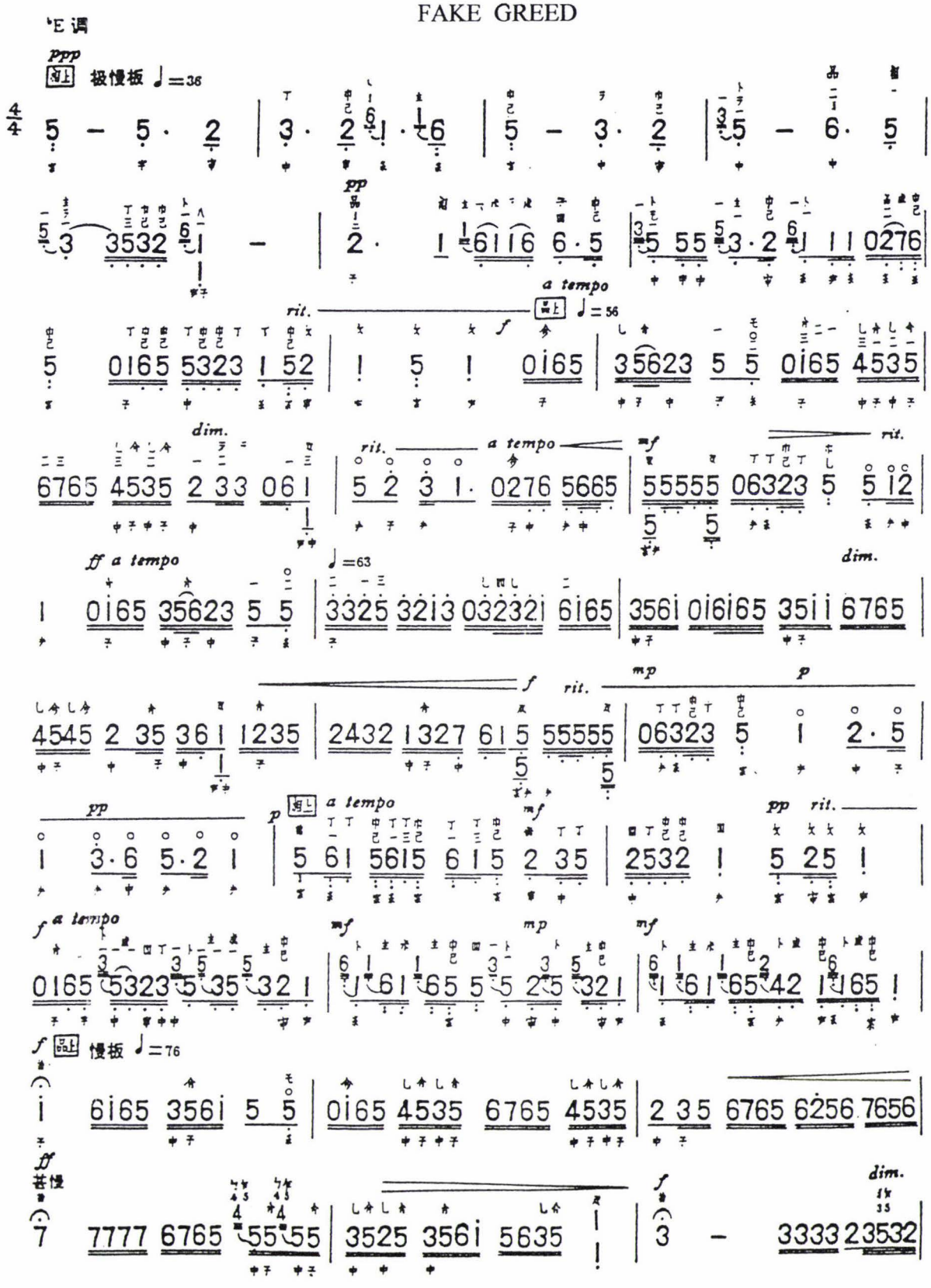
Picture 2.5 *a) The angle between the left shoulder and the erhu must be 45 degrees.*
b) The angle between the left arm and erhu needs a double 45 degrees and
c) The angle of the left wrist with the erhu should also be 45 degrees.



Picture 2.6 *(Soong, 1980, p.28)*

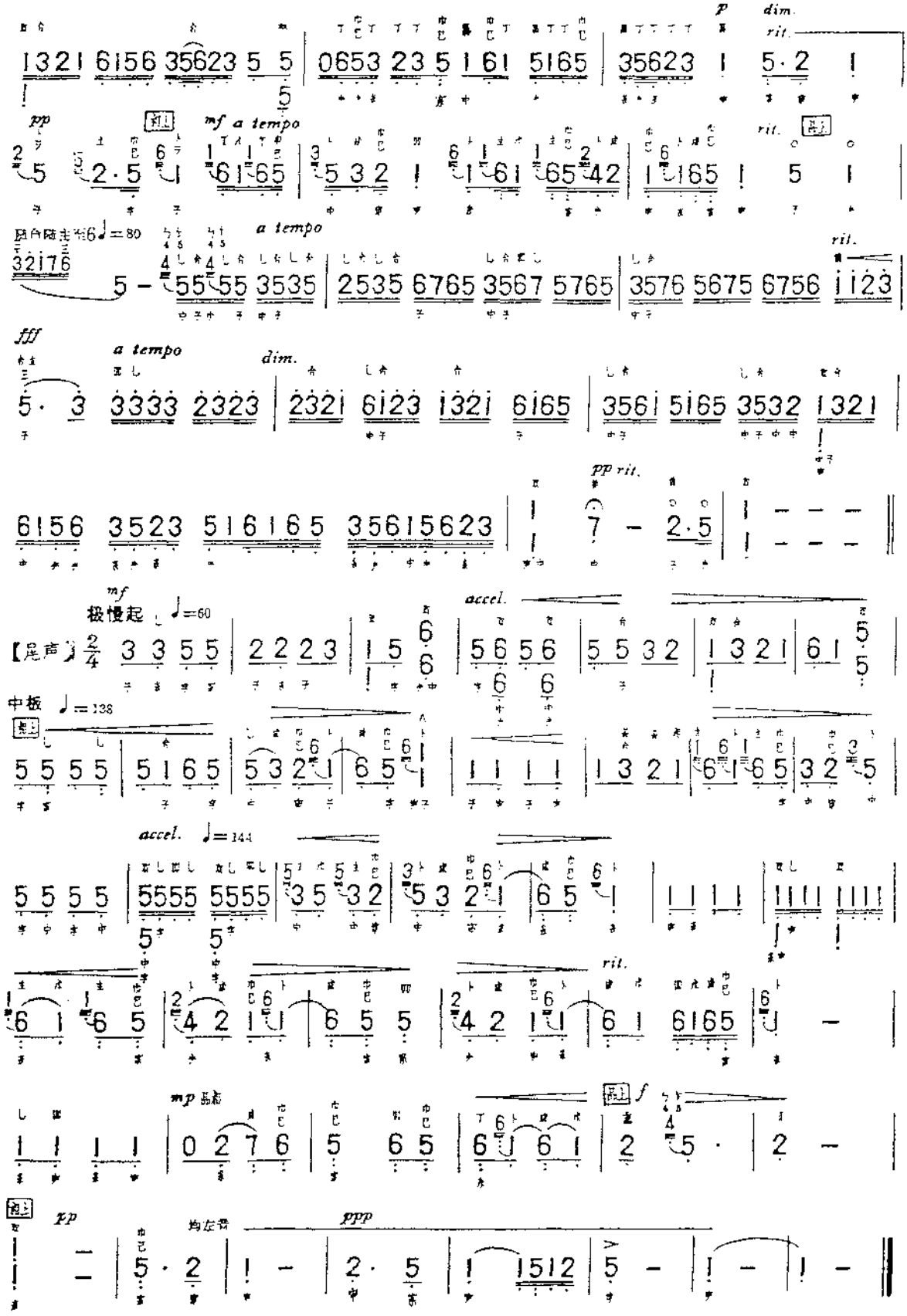
虛籟

FAKE GREED



Example 1

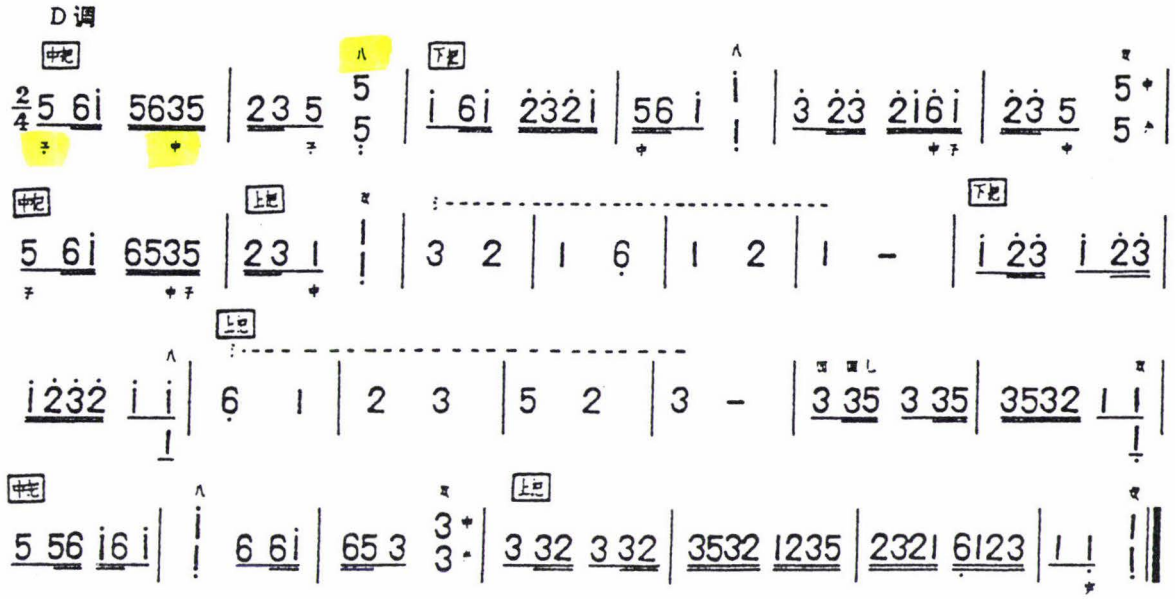
Pipa solo piece by Liu Tian Hua



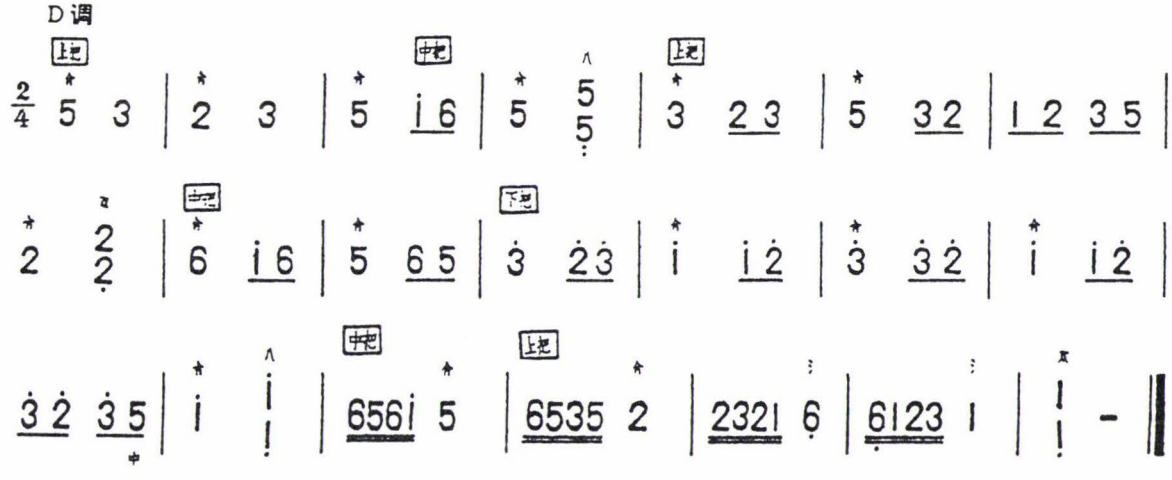
Chai, 1997, p.61 and 62)

Example 2

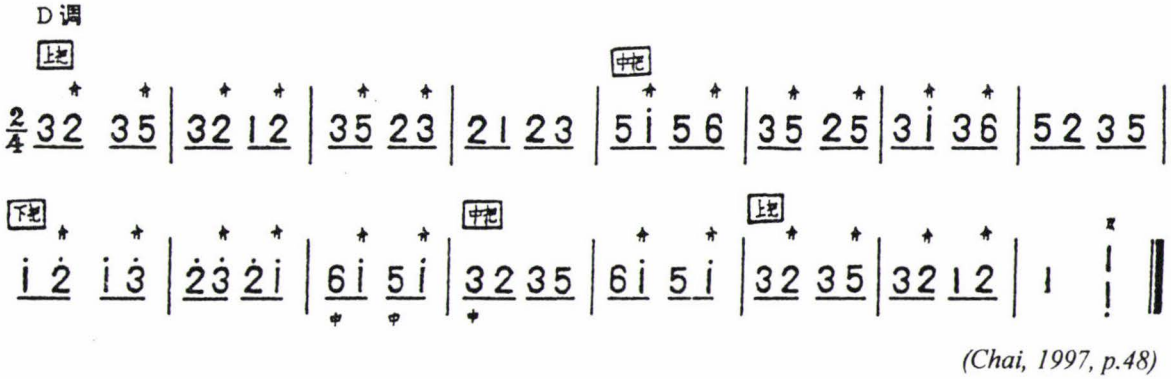
练习十三



练习十四



练习十五

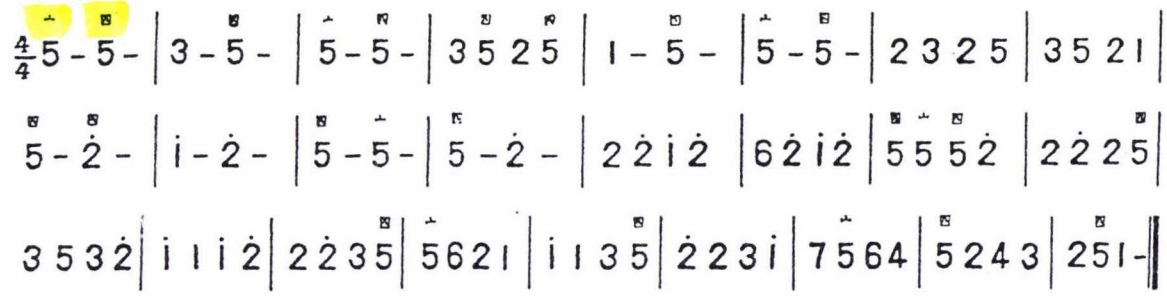


(Chai, 1997, p.48)

Example 3

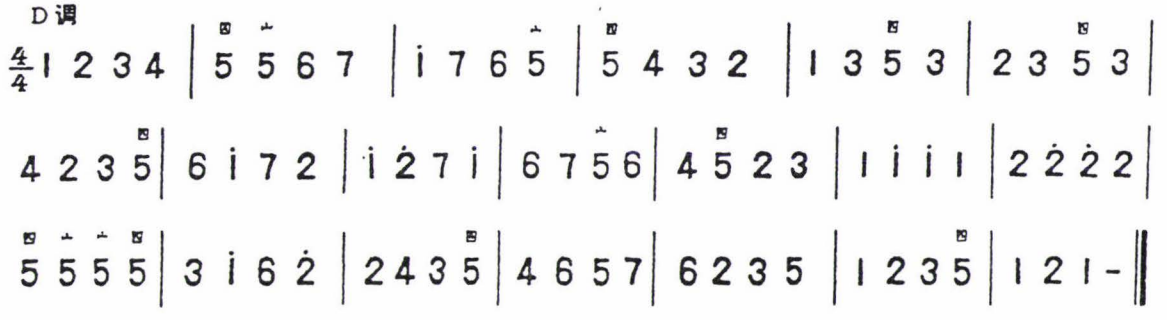
练习十二

D 调



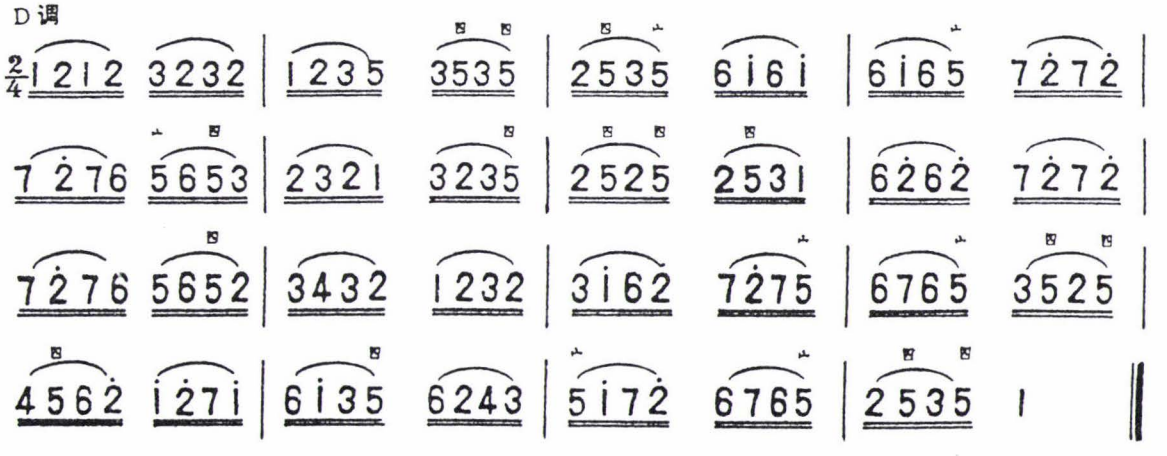
练习十三

D 调



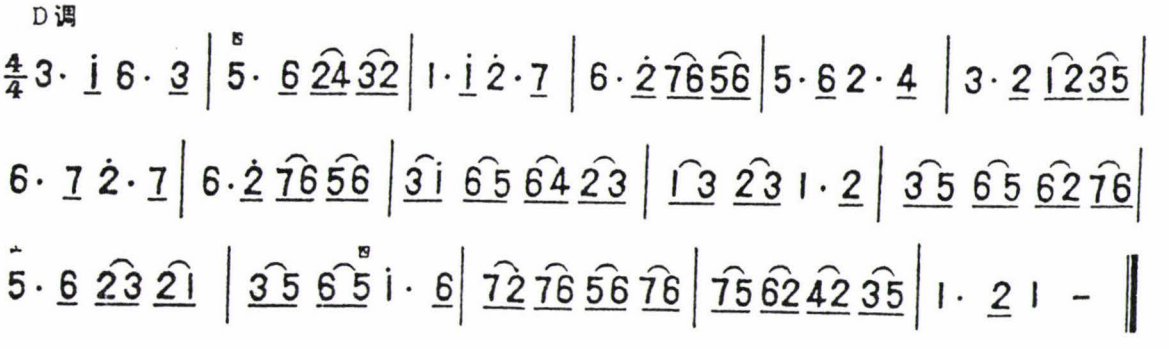
练习十四

D 调



练习十五

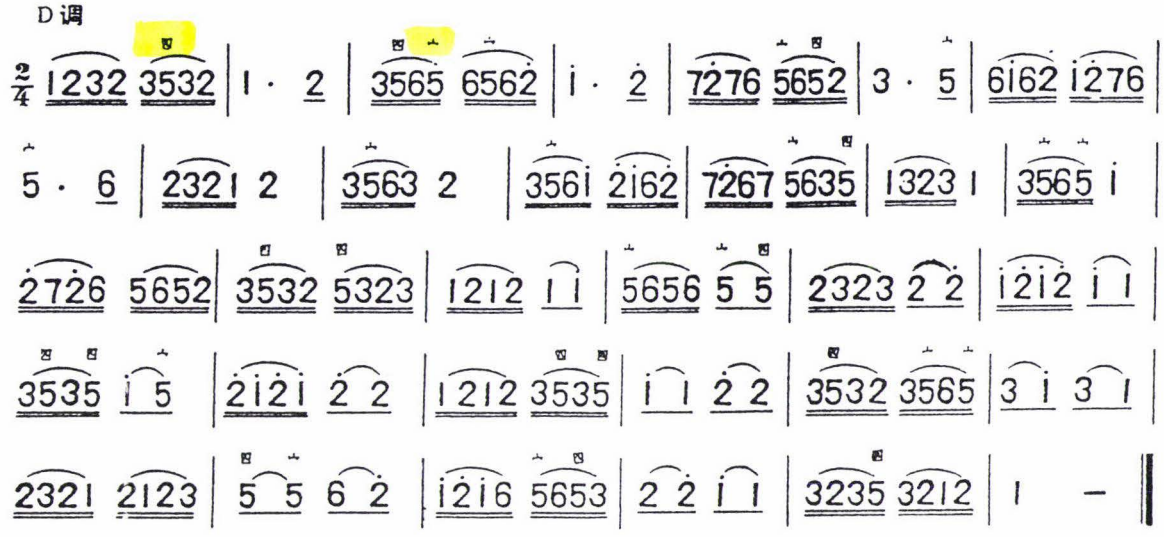
D 调



Erhu exercises from Nos: 12 to 22 by Liu Tian Hua

练习十六

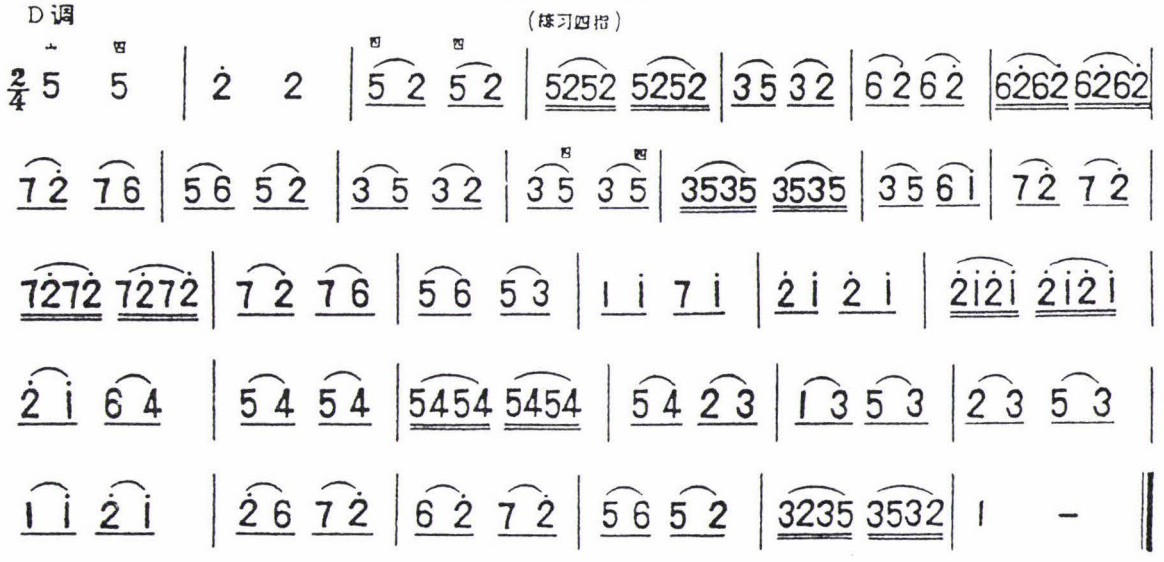
D调



练习十七

D调

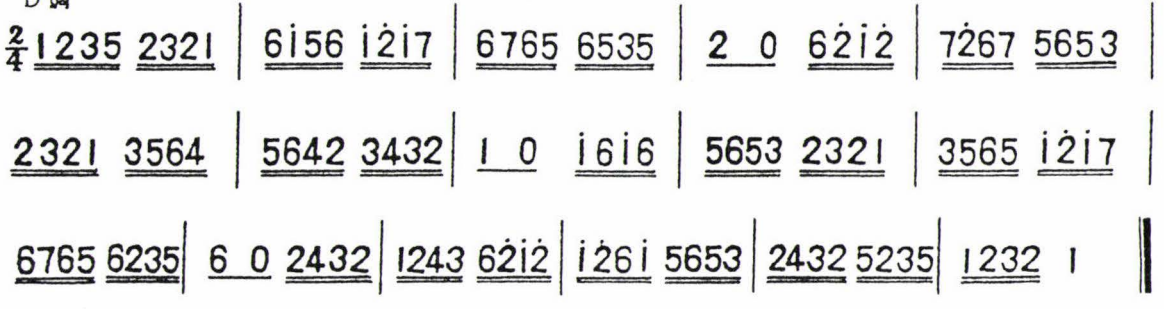
（练习四指）



练习十八

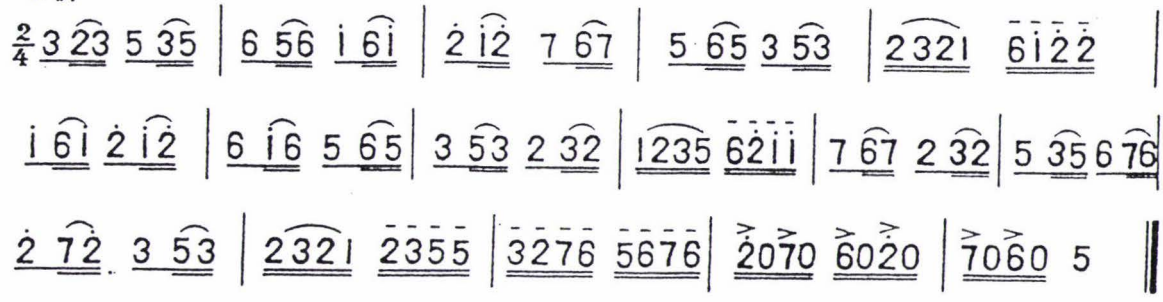
D调

（练习短弓）



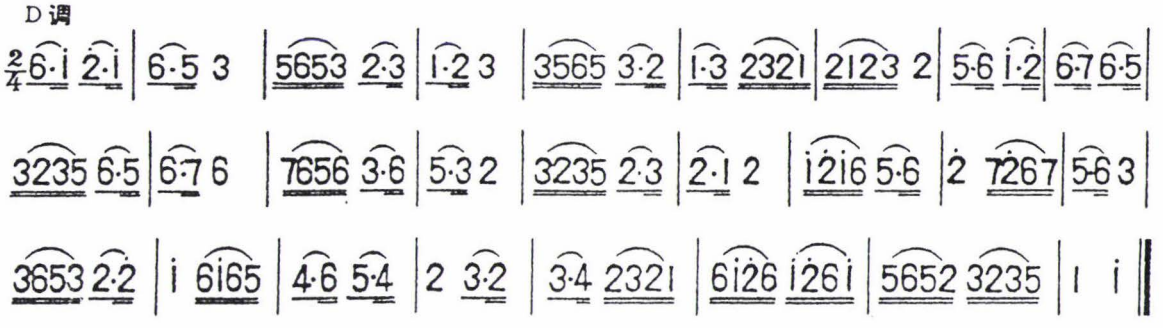
练习十九

D调



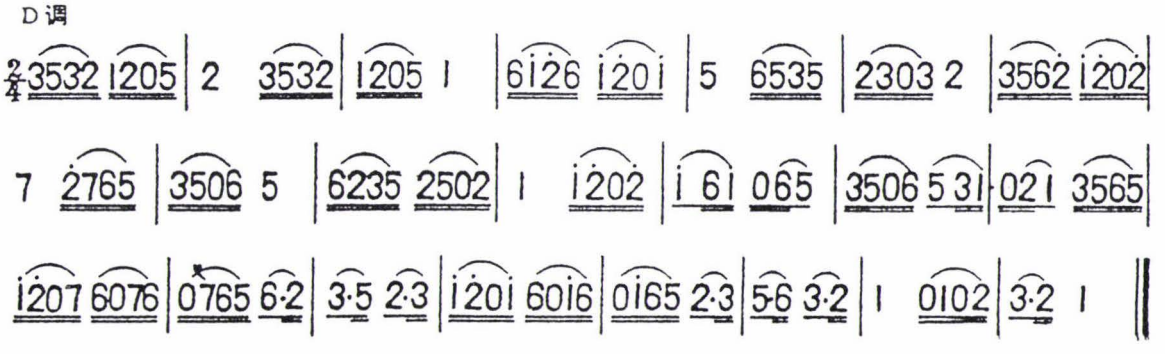
练习二十

D调



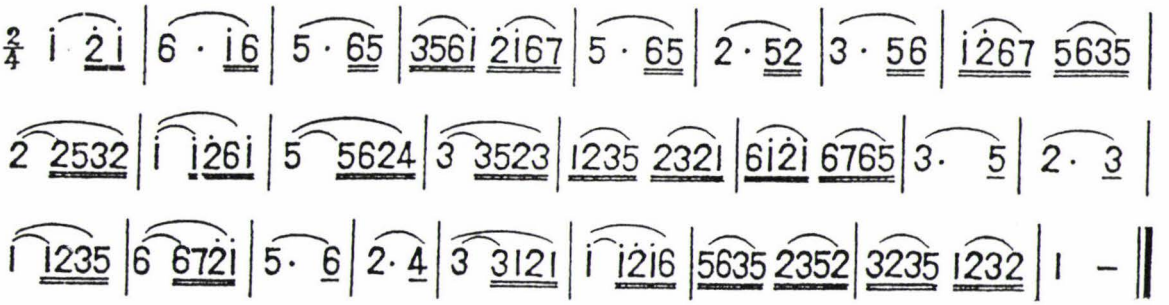
练习二十一

D调



练习二十二

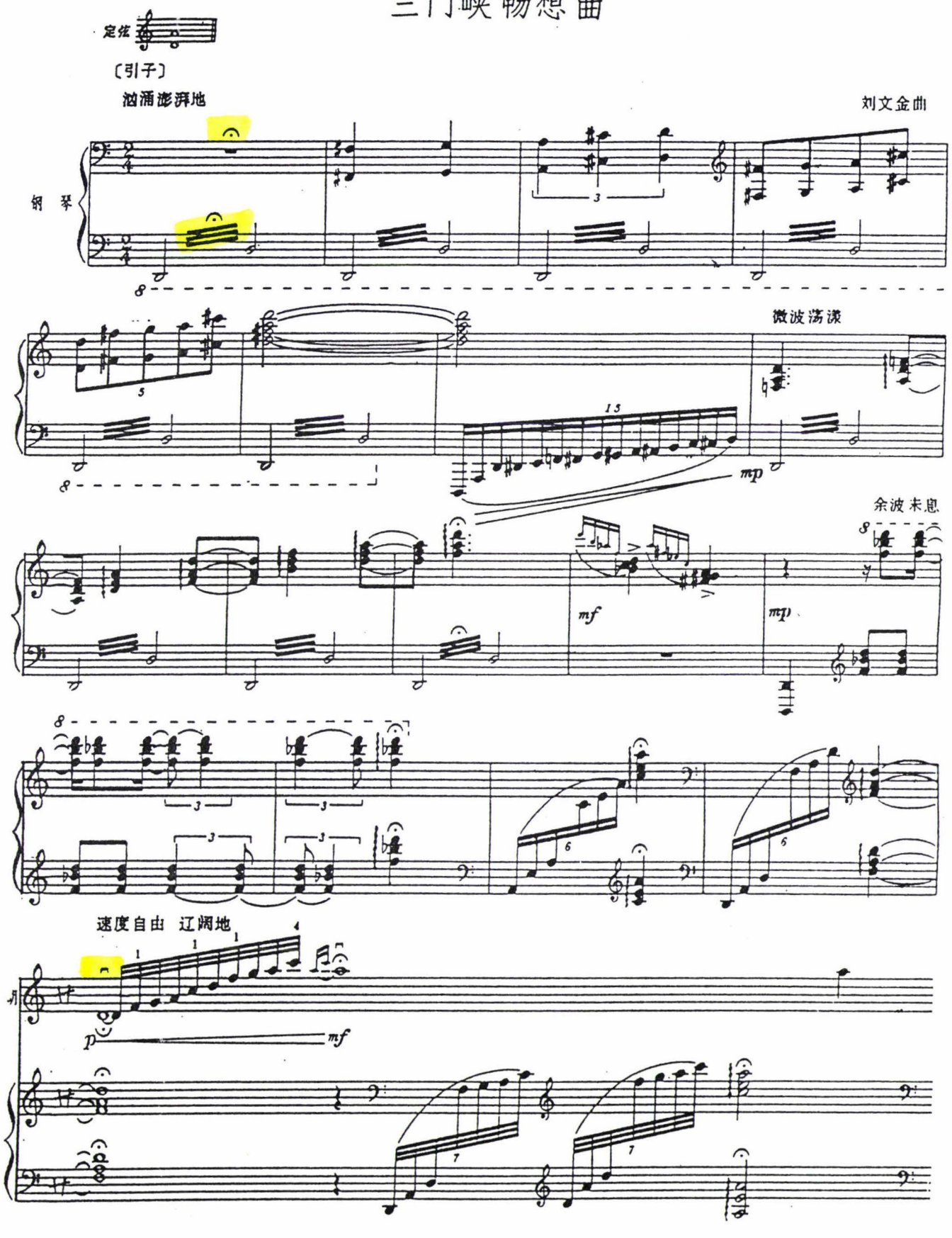
D调

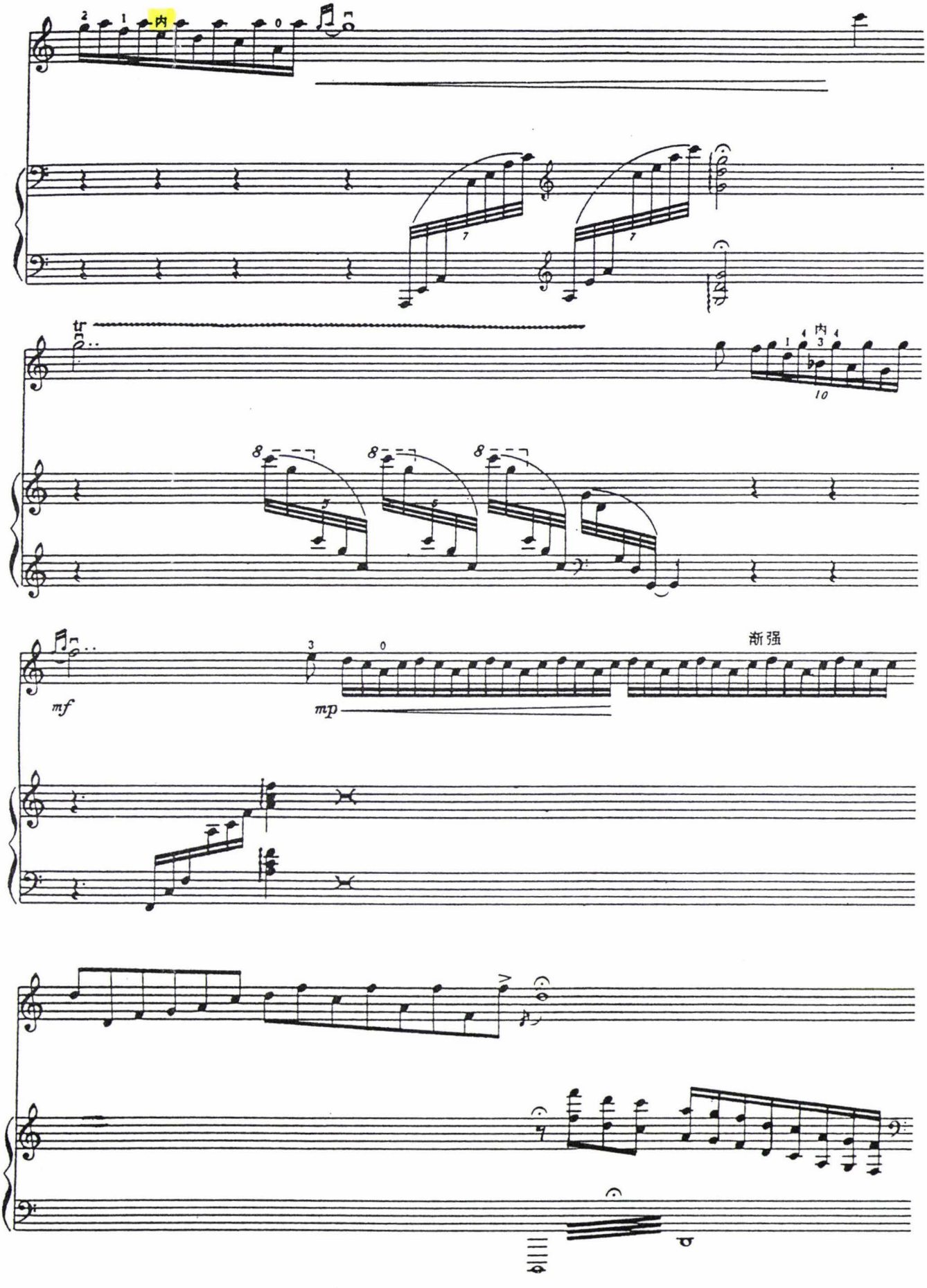


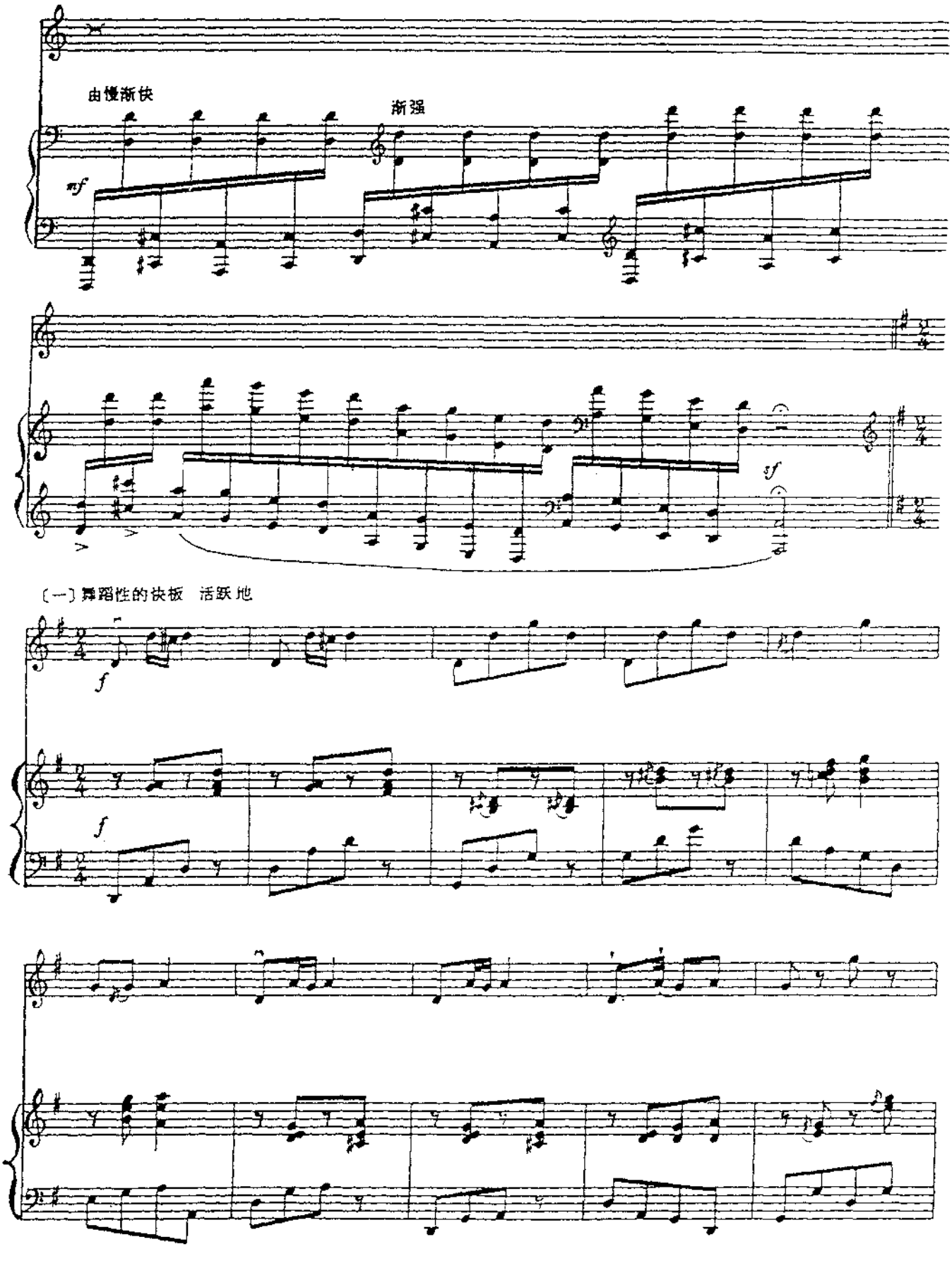
(Chai, 1997, p.8 – 10)

Example 4 **The Sammen Gorge Capriccio by Liu Wen-jin**

三门峡畅想曲



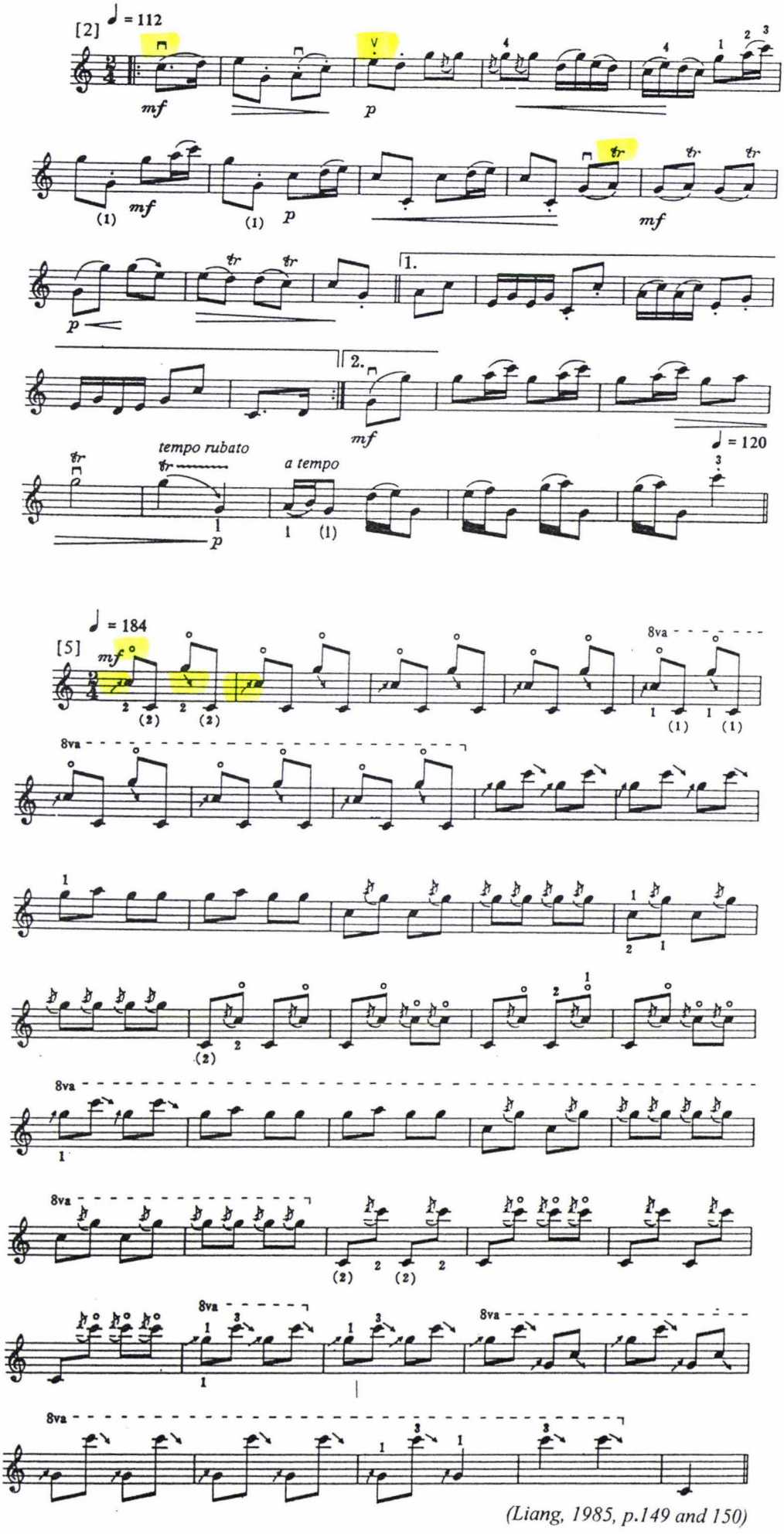

内
渐强
mf
mp


由慢渐快
渐强
mf
sf
〔一〕舞蹈性的快板 活跃地
f
f

Kongshan niaoyu ("Bird's Song in a Desolate Gorge")
(an Excerpt of Sections 2 and 5)

Example 5

by Liu Tianhua (1895–1932)

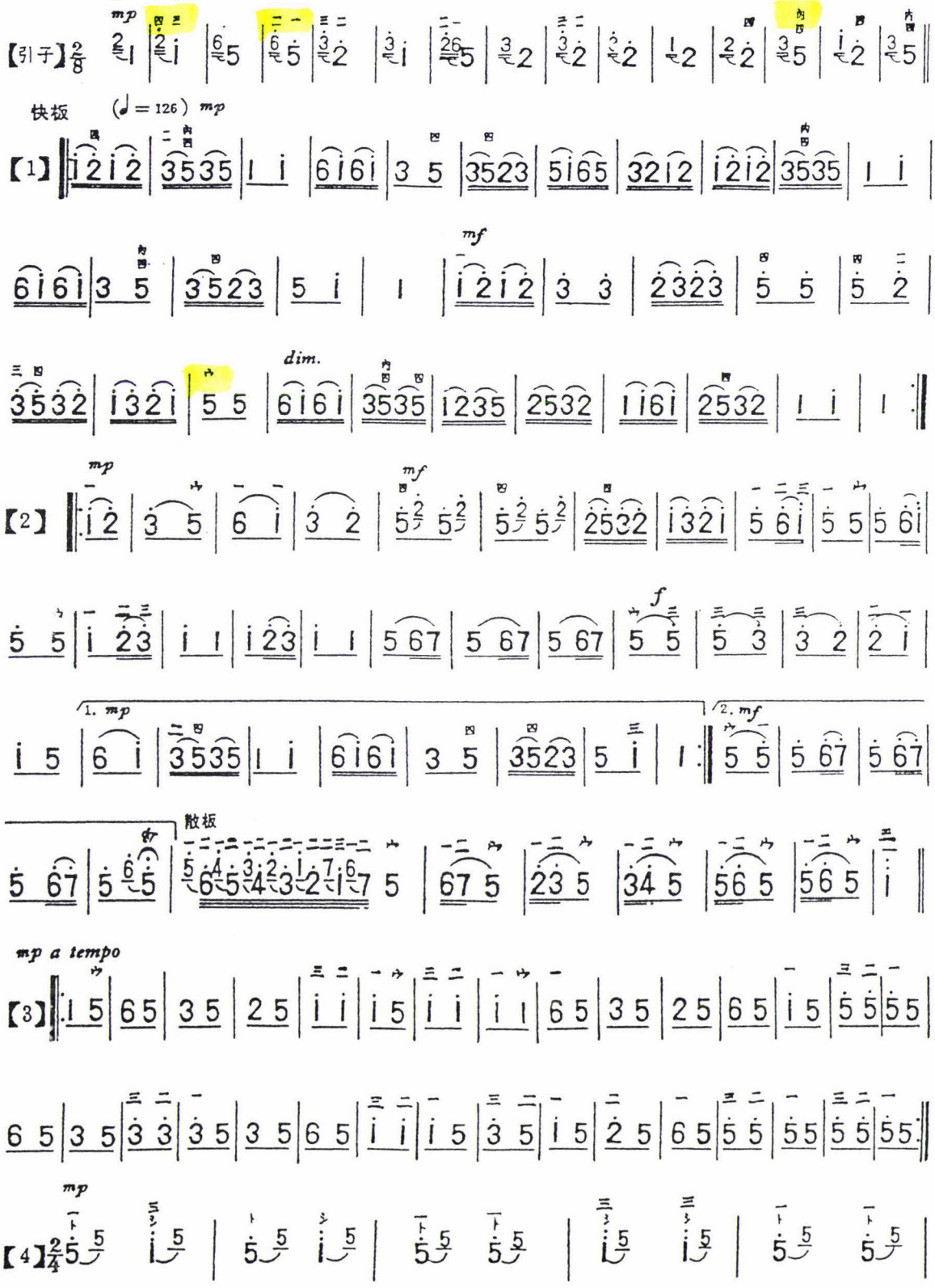


(Liang, 1985, p.149 and 150)

Example 6

空山鸟语

BIRD'S SONG IN A DESOLATE GORGE



(Chai, 1997, p.32 and 33)

Example 7 THE MOON REFLECTED ON THE SECOND SPRINGS

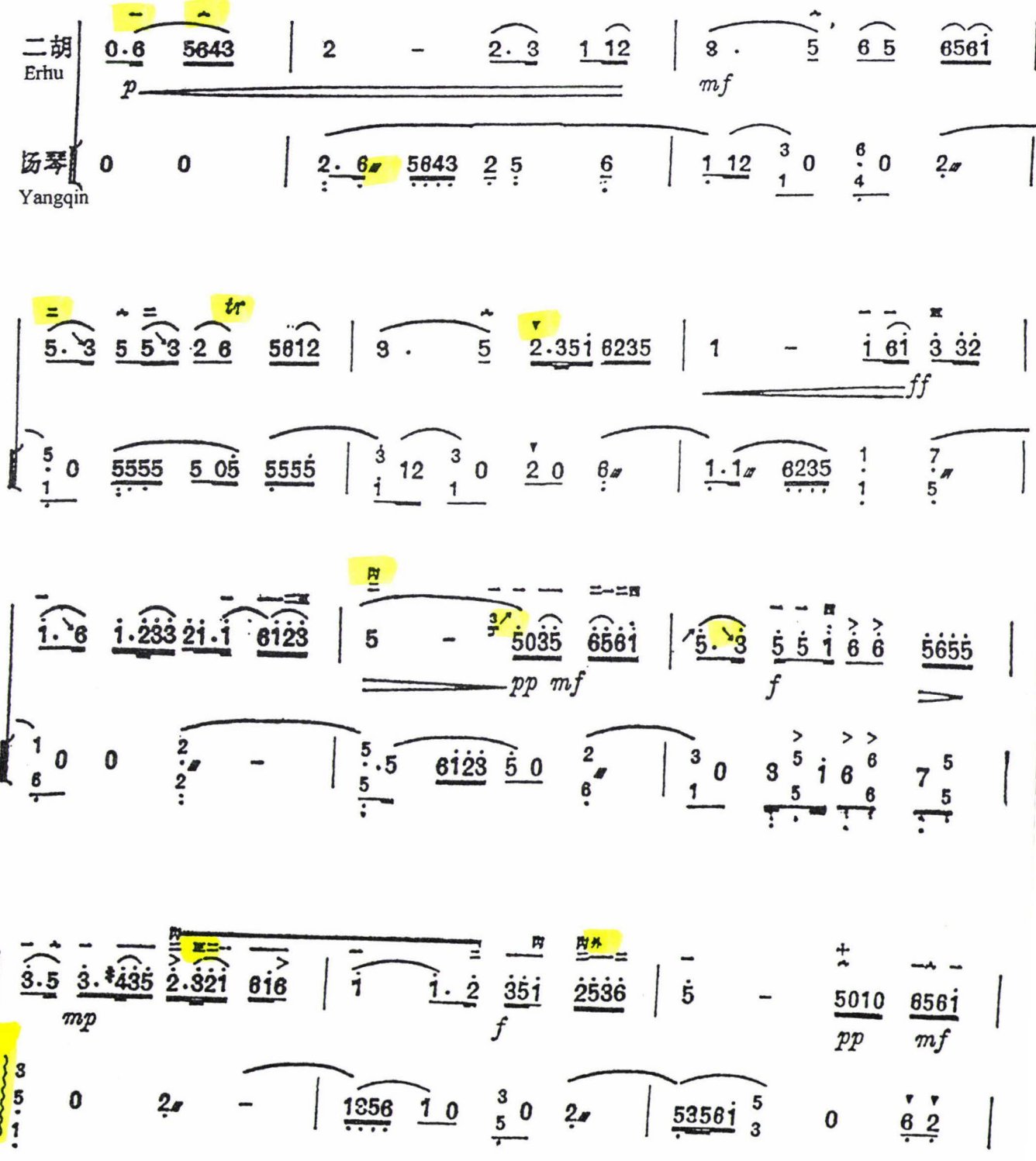
二 泉 映 月

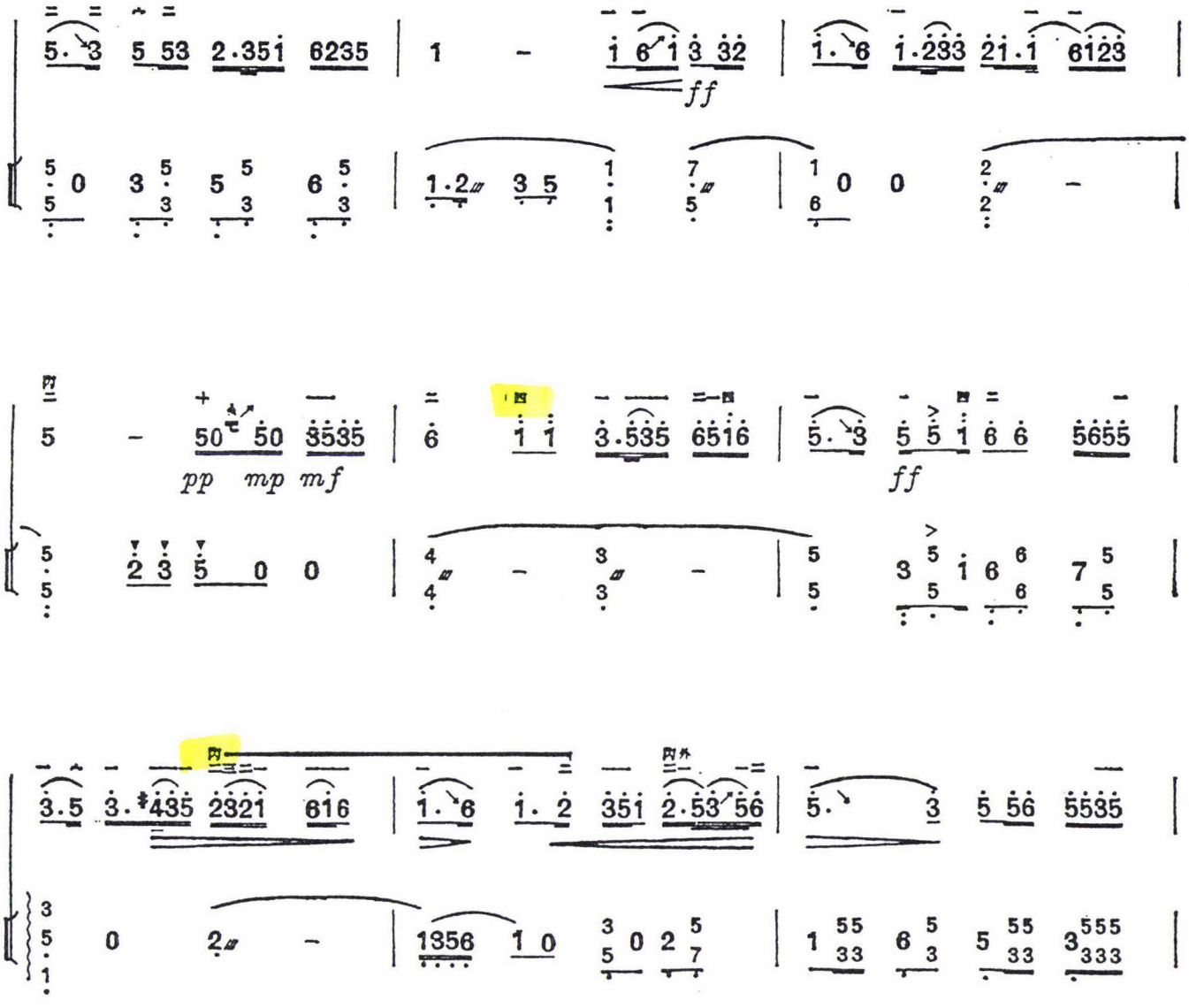
BY ABING

华 彦 钧曲
杨 荫 浏记谱
储师竹、梁松寿订指法
曾 加 庆配伴奏

1=G（1 5弦）$\frac{4}{4}$（定弦 g—d'）（比一般二胡低五度）

每分钟 48 拍至 58 拍




ff
pp mp mf
ff

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Compositions and Arrangements by Phoon Yew Tien

Compact discs titles	Performers	Productions
1. Confucius	Singapore Chinese Orchestra, Victoria Choral, Amadeus Choral Society and Nanyang High School Girls Choir	UTN Productions 002-006
2. "Meditations of a Poet" Orchestral Works	Russian Philharmonic Orchestra	UTN Productions 097-004
3. "Reminiscence" Chamber Works	Russian and Singaporean Musicians	UTN Productions 097-005
4. "Tang Huang" Dance Music	Singapore People's Association Chinese Orchestra	UTN Productions 097-002
5. Chinese Instrumental Music	Singapore People's Association Chinese Orchestra	UTN Productions 097-003
6. Symphonic Works	Shanghai Philharmonic Orchestra and Choir	K.K. Productions Yellow River 82062
7. The Best of Chinese Oldies	Shanghai Conservatory Symphony Orchestra	K.K. Productions Yellow River 82061
8. Chinese New Year Fantasy	Shanghai Philharmonic Orchestra	K.K. Productions Yellow River 82020
9. Melodies for New Year's Greetings	Shanghai Conservatory Chinese Orchestra	Hugo Productions Lotus LT 4008-2
10. Wandering Singer	Shanghai Conservatory Chinese Orchestra	Hugo Productions HRP 739-2
11. TCS Telemovie Soundtrack "Grandpa's Meat Bone Tea"		UTN Productions 097-001
12. "The Sky Builder"	Kaoshiung City Chinese Orchestra	Hugo Productions HRP 7155-2
13. New Music Forum III	Singapore Symphony Orchestra	Naxos (S) Pte Ltd

Recordings by authors and production companies.

Compact discs and video titles	Recordings	Producers/ Productions
1. Commemoration of the Renowned Folk Musician Hua Yan Jun (Abing). 1996	Hong Kong	ROI Productions, RC-961992-2C
2. Moonlit River in Spring. 1991	Recorded 1986-1989 in Hong Kong, Shanghai and Beijing	Hugo HRP 747-2
3. Musical Creativity in Twentieth-Century China: Abing, His Music, And Its Changing Meanings. 1996	Recorded c.1930 and 1996	Jonathan P. Stock
4. *Sizhu* Silk Bamboo: Chamber Music of South China. 1994. Anthology of Music in China 3.	Recorded in Shanghai, Guangzhou and Xiamen, 1986; Shanghai 1990; Vancouver 1994.	PAN2030CD Recorded by Alan R. Thrasher
5. *Erhu*—bowed fiddle with *yangqin*: *"Erquan yingyue"* (The Moon Reflected in a Spring)(3-3). The JVC Video Anthology of World Music and Dance, East Asia III, vol. 3, China I.		VTMV-33
6. Performing Arts of China: Instruments and Music. 1992. Video cassette.	Originally produced and copyrighted in 1983. Directed by Deben Bhattacharya	Audio-Forum V72185

GLOSSARY

Banhu	Similar in function and structure to the *erhu* except that the soundboard is covered entirely with a thin ply of wood.
Caiqiang	The art of decorating or embellishing a melody.
Cheng diao	Normal tuning mode or scale.
Cipher notation	Acoustic numeral notation.
Da gehu	The lowest-pitched instrument in the *huqin* family.
Dapu	Playing through one's own personal expression.
Diao	Scale, key or mode.
Erhsian	A two-stringed bowed lute.
Erhu	A two-stringed bowed lute.
Gaohu	Also known as soprano *erhu* and possesses a shorter neck than the *erhu.*
Gehu	A cross between a violoncello and an *erhu.*
Hongmu	*Padouk* wood resembling rosewood that is carved into a resonator of the *erhu.*
Huanbawei	The technique of shifting the hand down the shaft of the *erhu.*
Huhu	A two-stringed bowed lute.
Huqin	"Foreign" stringed instruments which encompasses various Chinese bowed stringed instruments.
Huyue	Foreign music from South East Asia, Korea, India and other countries.
Jiahua	Decorations or embellishments.
Jiangnan sizhu	Silk and bamboo music commonly played in the tea-houses throughout Southern Jiangsu and Northern Zhejiang.
Jianpu	Modern pitched notation.
Jinghu	Similarly constructed as the *erhu* and produces a loud piercing tone.
Kouchuan	Oral music transmitted from teacher to pupil.
Lagong	Pulling the bow horizontally on the two strings of the *erhu.*
Nei xian	Inner string of the *erhu*
Pipa	A four-stringed plucked lute.
Pu	Notation system.
Qianjin	A restrainer for the two strings of the *erhu* found between the bridge and the two pegs.
Qinjiang	An operatic style of Shaanxi Province.
Sizhu music	Silk and bamboo music found amongst the five principal regional styles in China.
Suyue	Common music for the proletariat, professional musicians or street musicians.
T'an –t'ze	A style of narrative folksong known in South China.
Ta'ku-shu	A style of narrative folksong known in North China.
Tuigong	Pushing the bow horizontally on the two strings of the *erhu.*
Wai xian	Outer string of the *erhu.*
Wongtzi	A two-stringed bowed lute.
Xinshou	Aural transmission that is through listening to the music and interpreting the sound.

Xiqin	Was an ancestor of the *erhu* and it resembles the instrument of today's *huqin* family and modern day *erhu.*
Yang	Represents the positive cosmic energy or forces that harmonize the universe in the teaching of Daoism.
Yanyue	Banquet music that symbolizes the Chinese empire's prosperity.
Yaoma	A wedge-shaped wood or 'waist-bridge' that replaces the restrainer found in the *banhu* family.
Yayue	Elegant and refined court music for the nobility and Confucian ritual for the Imperial family.
Yazheng	A half-tube bridged zither.
Yin	Represents the negative cosmic energy or forces that harmonize the universe in the teachings of Daoism.
Yudi	Musicians 'latitude' or liberality of interpretation.
Yue Shu	Book of Music by Chen Yang completed in 1104 A.D.
Zhifa	A special technique used to raise and lower pitches.
Zhonghu	Also known as the alto *erhu* and developed from the *erhu* in the 1940s.