

An Analysis of Selected Piano Works Inspired by Peking Opera:
Four Qupai Piano Etudes by Ni Hongjin and *Instants D'un Opéra de*
Pékin by Chen Qigang

by

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***Pékin* by Chen Qigang**

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the document is to provide a thorough analysis of Ni Hongjin and Chen Qigang's solo piano compositions *Four Qupai Piano Etudes* and *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin* in order to create a better understanding of their piano compositions, as well as the relationship of these pieces to a Chinese traditional art form, the Peking Opera. The document will provide a comprehensive view of these pieces as an instructional guide for performers, teachers, and music lovers.

Scope of research

The project will include the following: an introduction to the general characteristics of instrumental music in Peking Opera; an analysis of Ni Hongjin and Chen Qigang's solo piano works; and the influence of Chinese traditional musical theory and Western compositional techniques on these pieces. Finally, a performance guide will be presented.

Review of Literature

Four Qupai Piano Etudes

In recent years, research on Ni Hongjin's *Four Qupai Piano Etudes* has focused mainly on the form, and nationalist and the aesthetic aspects of these works. While it is vitally important to address the issue of artistic expression, there is not much detailed discussion of the piano technique in this work. While some of the published articles discuss specific technical challenges, very few provide detailed solutions on how to master the challenges in order to play this work effectively and effortlessly. I

hope my research will make a scholarly contribution by filling in the gaps in this area of research.

Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin

There have been brief articles analyzing Chen Qigang's *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin* in terms of its historical background, form, and motivic structure. In addition, some research papers have discussed a detailed pedagogical approach to *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin* from the performer's point of view. However, there is not much detailed analysis of the influence of Western compositional techniques and the sonic elements of timbre, register, and texture.

Published Research: *Qupai*

Yuxin Song's thesis (2019) discusses Ni Hongjin's use of the melodies composed for Chinese flute that form the basis for the solo piano works, and the ways Ni changes the rhythm and texture of the original melodies to make the whole set more technically challenging for piano.¹ Qing Dou's article (2008) also describes the four *qupai* tunes in this work.² However, she does not explain the origin of the tunes and nor does she discuss the characteristics of the original tunes. Similarly, there are a number of other articles that provide a brief overview of the original source of Ni's compositions but do not discuss the source of the tunes that the composer "borrowed,"

¹ Yuxin Song, "《倪洪进京剧曲牌钢琴练习曲四首》的演奏技法探究[The Playing Techniques of Four Pieces of Peking Opera Qupai Piano Etudes by Ni Hongjin]," (Xi An Conservatory of Music, 2019).

² Qing Dou, "倪洪进《京剧曲牌钢琴练习曲四首》分析[The Analysis of Four Pieces of Peking Opera Qupai Piano Etudes by Ni Hongjin]," *Shandong Weifang Music Conservatory* 5, (2008): 137-138.

or how the composer changed the tunes to create the piano pieces. Therefore, further study of the four *Qupai* that Ni chose will lead to a better understanding of her works.

Research concerning aspects of the “developing variation technique”
in the formal structure of *Instants*

According to Zhihong Sun (2010), the musical structure of *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin* uses a variation form.³ Compared with the variation form in Western music, variation in this work moves from simple to complex in a kind of development. Some important aspects of this developing variation compositional technique are discussed in the thesis *Cross-Cultural Synthesis in Chen Qigang's Piano Compositions* by Yannan Li. (2012) Li's research highlights thematic modulation, transposition, elimination, and motivic continuation as aspects of the compositional technique of developing variation.

According to Dongmei Zhao (2003), even though this piece uses a variation form, there is no sense of “segmentation” in the traditional sense of variation. Zhao also states that the composer himself confirmed that the most prominent feature of this work is that it is “through-composed” - everything is done in “one take”⁴. However, Zhao mentions in her article that while the piece does have sections, the boundaries of the sections are subtly hidden by the composer⁵. This reveals Chen Qigang's intention to present the coherent and continuous feature of *Xing xian* (the transition

³ Zhihong Sun, “The Coexistence of Key Field in Chen Qigang's piano work *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin*,” in *Qilu Realm of Arts* 113, no. 2 (2010): 64.

⁴ Dongmei Zhao, “陈其钢最新钢琴作品《京剧瞬间》的艺术创造》 [Artistic Creation in Chen Qigang's *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin*],” in *Chinese Music* 4, (2003): 27.

⁵ Ibid.

passagework in *Xipi*), as well as calling our attention to the compositional techniques Chen Qigang used to hide the transitions between each section.

The Western Influence

It is not surprising to find that *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin* reflects the influence of the French composers Claude Debussy (1862 –1918) and Olivier Messiaen (1908 – 1992) in compositional technique, sound and texture. In fact, Chen was a student of Messiaen. Chen, in an interview with Shan Jiang, states: “In my past 17 years living and composing in France, my work has been deeply affected by the influence of “tone-color.” But I couldn’t find the ready-made ‘chromatography’ based on the palette of Chinese pentatonic modes.”⁶ (Translated by the author) The question arises: how did Chen Qigang create his own music language and incorporate the essence of French impressionism in his solo piano piece *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin*?

As a student of Olivier Messiaen, Chen Qigang had the significant advantage of working with one of the great musical geniuses of the 20th Century. Andrew Hisey discusses this influence on *Instants* in a short article (2002): “This piece is full of Chinese and French sounds: parallel chords, many voicings that include open fourths and fifths, the use and combination of several of Messiaen’s “modes of limited transposition” (pentatonic, whole-tone and octatonic, to name a few) and unmarked,

⁶ Qigang Chen, interview by Jiang Shan, *Qigang Chen talks about the Music of Raise the Red Lantern*. People’s music, 2002.

but clearly necessary, pedaling.”⁷ An article titled *The Coexistence of Key Fields in Chen Qiangang’s Instants d’un Opéra de Pékin* by Zhihong Sun (2010) describes the different types and features of coexisting key fields that Chen Qigang used in this composition, and Sun suggests that this compositional technique simulates the effect of mode shift in traditional Chinese music.⁸ This is worth noting because it shows Chen Qigang’s combination of both Western and Eastern tonal concepts to create his own music language. Yet, some questions still remain to be answered. Most of the research articles describe Messiaen’s compositional influence on Chen Qigang’s composition, but few explore Claude Debussy’s influence on Chen Qigang in terms of tone color and timbre.

⁷ Andrew Hisey, “Reviewed Work: *Instants D’un Opéra de Pékin pour piano* by Qigang Chen,” *American Music Teacher* 52, no. 2 (2002): 102.

⁸ Zhihong Sun, “The Coexistence of Key Field in Chen Qigang’s piano work *Instants d’un Opéra de Pékin*,” in *Qilu Realm of Arts* 113, no. 2 (2010): 64.

Chapter I

Introduction

As the treasure of Chinese culture, Peking Opera is an important component of the world's artistic endeavors because of its unique artistic form. There are numerous connections between the piano compositions that use elements from Chinese Peking Opera and Western music. In the process of creating piano music, composers use arias such as *Xipi* and *Erhuang* (two styles of aria), and accompaniment music including *Qupai* tunes (fixed tune melody) and *Xing Xian* (transition passage). These are the primary references to the musical elements of Peking Opera.

The Chinese Pentatonic Scale

The Chinese pentatonic scale plays a significant role in the melodic development, harmony, tonality and technical challenges of *Four Qupai Etudes* as well as *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin*. The tones of this scale (including the hexachordal scale and the heptachordal scale) are *gong*, *shang*, *jue*, *zhi* and *yu*. Different tones can be used as the tonic: the *gong* mode with *gong* as the tonic, *shang* mode with *shang* as the tonic, etc. In Chinese music, many scale patterns, including the hexatonic and heptatonic scales, belong to the pentatonic scale system.

The pentatonic scale has the following characteristics :

1. The distance between two adjacent notes is the major 2nd or the minor 3rd.

Between the five tones in the pentatonic scale, the neighboring tones are major 2nds except for the minor 3rd from *jue* to *zhi* and *yu* to *gong*.

It is impossible for any two notes to form dissonant intervals, such as the minor 2nd, augmented 4th or diminished 5th. Therefore, the tunes produced by the pentatonic scale are very consonant.

2. Each pentatonic scale can be considered as a combination of two trichords. According to the interval structure of the pentatonic scale, there are three kinds of trichords:

- a. major 2nd + major 2nd
- b. major 2nd + minor 3rd
- c. minor 3rd + major 2nd.

The interval structure of the pentatonic scale determines the color of each mode, major or minor. For example, *yu* mode is the most frequently used “key” in in the overall mode scheme of *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin*. (See figure 1.1) This mode appears in its complete form in m. 4. The descending melodic line in right hand from top to bottom presents *yu* mode on “E,” *yu* mode on “B,” and *yu* mode on “A.” The ascending melodic line in left hand from bottom to top presents *yu* mode on “E^b,” *yu* mode on “A^b,” and *yu* mode on “B^b.” (See figure 1.2) The music sounds like the minor mode used in Western music because of the minor 3rd from *yu* to *gong* and the minor 7th from *yu* to *zhi*. This could be the reason that *yu* mode in *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin* has a slightly melancholy mood.

Figure 1.1: Musical example of *Yu* mode:



Figure 1.2: Theme of *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin* in *yu* mode, m. 4:



Zhi mode sounds like a major “key” as used in Western music because of the major 6th between *zhi* note and *jue* note. (See figure 1.3) The *A zhi* mode is briefly used by Chen Qigang in the middle section of *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin* for a contrasting effect. (See figure 1.4)

Figure 1.3: Example of *zhi* mode:

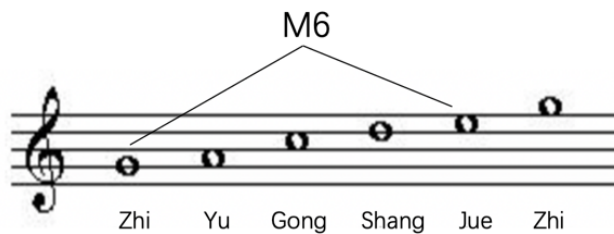
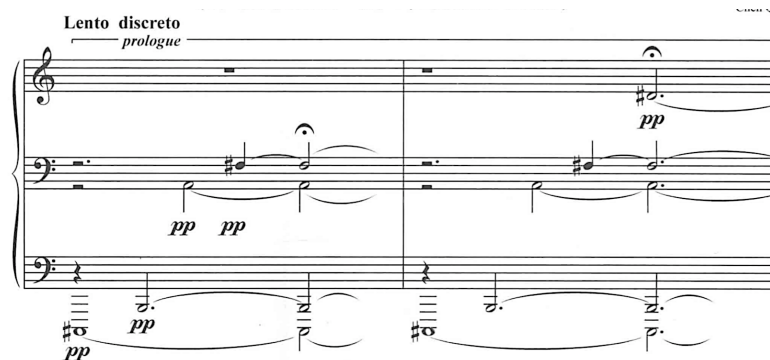


Figure 1.4: A *zhi* mode in *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin*:



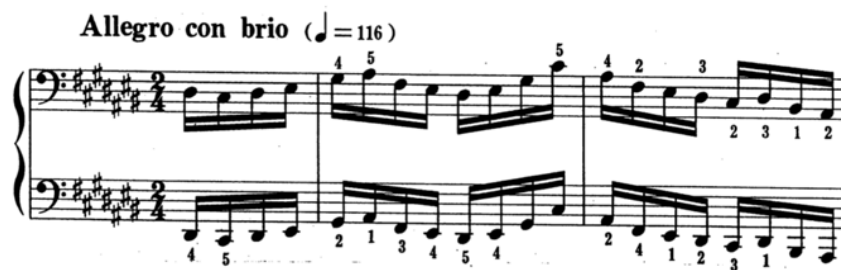
If other tones are added to the five tones of the pentatonic scale, the hexachord scale and the heptachord scale can be formed. Normally, four tones could be added based on their relation to *gong*, *shang*, *jue*, *zhi* and *yu*. They are *bian gong* (perfect 5th above *jue*), *bian zhi* (ten scale degrees above *jue*), *qing jue* (perfect 5th below *gong*) and *run* (ten scale degrees below *gong*). The added notes can only be used as decoration in pentatonic mode. For example, *bian zhi* note as an added note is frequently used in Peking opera. In *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin*, the D[#] in m. 2 could be considered *bian zhi* to form a tritone with *gong* note (A) (See figure 1.5).

Figure 1.5: *bian zhi* note in *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin*, m. 4:



An example of *qing jue* (five scale degrees below *gong*) can be found in the opening of *Four Qupai Etudes*. The piece starts in C[#] *gong* mode (C[#]-D[#]-E[#]-G[#]-A[#]-C[#]). The F[#] is five scale degrees below C[#] which functions as *qing jue* in C[#] *gong* mode. (See figure 1.6).

Figure 1.6: The opening of *Xiao Kai Men* etude, mm. 1-3:



In general, Chinese pentatonic scale as the cornerstone of the pieces by Ni Hongjin and Chen Qigang, plays a significant role in setting the motive, melody, harmony development and atmosphere. I will discuss the treatment of the pentatonic scale in more detail in each piece and explore its creative development with modern compositional technique.

Chapter II

Four Qupai Piano Etudes

Ni Hongjin's Life as a Musician

Ni Hongjin (b.1935) is a well-known pianist and educator in China. In 1953, Ni Hongjin was given the opportunity to study music in Moscow. Her five-year experience studying in Russia had a decisive influence on Ni Hongjin's later compositions.⁹ She states: "The Moscow Conservatory of Music emphasizes the national characteristics of Russia; their textbooks, concerts, and publications all have distinctive national characteristics."¹⁰ (Translated by the author) Her growing awareness of the power of nationalism changed Ni Hongjin's attitude and influenced her decision to incorporate national elements such as folk styles as musical elements in her compositions. She later produced a substantial body of work, including *the Zhuang suite* for piano, *Walking in The Old Summer Palace* for piano, and *Two Fantasies*, all characterized by elements of "nationalism."¹¹

Ni Hongjin's *Four Qupai Piano Etudes* represent a creative engagement with the piano etude by combining the traditional *qupai* with Western musical form. The piano etude is an indispensable part of piano music, designed to develop performing skill

⁹ Xing Pan, "戏曲元素在中国风格钢琴练习曲中的运用 - 以储望华、倪洪进钢琴练习曲为例[The musical element in the drama art in the application of Chinese style piano etude]" (Master diss., Shandong Normal University, 2015), 25.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Yuxin Song, "《倪洪进京剧曲牌钢琴练习曲四首》的演奏技法探究[The Playing Techniques of Four *Qupai* Etudes by Ni Hongjin]" (Xi An Conservatory of Music, 2019), 3.

and technique. Qing Dou, professor at Shandong Normal University (2017) discusses the different types of etudes in Western piano music and the different degrees and types of technical challenge in these pieces. These pieces include the finger exercises such as *Hanon*; etudes by Carl Czerny; etudes that combine virtuosity with artistry, such as the advanced concert etudes by Frédéric Chopin, Franz Liszt and others; and pieces that are not actually designated as “etudes,” such as the contrapuntal works of Johann Sebastian Bach and sonatas by Scarlatti.¹² Ni Hongjin’s *Four Qupai Piano Etudes* use traditional Chinese *qupai* elements to create a new type of etude.

Ni Hongjin’s father Ni Qiuping is the accompanist of the notable Peking opera artist Mei Lanfang (1894-1961). When Ni Hongjin was a child she was deeply influenced by her father, specifically in regard to the elements of national music. She said in an article about the *Four Qupai Piano Etudes and the Problems in Practice*: “students in China sometimes are completely unfamiliar with, and even dislike, their national music. Therefore, these Chinese piano etudes not only help to build the pianist’s technique, but the musical content also promotes one’s musical development in ways that cannot completely accomplished by the study of Western etudes.”¹³

(Translated by the author) As piano etudes combined with artistry, *Four Qupai Piano Etudes* combine the specific purpose of technical training with musical expression and have a high artistic value in promoting national culture and traditional music.

¹² Qing Dou, “论中国风格钢琴练习曲创作的体系性构建[The Systematic Construction of Chinese-Style Piano Etude Composition],” *Music Research*, no. 6 (November 2017):81.

¹³ Hongjin Ni, “我写钢琴练习曲四首的背景和在练习中要注意的问题[The writing background of Four Qupai Piano Etudes and the Problems in Practice].” *China Academic Journal Electronic Publishing House*, 32.

Personally, I do not recommend using this work as a replacement for Western piano etudes. I suggest that it this work be used as supplemental teaching material to give students a more extensive technical repertoire and to give them a different experience in their learning process. In the next section, I will discuss the technical difficulties in the works, relating these works to etudes by Czerny with similar technical difficulties for additional practice.

Overview of *Qupai*

Qupai originates from folk music. As the musical accompaniment, *qupai* is an important part of Peking Opera music. This music makes Peking opera more colorful and richer in content. Throughout the performance of Peking Opera, *qupai* is used to set the plot in motion, set the scene, create an atmosphere, and accompany the actors' performances to enhance the artistic effect.¹⁴ The prelude, interlude music, scene change music and ending music are all realized through the performance of *qupai*.¹⁵

According to the categories of Peking opera, *qupai* can be divided into vocal *qupai* with lyrics and pure instrumental *qupai*.¹⁶ Vocal *qupai* is also called *dazi paizi* (大字牌子) with lyrics sung by many people, accompanied by instruments such as *suona*¹⁷ and drums¹⁸. In the instrumental *qupai*, there are no lyrics, and various instruments are used. The category of the instrumental *qupai* is determined by the classification of the instruments, such as *suona qupai*, *flute qupai*, *huqin qupai*, etc. In

¹⁴ Lizhu, Zhang, “风格各异的京剧曲牌[Different Styles of *Qupai*],” in *New Century Theatre*, no. 3 (2011): 20.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Huan Qi, Qun He, and Xiaohui Yang, 京剧音乐基础教程[*Introduction of Peking Opera Music*] (Beijing: Culture and Art Publishing House, 2018), 96-97.

¹⁷ Double-reeded horn

¹⁸ Zhang, 风格各异的京剧曲牌[Different Styles of *Qupai*], 20.

scenes that describe hunting or marching, for example, *suona qupai* will be used. The flute *qupai* and *huqin qupai* are mostly used in interludes and scenes of domestic activities.¹⁹

In Peking Opera, instrumental *qupai* are coordinated with the actors' stage movements and are used to create the atmosphere for the scene. This instrumental style is easy to transfer to a non-operatic musical medium, such as piano. The *Four Qupai Piano Etudes* are based on the instrumental *qupai* which have distinctive national characteristics as part of Peking opera. Techniques from Western piano music are used, and the melodies and modes of Chinese music are used to incorporate Chinese national elements into these piano etudes. The result is music that is very accessible for pianists.

In this chapter, I will provide a detailed analysis of Ni Hongjin's *Four Qupai Piano Etudes* and discuss *qupai*, musical style, structure and technical challenges.

Xiao kai men (小开门)

Xiao kai men, also known as *xiao bai men* (小拜门) is a *qupai* widely used in various forms throughout China: in Hebei *suona* (*xiao kai men*); Jiangnan *sizhu* (*xiao kai men*); Gansu *xiao kai men*; and Inner Mongolia *qupai* for two people (*xiao bai men*).²⁰ *Xiao kai men* features a lively melody in a relatively fast tempo; it is a popular *qupai* and can be used to display one's virtuosic technique.²¹ Although it has a

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Xiuting Wang and Yuqin Yang, "京剧器乐曲牌 [小开门] 溯源与创新[The origin and innovation of Xiao kai men Qupai]," *Journal of National Academy of Chinese Theatre Arts* 36 no. 4, (November 2015): 119.

²¹ Huan Qi, Qun He, and Xiaohui Yang, *京剧音乐基础教程[Introduction to Peking Opera Music]*.

title, *xiao kai men* doesn't indicate a story or any specific imagery, and it can be flexibly applied to different occasions, such as a court ceremony, or a scene where the emperor is travelling.²² The following is an example of the original tune of *Xiao kai men*.

Figure 2.1: Original tune of *Xiao kai men*.²³

① ②
 ③ ④ ⑤
 ⑥ ⑦

中速 慢起
 $\frac{2}{4}$ (多多) 7 | 6 1 2 3 2 1 6 || : 1 1 6 5 | 3 6 1 6 5 | 3 6 3 5 | 1 3 5 2 |
1 2 3 4 3 2 1 | 6 6 5 3 4 3 5 | 6 5 3 5 6 5 6 | 6 3 5 2 | 1 5 6 5 3 2 |
3 5 6 1 5 | 3 3 6 3 4 | 3 6 5 1 | 6 5 3 2 | 1 1 1 3 2 1 | 6 1 2 3 2 1 6 :||

A transcription into Western notation:

The image shows a transcription of the Xiao kai men tune into Western musical notation. It consists of three staves of music. The first staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 2/4 time signature. The second and third staves are also in treble clef with a 2/4 time signature. The notation includes various note values, rests, and articulation marks, corresponding to the numbered notation provided in Figure 2.1.

²² Xiuting Wang and Yuqin Yang, 京剧器乐曲牌 [小开门] 溯源与创新 [The origin and innovation of Xiao kai men Qupai], 119.

²³ Huan Qi, Qun He, and Xiaohui Yang, 京剧音乐基础教程 [Introduction of Peking Opera Music] (Beijing: Culture and Art Publishing House, 2018), 168.

The *Xiao kai men* etude features ternary form. It has five sections (Introduction-A-B-A-Closing). The introduction is built on $C^\#$ *gong* mode, and the other sections are all built on *yu* mode. The closing section brings back the opening material at m. 52, where both hands move up by an octave and the right hand is harmonized, which makes the tone fuller and more expressive.

The theme first appears at m. 15, and it is based on the traditional *xiao kai men qupai*. (See figure 2.2)

Figure 2.2: Theme in *Xiao kai men* etude:



The first piece is an etude for training the independence of hands. The right hand states the *xiao kai men* theme while the left hand has the fast-moving line. The performer should study the phrases and the character of the music, practicing hands separately in order to hear the two parts clearly. The pianist can study the right hand alone from mm. 15-23 to master the dynamic shaping in the phrases; in many cases, a long phrase like this needs a broader dynamic arc. An agogic accent on the first chord at m. 21 can enhance the expression, while the left hand can give nuance to the descending melodic patterns with a subtle *diminuendo*.

During practice, students often ignore the interrelationship of all voices within the texture. It is important to keep in mind that both hands are equally important and consciously coordinate the two hands so that one hand does not dominate. For example, in the opening section, mm. 1-7, both hands are moving in the same direction until m. 7, where the left hand is in contrary motion with the right hand. (See figure 2.3) In m. 7, the performer needs to feel both hands as one coordinated choreographic gesture - the left hand going down and the right hand coming up.

Figure 2.3: *Xiao kai men* etude: opening section:

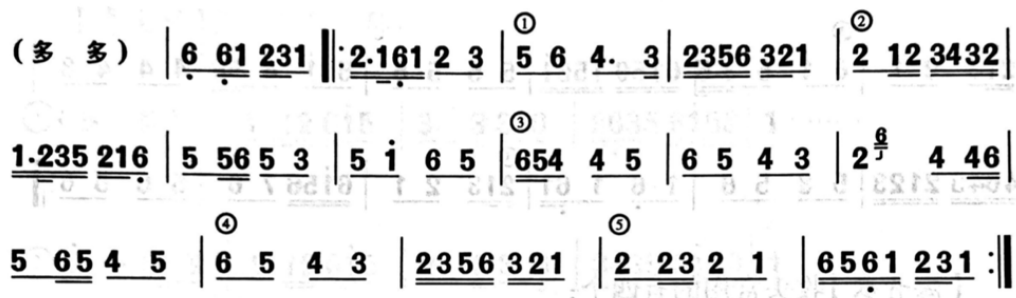


Carl Czerny's Op. 299, No. 7 is an excellent choice of supplemental material, since the performing technique is similar to the *Xiao kai men* etude, with a flowing left hand part and a lyrical, melodic right hand. Students can use this etude to feel and develop the sense of interrelationship of all parts of the musical texture.

Liu qing niang (柳青娘)

The second etude is based on the *qupai Liu qing niang*. The original melody is beautiful and lively. (See figure 2.4) In *suona qupai*, *liu qing niang* is mostly used for fighting scenes.²⁴ In *jinghu qupai*, it is usually used to represent women in domestic activities such as needlework and housework.²⁵ In the *Liu qing niang* etude by Ni Hongjin, the composer quotes the original tune of *Liu qing niang* throughout the whole piece, giving it a characteristic lyrical, long, and flowing quality. (See figure 2.5)

Figure 2.4: Example of the original tune of *Liu qing niang*:²⁶



A transcription into Western notation:



²⁴ Huan Qi, Qun He, and Xiaohui Yang, *京剧音乐基础教程*[Introduction of Peking Opera Music] (Beijing: Culture and Art Publishing House, 2018), 113.

²⁵ Huan Qi, Qun He, and Xiaohui Yang, *京剧音乐基础教程*[Introduction of Peking Opera Music], 170.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 241.

Figure 2.5: *Liu qing niang* etude: mm. 1-14:

The *Liu qing niang* etude is in ABA ternary form. There are two parts in the A section, [(a) and (b).] The (a) part, mm. 1-7, is in G[#] *yu* mode. The (b) part, mm. 8-15, uses the F[#] *zhi* mode.

Table 1: Structure of A Section

A Section			
a	b	a ¹	b ¹
1-7	8-15	16-22	23-39
G [#] <i>yu</i>	F [#] <i>zhi</i>	G [#] <i>yu</i>	G [#] <i>yu</i>

The B section is based on the material of the (a) part in section A. Mm. 33-41 use the material in first half of (a), and mm. 42-61 use the material in the second half of the (a) part. The music returns to the complete opening theme at m. 62 in C[#] *gong* mode with strong *ff* chords.

The technical challenge in this piece is the voicing, that is, bringing out the upper voice in the right hand. At measure 7-15, the expression of the upper voice should be projected. The performer should use nuances to vary the sound and create a warm and beautiful tone, listening to every note. The performer can mentally sing the top part to feel the larger phrase motion and avoid the feeling of “verticality.”

For the alto voice, the fingers should stay close to the keys to create a softer sound. For the *Allargando* at the end of the piece, the elbows should be relaxed, and the arms should be used to transfer weight from the upper body to the fingers.

Pomegranate flower (石榴花)

The third piece is based on the *qupai* “Pomegranate flower” of Kunqu Opera. This *qupai* was used in the Peking Operas *How Leung Hung-yuk's war drum caused the Jin troops to retreat* and *Fifteen Guan*.²⁷ The original lyrics associated with the tune “Pomegranate flower” in this opera describe the battleground, the surging waves and the sound of the snare drum.

In the *Pomegranate flower* etude, Ni Hongjin quoted the tune “Pomegranate flower” from the *How Leung Hung-yuk's war drum caused the Jin troops to retreat*. The piece embodies a heroic and triumphant spirit. The piece is divided into two different sections (AB) with a four-bar introduction and a five-bar ending. At the beginning of the piece, the fanfare-like chords in C *gong* mode set a mood of joyful excitement for the whole piece. The complete theme first appears in m. 5. The theme

²⁷ Hongjin Ni, “我写钢琴练习曲四首的背景和在练习中要注意的问题[*The writing background of Four Qupai Piano Etudes and the Problems in Practice*].” *China Academic Journal Electronic Publishing House*, 33.

is repeated three times in the A section. The last appearance of the theme in the A section is in B *yu* mode, and it transitions to the B section naturally in the same mode. The B section is based on a fragment of the material in the A section. Beginning in m. 28, the rest of the B section is a fast and virtuosic toccata. (See figure 2.6)

Figure 2.6: *Pomegranate flower*, mm. 27-30:



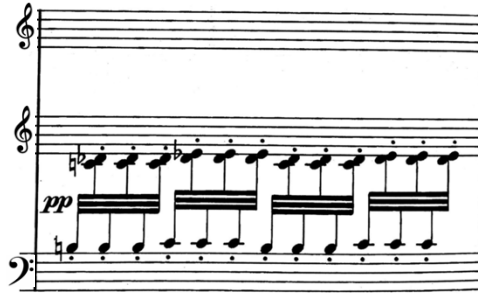
This is a piece for training the alternation and coordination of the hands. When practicing, the performer should play with relaxed arms and rotation in the right hand to avoid any tension. Without using the correct technique, the muscles will quickly become tense in this three-page toccata section. When practicing this passage, it is important to feel the rotation of the right arm. The performer can roll the forearm inward toward the thumb as the hand rotates. Feel the elbow and the forearm to the tip of the fingers as one unit. Allow the fingers to be controlled by the forearm instead of using a finger articulation. During hands-separate practice, the performer can also “block” (play solid, rather than arpeggiated) the right-hand chords to feel the hand position.

For the passages that have alternating hands, it is extremely important to keep an awareness in mind of the interrelationship of all voices. When the technique is mastered, the two hands should be perfectly coordinated without any break. From my own experience in playing passages that have fast alternating hands, such as mm. 137-141 in the first movement of the *Trio No. 1 in B Major*, Op. 8 by Johannes Brahms, the hands must actively feel the syncopation; otherwise, it is easy for the passage to become unrhythmic and lose the effect of the syncopation. Another example is Debussy's *Feux d'artifice*, from m. 20, where it is difficult to achieve the necessary evenness without feeling the coordination of the two hands.

Figure 2.7: Brahms trio no. 1 in B Major, mm. 137-141



Figure 2.8: Debussy's *Feux d'artifice*, m. 20:



I suggest that the performer in this toccata section of *Pomegranate flower* etude think “left-right” continuously during practice to feel the syncopation in this etude. Carl Czerny's Op. 299 No. 13 is a good preparatory exercise, a toccata-style piece where the hands alternate in a fast tempo. The right hand of the Czerny etude has single notes, which is much easier than the double notes in “*Pomegranate Flower*.” Pianists can use this etude as supplemental material to feel the rotation of the arm and the interdependence of two hands to achieve perfect coordination.

Liu yao jin (柳摇金)

Liu yao jin qupai is usually used as an accompaniment for dancing, cleaning, and drinking. The melody is lyrical and relatively long.²⁸ (See figure 2.9) The music style of the original *qupai* is playful, with a rather quick speed. The most famous use of this *qupai* is in the Peking opera *The Drunken Concubine* by Mei Lan-fang.²⁹ In the scene II, while the concubine is dressing up for the Emperor’s harem, her servants are busy cleaning the place and getting ready for “flower viewing.” Ni Hongjin captures the lively quality of the original *Liu yao jin* tune in the *Liu yao jin* etude.

²⁸ Huan Qi, Qun He, and Xiaohui Yang, *京剧音乐基础教程*[Introduction of Peking Opera Music], 253.

²⁹ Ibid.

Figure 2.9: The original tune of *Liu yao jin*.³⁰

(反二黄) $\frac{2}{4}$ 0 0¹¹ 23 1 | 2¹¹ 2 3 | 1 7 656¹ | 5653 2350 |

0¹235 23 1 | :2532 16 1 | 0 5 6¹ 5 | 6¹¹ 6 6 5 | 6¹ 6 5 |

3 5 3 2 | 1 32 1232 | 1 2 1 6 | 5 3 5356 | 1235 216¹ |

6¹65 4 5 | 6 5 5676 | 5 6 5 3 | 2 1 1 2 | 3 5 3 0 |

A transcription into Western notation:

This etude is in an incomplete rondo form, A–B–A–C with a two-bar introduction. The *ff* opening is filled with energy. Following the introduction, the A section is cast in two parts (A¹-A²). The A² section, in D^b *gong*, uses the lyric expressive rhythmic fluidity characteristic of *liu yao jin*. A five-measure bridge, mm.

³⁰ Yuxin Song, “《倪洪进京剧曲牌钢琴练习曲四首》的演奏技法探究[The Playing Techniques of Four *Qupai* Etudes by Ni Hongjin]” (Xi An Conservatory of Music, 2019), 9.

17-22, forms the transition to the B section in E^b *gong* mode at m. 23. The B section is in three parts. The melody in part 1 and part 3 in the B section is an extension of the theme heard in the A section. In part 2, beginning in m. 29, the left hand is punctuated by percussive repeated chords in the right hand.

This piece has many stretches between the fingers. However, the pianist's use of correct hand and arm movement and rotation can help achieve the necessary speed and prevent fatigue in the hands.

The pianist can use the choreography of the hand and arm to play many of the awkward passages in this piece. In performance, the pianist needs to swing the hand and forearm slightly up and down for greater facility and control. This technique is especially useful in passages that involve motion from white keys to black keys, for example, in m. 3. Pianists might instinctively move downward for the white key (F) and pull up the wrist on the black key (E^b), because the black keys are higher than the white keys; however, pulling up can cause fatigue and insecurity. The Pianist needs to move downward on the *black* key, and move the forearm a little bit up, then swing over and play down to B^b . (See figure 2.10)

Figure 2.10: *Liu Yao Jin*, m. 3: see upper voice

The image shows a musical score for the piece 'Liu Yao Jin', measure 3. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff (upper voice) and a bass clef staff (lower voice). The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is 4/4. The upper voice starts with a dynamic marking of *ff* (fortissimo) and features a complex melodic line with many sixteenth notes. A large slur covers the first two measures, with a '3' above it. In the third measure, there are fingerings '3 5 2 1' above the notes. The lower voice starts with a dynamic marking of *mf* (mezzo-forte) and has a simpler accompaniment. Fingerings '8', '1', and '5' are shown below the first three notes. A second slur covers the last two measures of the lower voice, with fingerings '2 1', '5', '3', '5', '4' above the notes. The right side of the score is shaded in grey.

The rotation technique is useful for passages that have rising and falling motion with big leaps in the left hand, as in mm. 4-5 (See figure 2.11), and mm. 12-13. When practicing wide leaps like this, it is important to use rotation to keep the wrist and hand aligned to avoid twisting; this will also help with technical security. The study in leaps will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

Figure 2.11: *Liu Yao Jin*, mm. 4-5:



Conclusion

Peking Opera and music composed for the piano are two of the most representative art-forms in their respective cultures. Ni Hongji's *Four Qupai Piano Etudes* pays homage to traditional folk music while combining it with the genre of Western music by using Peking Opera accompaniment music *qupai* in the creation of piano works. These etudes not only vary the musical material of the *qupai*, but also grasp and imitate their expressive character. At the same time, these etudes cover different techniques and virtuosic passage work including big leaps, toccata, interdependence of hands, etc.

For a long time, Peking Opera has been facing the challenge of attracting new audiences, especially of encouraging the younger generation to understand and appreciate Peking Opera. Ni Hongjin's *Four Qupai Piano Etudes* present the Peking Opera in a creative new way and is a significant exploration combining traditional local opera with a Western music genre.

Throughout out this document, I wish to introduce Ni Hongjin's piano composition to a broader audience. I also wish to attract more attention to other contemporary Chinese composers who use the outstanding elements of Peking Opera to create more works with national spirit. I hope this research can help to promote and bring more attention to the outstanding qualities of the Peking Opera.

Chapter Three

Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin

Chen Qigang's Life as A Musician

Chen Qigang was born to an artistic family in Shanghai in 1951. His father liked to play folk music in his spare time and taught the music of Peking Operas to Chen when Chen was a child. When Chen was in his early teens, his father expected him to become a Peking Opera actor, but Chen chose to major in clarinet in middle school.³¹ After the Cultural Revolution, Chen Qigang was admitted to the composition class at the Beijing Central Conservatory, becoming one of the candidates of the first class of composition students.³²

After graduating in 1984, the 33-year-old Chen Qigang went to France for further study. The cultural exchange that happened in that year gave him a chance to travel out of China for the first time, and he wrote to the French composer, Olivier Messiaen, asking Messiaen to accept him as a student.³³ Olivier Messiaen accepted him, and Chen Qigang became Messiaen's final student. Chen Qigang said:

When I was studying with him, I felt I could learn things which were important to me. But only after his death did I realize the essence of what he gave me. I think he influenced me not just musically, but in more significant ways – what it is to be a human being and to be “true to life.” He was a ray of light in my life. Even though he

³¹ Shuang Zhang, “回望《京剧瞬间》 – 兼谈陈其钢的音乐语言[Retrospect *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin* – Qigang Chen's music language],” in *People's Music* 5 (2008): 107.

³² Chen Qigang official webpage, under “biography,” <http://www.chenqigang.com/biography.php> (accessed July 7, 2020)

³³ “音乐诗人-陈其钢(下)[Poetic Musician – Chen Qigang (next)],” CCTV, accessed July 7, 2020, <http://news.cctv.com/world/20081204/104874.shtml>.

is no longer living I feel as if he is still here. I always seem to see a ray of light in the sky, as if this person is still alive.³⁴ (Translated by the author)

When Chen Qigang recalls this period of overseas study, he said: “Messiaen was the first person who encouraged me to write truthfully and to discover my own compositional voice. I gradually found that the traditional music of my own country is rich and varied, distinct and different from the music of Western cultures.”³⁵ Chen also wrote:

For the first time in our generation, we had the opportunity to witness what happens in the West, especially when we got the opportunity to go abroad, and to experience Western classical music. From Romanticism to Impressionism to 20th-century music, Western composers develop their own musical vocabulary and distinctive voices. Music now is perceived as an art that allows individual expression rather than fulfilling social requirements. In the past three decades, music created by Chinese composers reflects their own unique style.³⁶ (Translated by the author)

At a Symphony Award ceremony, Cheng Qigang declared:

“If I have to use a figure of speech to describe myself, then I would be a tree that was rooted in China but transplanted to France. I was raised by France’s sunshine, air and rain. My musical career represents the integration of Chinese and French culture.”³⁷ (Translated by author)

What we hear in Chen Qigang’s music is a fascinating combination of traditional Chinese art and French impressionism. His works use traditional Chinese folk music and art, combined with the strong influence of Western music. He created a highly personal, colorful and lyrical musical style and sought inspiration from different sources— ancient Chinese philosophy, as well as reflections on life. Chen Qigang’s works include a number of different genres, including vocal music,

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

symphonic music, music for ballet, song, music for film, instrumental and electronic music. His representative works are *Wu Xing (The Five Elements: Metal, Wood, Water, Fire, and Earth)* (1998-1999) for symphonic orchestra; *Iris Dévoilée* (2001) a concert suite for grand orchestra; *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin* (2004 version) for piano; *Er Huang* (2009) for piano and orchestra; *Luan Tan* (2010-2015) for orchestra; *The Joy of Suffering* for violin and orchestra (2017); *Itinerary of an Illusion* for symphony orchestra (2018), and many others.³⁸

Peking Opera has had a strong and lasting influence on Chen's music. He combined Chinese traditional Peking Opera with Western music in many of his works: *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin* for piano solo; *Er Huang*, a piano concerto; and the dance drama *Raise the Red Lantern*. Chen discusses his experience with Peking Opera in many of his interviews: "When I was little, my father always expected me to study at the opera school, and I began to study traditional opera. When guests visited, I always gave them a performance, singing a song and showing some acrobatic fighting skills, as in the opera."³⁹ However, he didn't honor his father's wishes in the end, but entered the Central Conservatory of Music Middle School. He confessed that at that time, he seemed to forget about Peking Opera until he became a student of Messiaen after he arrived in France, when his childhood memories of opera gradually returned.⁴⁰ The mysterious Asian elements hidden deep in his soul gradually became part of his expressive musical language. Even now, his works are being further

³⁸ Chen Qigang official webpage, under "works," <http://www.chenqigang.com/works.php> (accessed July 7, 2020).

³⁹ "Program Notes", HD-Hall, accessed August 5, 2020, <http://hd-hall.com/music/d.html?id=297>.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

transformed by new works that combine Chinese culture, Chinese traditional music, and Western compositional techniques.

When Chen Qigang spoke about his piano concerto *Er Huang*, he said: “The musical materials of Peking Opera in *Er Huang* are all memories of my family and social life when I was a child. Those of my generation who grew up in Beijing can recite these melodies. However, these tunes are gradually disappearing in real life. It's a pity that the life of young people is full of British and American popular culture. Chinese traditional music has a very different personality, distinct from Western culture. The use of Chinese traditional music materials has gradually become my basic way of self-expression and my thinking.”⁴¹ (Translated by author)

Overview of *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin*

Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin is a piano solo work written by Chen Qigang in 2000 for the Chen Qigang Performance Award, which was specially set up for the Messiaen International Piano Competition. The work was revised in 2004. Chen Qigang introduced this work at the symposium on new music works held by the China Conservatory of Music:

When I wrote this work, I was actually inspired by a student of the Central Conservatory of Music who wrote a piece inspired by Peking Opera; the piece was too difficult for anyone to play. His work pushed piano technique beyond the limit. Later on, he made a sample of that piece using an electronic synthesizer. I was very affected by that piece of music and I was inspired to create a piece that can be realized by a pianist and would have great effect in performance. As it happens,

⁴¹ Program notes, China NCPA Orchestra, accessed August 5, 2020, <http://www.chncpa.org/subsite/NCPAO2017-18/artist.html>.

with the commission of the Messiaen International Piano Competition, I put this idea into practice.⁴² (Translated by author)

Eastern influence in *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin*

Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin is a work that combines traditional Peking Opera elements with modern compositional techniques. Before we discuss the work, it is necessary to give a general description of the singing styles in Peking opera, since these styles play an essential role in Chen Qigang's works.

In Peking Opera, *Xipi* and *Erhuang* are the most representative and characteristic singing styles, and they are the most important parts of Peking opera. People often refer to them collectively as “Pihuang” tone.⁴³ The lyrics of the rhyme scheme of *Pi Huang* tone are mostly composed of seven-word or ten-word verses. The singing part is called the aria. The music that occurs between the arias is called *Xing xian* (行弦) or *Guo men* (过门), and its function is similar to the *intermezzo* in Italian opera. It is generally believed that *Xipi* originated from Qin opera, which has the cheerful, excited and powerful characteristics typical of the music of northern China. *Xipi*'s melody is lively and vigorous, which is mostly used to express a mood of unrestrained joy.⁴⁴ It is generally believed that *Erhuang* originated in Hubei and Anhui, and the melody is melancholy, sentimental and lyrical.⁴⁵

⁴² Youdan Zhang, “戏味十足的京剧瞬间[Dramatic Effect in *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin*],” in *People's Music no. 4 (2008)*: 38.

⁴³ Zheng Luo, 中国京剧二十讲[Twenty Articles about Peking Opera] (Chemical Industry Press Co., Ltd, 2019), 13.

⁴⁴ Zheng Luo, 中国京剧二十讲[Twenty Articles about Peking Opera], 17.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 18.

From the title of *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin*, we know that this work aims to express the impression of Peking Opera and the quintessence of Chinese culture. Chen said that the musical materials of this work come from his memory of his early family life. “Before writing this work, what I remembered was an obscure and vague emotion connected with the tones of Peking Opera music that you are familiar with.” Chen Qigang explained that the work was intended “as a kind of musical journey through Peking Opera. The impression of *Instants* is not one of direct or concrete representation, but a sense of the color in Peking Opera music that resembles Impressionist music, indistinct but evocative.”⁴⁶ (Translated by author)

For the composition of *Instants*, Chen did not literally quote the most characteristic melodies in *Xipi* and *Erhuang* but vividly expresses these melodies through the use of *Xing Xian* – the transition passage in *Xipi*. Chen Qigang described his use of *Xing Xian* in this way: “*Xing Xian* is an interesting form that can be used anywhere. In fact, it is usually used when the drama is *least* interesting, such as to express trivial family activity or daily behavior. It does not have a distinct personality, so it can be used freely throughout the composition.”⁴⁷ (Translated by author)

There are two main themes in *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin*. In the score, the composer marks "I: theme" and "II: antithesis". The first theme features the original tune of *Xing Xian*.⁴⁸ (See figures 3.1 and 3.2)

⁴⁶ “Program notes,” So Hu, accessed August 7, 2020. https://www.sohu.com/a/276250459_740791.

⁴⁷ Youdan Zhang, “戏味十足的京剧瞬间,” in *Profile of Musicians*, 38-39.

⁴⁸ Yan Zheng and Wen-Xuan Li, “中国当代钢琴音乐的音响形态与建构方式个案研究—析陈其钢的《京剧瞬间》 [A Case Study on the Forms and Construction of Chinese Contemporary Piano Music – Analysis of Chen Qigang’s *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin*],” *Chinese Music* 2, (2017): 43.

Figure 3.1: Tune of *Xing Xian*:



Figure 3.2: *Xing Xian* theme in *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin*:



The second theme is taken from *Guo men* in *Erhuang* that has a similar melodic contour, rising and falling stepwise motion and leap of a 5th. (Refer to figures 3.3 and 3.4)

Figure 3.3: Tune of *Erhuang Guo men*:⁴⁹



Figure 3.4: second theme in *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin*:



⁴⁹ *Erhuang Guo Men Score*, accessed January 27, 2020, https://j.17qq.com/article/qqrstwrxx_p3.html.

Formal structure

To fully understand the *Instants*, the pianist must study each variation. The following chart can help the pianist decide how to organize this piece, showing changes in figuration and changes of mode.

Table 2: Structure of *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin*

	Measures	Notes
Introduction	1-19	In the opening, the sound emerges from the deep register of the piano. In mm. 1-2, fragments of the theme are played in different registers (C [#] -B-A-F [#]). This is similar to the compositional technique of “pointillism” used by Webern. Normally “pointillistic” textures in Webern feature smaller fragments (groups of two notes or three notes, widely separated from each other). We find a similar approach in mm. 17-19. In m. 9, theme 1 and theme 2 first appear in complete form.
Variation 1	20-46	Variation 1 uses melodic embellishments and variations on theme 1 through fragmentation and augmentation.
Variation 2	47-68	Rhythmic augmentation of theme 1. A sense of verticality is created by the staccatos and rests. We hear augmentation in the left hand, mm. 49-53 with

		notes added to the second theme.
Variation 3	68-100	Variation 3 also uses staccatos and many rests. The composer changes the figuration and uses the two-note group (staccato slur) in the right hand.
Variation 4	101-132	From m. 109, horizontal lines in this variation create speed and a sense of urgency, in part due to simultaneous use of polytonality and the constant alternation between white and black keys in <i>C[#] gong</i> and <i>B^b gong</i> mode. In mm. 119-123, the whole-tone scale appears for the first time.
Variation 5	133-187	The 7/8 meter is subdivided into 3+2+2 in m. 138, 2+3+2 in m. 139, and 2+2+3 in m. 140, similar to the rhythm in the third movement of Prokofiev's <i>Sonata no. 7</i> . In m. 144 of Variation 5, both hands use the whole-tone scale.
Variation 6	188-209	From m. 188, the sonority and character change. Everything is much gentler, more consonant, lyrical, and mellow. Because the mode switches to <i>A zhi</i> , the color is brighter and warmer compared with <i>yu</i> mode.
Variation 7	210-222	This is the most glorious and sonorous music in the piece. In the alto and tenor, we hear complete 6/4 chords, and the sound

		effect is pervasively consonant in this variation.
Variation 8	222-237	In m. 234, pointillism reappears. In mm. 235-236, polytonality is used to create an effect of combined sonority, and we hear the grand gesture and majesty of the C Major chord with added sixth in m. 237.
Coda	238-242	The ending mirrors the introduction section. At the end of the piece, the residual sound of the <i>Xing Xian</i> motive is heard in different registers of the piano, producing the effect of infinite reverie.

Western influence in *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin*

Chen's work draws inspiration from traditional music in China; his music also reveals his absorption of the aesthetic of, and his admiration for, French music. There seems to be little doubt that Chen's compositional technique emerged from the harmonic innovations and the musical language of Debussy and Messiaen. Their influence and inspiration is evident throughout Chen's work. We hear many similarities in the ways these three composers use motivic development, melodic development, harmony, and virtuosity. Messiaen once stated:

Since I left the Paris Conservatory, Chen Qigang is my only student. The reason I have been instructing him for nearly four years is because I have a very high regard for his ability. He exhibited remarkable intelligence in quickly understanding European music and "avant-garde" music. I have examined all his works carefully, and it can be said that these works are truly creative and present a perfect fusion of traditional Chinese modes of thinking and the conceptions of

European music. All the works he has written since 1985 are outstanding in terms of conception, poetry and instrumentation. I hope Chen Qigang will achieve great success, because it is well-deserved.⁵⁰ (Translated by author)

In this discussion of *Instants*, I will explore the specific Western compositional methods that have influenced Chen Qigang. I will also focus on the technical challenges and interpretation of the piece.

Motive

The theme and the subsequent variations in *Instants* are characterized by constant transformative momentum. The two simple recurring themes serve as a unifying device, which are heard melodically and harmonically throughout the piece in different contexts. The sections of this piece are defined by variation in harmony and melody. It is amazing to see how much variety Chen Qigang can generate from two simple thematic ideas. (see figure 3.5) This is similar to the way Debussy treats motives in many of his late compositions. The themes are repeated throughout the piece but disguised by different harmonies, register, etc. For example, the two-note motive (C-G) in Debussy's piano prelude *Feux d'artifice* from *Préludes, Book II* (1913) is changed in its surrounding harmonies, register, and rhythm.

In general, in varying these two themes melodically and harmonically, Chen employs several melodic developments throughout the variations, including the use of “elimination” and “augmentation” and change of register. In addition, Chen Qigang

⁵⁰ “陈其钢：融合中国思维方式与欧洲音乐构思[The fusion of Chinese Mode of Thinking and Western Music Conception],” Sina, accessed August 5, 2020. <http://ent.sina.com.cn/c/m/2002-10-10/1625105742.html>.

uses compositional techniques such as the “Effect of Resonance,”

Polytonality/Polymodality, enharmonic equivalents to create natural transitions, the shape of the overtone series, effects and textures. Studying these compositional techniques in *Instants* can bring a new perspective to understanding the Western influences in this work.

Figure 3.5: Examples of motivic transformations in *Instants*:

mm. 9-10:



mm. 26-31:



mm. 55-61:

mm. 69-71:

Melodic Development

1. “Returning chromaticism”

In varying the theme melodically, Chen Qigang employs a technique called “returning chromaticism.” In Messiaen’s book, *The Technique of My Musical Language*, he discusses this melodic formula⁵¹ and credits this figure to Bela Bartók, referring to this element as the “joy of Bela Bartók.”⁵² Messiaen provided an example

⁵¹ Olivier Messiaen and John Satterfield, *The Technique of My Musical Language* (Paris: Alphonse Leduc, 1956), 32.

⁵² Christopher Dingle, *Messiaen’s Final Works* (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 29.

of this melodic contour in his book *The Technique of My Musical Language* (1956). (See figure 3.6)⁵³ According to Christopher Dingle's study, *Messiaen's Final Works*, returning chromaticism functions as a decoration of the tritone leap in Messiaen's music.⁵⁴ An example can be found in *Louange à l'immortalité de Jésus* [Praise to the Immortality of Jesus] from Messiaen's *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* [Quartet for the End of Time, 1941]. (See figure 3.7)

Figure 3.6: Returning Chromaticism [*chromatisme retourne*]: Example 74 in *The Technique of My Musical Language*, Page 88:



Figure 3.7: Returning Chromaticism [*chromatisme retourne*]: *Louange à l'immortalité de Jésus*



In *Instants*, returning chromaticism can be found on the third beat in m. 109 (C[#]-C-D-F). The first theme is ornamented, and the returning chromaticism here is used as a decorative melodic device.

Figure 3.8: Returning Chromaticism in *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin*, mm. 109-110:

⁵³ Technique, example 74, p.18.

⁵⁴ Christopher Dingle, *Messiaen's Final Works* (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 29.



In the Sonata op. 90 in E Minor (1814) by Beethoven, a similar technique is used in the retransition. This sonata is based on a three-note motive, G–F#–E. In the development section, Beethoven uses a process of reduction and “eliminates” the 16th note unit (G–F#–E–D#) to three descending notes (G–F#–E), then transitions to the first theme naturally. (Figure 3.10)

Figure 3.10: Sonata op. 90 in E Minor, example of “elimination”:



In *Instants*, we find the technique of “elimination” both vertically and horizontally. From m. 22 to m. 35, the upper voice is in E^b *yu* mode, and its relationship with the intervals of each mode (from *G yu*, $G^\#$ *yu*, *A yu*, B^b *yu*, *B yu*, *C yu* to *D yu*) in the lower part is gradually “squeezed” from the interval of a 6th to the interval of a 2nd. Chen also employs this technique in mm. 36-45. The theme is gradually “tightened” or foreshortened, cut from four notes to two notes in its progress until it completely disappears. At the same time, Chen uses the effect of “elimination” in the left hand. The lowest part of the bass is constantly changing the interval relationship with the highest note B^b in the upper voice, from an eleventh to a tenth, to a ninth etc., moving it gradually closer to the right hand. The music seems to express the feeling of new things born in desperate circumstances. (See figure 3.11)

Figure 3.11: *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin*, technique of “elimination,” mm. 36-46:

3. Augmentation

In *Instants*, Chen also uses “augmentation”. It is achieved by increasing the *number* of notes rather than the traditional augmentation in Western music that uses proportionally longer note values, as in fugues by Johann Sebastian Bach. Variation 1 has seven versions of the subject material in the right hand. As the theme is repeated, the number of notes continuously increases. In other words, the melody grows through the additive process.

4. Octave displacement

Octave displacement is another technique used by Chen Qigang. This is a technique frequently used by many Western composers for altering the quality of sound and heightening the tension between adjacent notes of the melody to create a dramatic effect, such as m. 70 in Debussy’s *Feux d’artifice*. (See figure 3.12)

Figure 3.12: *Feux d’artifice*, m. 70:

The image shows a musical score for the piece *Feux d'artifice*, measure 70. The score is written for piano and consists of three staves: a right-hand treble clef staff, a left-hand treble clef staff, and a bass clef staff. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The tempo/mood marking is *Incisif*. The right-hand staff features two measures of music, each starting with a sixteenth-note triplet marked with a '6' and an accent (>). The first measure is marked *f* and the second *più f*. The left-hand staff has a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes with accents. The bass clef staff has a single note in the first measure. The score illustrates the technique of octave displacement, where notes are shifted between octaves to create tension.

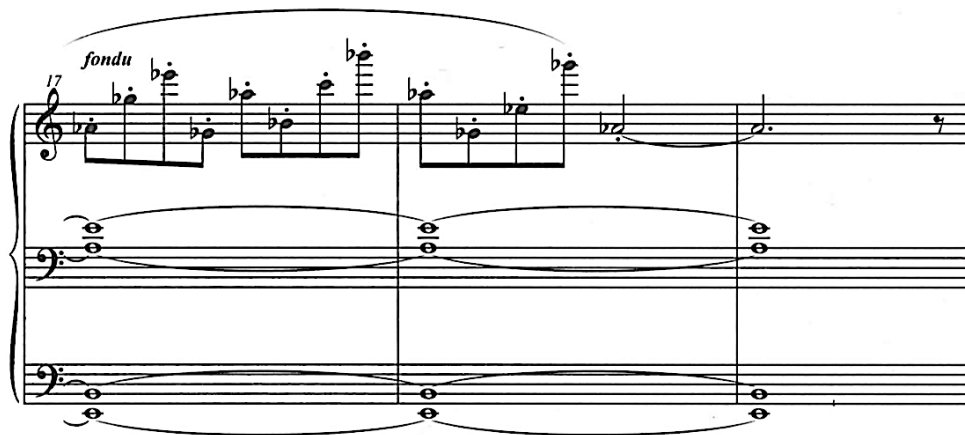
This technique can be found in mm. 128-132 of the *Instants*. The displacement creates angularity in the melodic contour and increases the musical tension.

Figure 3.13: *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin*, mm. 128-131 displacement:



Another example of displacement can be found at the end of the introduction, in mm. 16-18. The continuous melodic line is interrupted by strongly displaced individual notes. (See figure 3.14) The texture sounds similar to the “pointillism” of Anton Webern, with each single tone standing in isolation. We hear the “disintegration” of the theme, producing a mood of melancholy that brings listeners into a “dream state.”

Figure 3.14: *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin*, displacement mm. 17-18:



The Harmonic and Tonal Design

1. Effect of Resonance

In his book *Technique of My Musical Language*, Messiaen discusses the effect of resonance. Messiaen writes: “Effects of pure fantasy [chord spacings invented by the composer] are by a very distant analogy similar to the phenomenon of natural resonance.”⁵⁹ What Messiaen means by “effects of resonance” has to do with the intervallic shape of the overtone series. It could be understood as a piano texture that imitates the harmonic series. According to Liqing Yang, the “effect of resonance” exploits the unique resonance of the piano to give the music a more colorful dimension, for example, creating the effect of a sonic “halo” by scoring a series of softer chords following a louder sound.⁶⁰ The soft reverberations fill out the sonic texture. We find this compositional technique in many of Messiaen’s works, such as *Cloches d'angoisse et larmes d'adieu* [Bells of Anguish and Tears of Farewell] from *Préludes pour piano* [Preludes for piano] (1928-1929). (see figure 3.15).

Figure 3.15: *Cloches d'angoisse et larmes d'adieu*, mm. 5, effect of resonance:

⁵⁹ Olivier Messiaen, and John Satterfield, *The Technique of My Musical Language* (Paris: Alphonse Leduc, 1956), 51.

⁶⁰ Liqing, Yang, *梅西安作曲技法初探*[*The Preliminary Study on Messiaen’s Compositional Techniques*] (Fujian Education Press, 1989), 105.

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*Cloches d'angoisse
 et larmes d'adieu*

Très lent

Piano

Chen Qigang uses a similar technique in *Instants* to create the distant and gentle sonorous haze of auditory sensation. In m. 11, Chen uses a sustained pedal point, the minor 7th chord on the first beat; the middle voices have a cluster of intervals that extend the sonority of the minor 7th chord and create resonance. (See figure 3.16) The resulting resonance and harmonies have a dream-like effect.

Figure 3.16: *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin*, Effect of Resonance, mm. 11:

$\text{♩} = 63$ poco movendo

Another example can be found in mm. 237-238 (Figure 3.17). Chen indicates that the major triad in the upper register should be played fortississimo. The F[#] in the bass under the F[#] added sixth chord acts as a pedal point to sustain the vibrations through this fairly long passage. The “Pipa”⁶¹ chords in m. 238 are reverberations of the previous bright sonority, lingering in the air, played *piano* and *pianissimo*.

Figure 3.17: *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin*, mm. 237-238:

The musical score for mm. 237-238 of *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin* is presented in a grand staff format. At the top left, the tempo is marked as quarter note = 60. The score begins in measure 237 with a fortississimo (*fff*) dynamic. A major triad is played in the upper register, with a fermata over it. The bass line features a pedal point of F[#]. In measure 238, the tempo is marked as *Lento*. The dynamics shift to piano (*p*) and then pianissimo (*pp*). The score includes a 'Pipa' chord in m. 238, which is a reverberation of the previous sonority. The score concludes with a double bar line and a fermata.

2. Polytonality/Polymodality

Polytonality is a compositional technique where two or more tonalities are employed simultaneously. In Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *A Musical Joke* for two horns and string quartet (1787) an early example of polytonality, Mozart uses this technique for comic effect, with different instruments playing in four different keys

⁶¹ The pipa chord is based on the method of tuning strings. Tuning strings as a-d-e-a is the most common method.

simultaneously. Polytonality can also be found in American composer Charles Ives's works, such as *The Unanswered Question* (1906), where a layered textural effect is created by different instruments playing in different keys. Debussy also employed polytonal effects, as in the ending of the *Feux d'artifice*, where the pianist plays a tremolo in D^b Major in the left hand while the right hand plays a "quote" from "*La Marseillaise*" in C Major.

In *Instants*, Chen uses polytonality, or more precisely "polymodality," to great effect. He uses different modes that are "offset," that is, separated both horizontally and vertically by specific intervals. Often, he uses the interval of a minor 2nd, occasionally the interval of a major third or 5th. In many places, the minor 2nd in vertical combination creates a dissonant effect, and in horizontal combination, it produces strong color. We find numerous examples in this work. The fragment of theme II in m. 4 uses E^b *yu* mode, which is offset by a minor 2nd from the fragment of theme I in E *yu* mode in the same measure. (See figure 3.18) Besides, the first chord in each measure in the upper voice, mm. 87-89, and the first beat of the lower voice in m. 89 form G *gong*; the last beat of the upper voice in m. 86-88 and the lower voice in mm. 87, 88, and 90 make up G^b *gong*. In addition, we hear an example of the minor 2nd in a linear horizontal context in m. 104: the chord on the first beat (D-E-G-A) in the left hand is in C *gong* and the sixteenth notes E^b - D^b - E^b - G^b - A^b - G^b - A^b are in C^b *gong*.

Figure 3.18: *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin*, m. 4:

In addition, Chen likes to use the same mode, but use different tones as the tonic (through transpositions so a particular note becomes *yu* in this case) to create an effect of combined sonority. For example, for the syncopated clusters at m. 235, the second theme features *yu* mode (*yu* on E, B, A and F#). The first theme in the lower register uses three different *yu* modes including G#, F#, C#. (See figure 3.19)

Figure 3.19: *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin*, m. 235:

Similarly, the soprano in m. 236 combines five *yu* modes including E, B, A, F and C. The first theme in the lower register also has the four *yu* modes G[#], F[#], C[#], and D[#]. (See figure 3.20) This is some of Chen’s most expressive music.

Figure 3.20: *Instant d'un Opéra de Pékin*, m. 236:

3. Enharmonic equivalence

Chen Qigang also explored certain aspects of conventional harmonic practice, for example, enharmonic modulation. Enharmonic modulation allows a very natural transition from one mode to another through a pivot chord. For example, in variation 6, the notes of the last beat of m. 195, D[#]-G[#]-A[#]-D[#] (G[#] *yu* mode) are enharmonically equivalent to E^b-A^b-B^b-E^b. The first chord (B^b-E^b-F-B^b) in C *yu* mode in m. 196 is different in only one note (F) from the G[#] *yu* mode. In this way, Chen creates a smooth transition to C *yu* mode.

Figure 3.21: *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin*, enharmonic equivalent mm. 195-196:

G[#] *yu* mode: G[#]-B-C[#]-D[#]-A[#] bian
gong F[#]-G[#]

C *yu* mode: C-E^b-F-G-B^b-C

The figure shows two musical staves. The left staff is for the G[#] *yu* mode, with a circled chord in the treble clef containing the notes G[#], B, C[#], and D[#]. The right staff is for the C *yu* mode, with a circled chord in the treble clef containing the notes C, E^b, F, and B^b. Both staves have a bass line with a tremolo pattern.

4. Additional Highlights of this Work

Finally, in speaking of harmony, I must mention the use of the tritone (augmented fourth or diminished fifth) throughout the entire work. The tritone became part of the common vocabulary in music with composers such as Schoenberg, Bartók, Scriabin, Debussy and Messiaen in the 20th century. For example, in the opening section of Scriabin's *Piano Sonata No. 5*, the tremolo in the bass outlines the tritone to create harmonic instability. Messiaen's use of tritones is often reflected in notes added to

chords. Messiaen often adds a note (augmented 4th or major 6th) to a triad or dominant seventh. Messiaen said: “*added notes* create a character of intrusion: the bee in the flower! They have, nevertheless, a certain citizenship in the chord, either because they have the same sonority as some notes classified as *appoggiaturas*, or because they issue from the resonance of the fundamental.⁶²”

As I mentioned in Chapter 2, in Peking opera, the *bian zhi* note is a modified pitch in one mode, and it has a tritone relationship with the *gong* note. Chen Qigang used the *bian zhi* note as a bridge to link traditional Chinese opera music and Western composition techniques. The most interesting and creative use of the tritone is in m. 237, where the cadential point is reached by the tritone between two major added sixth chords – a favorite sonority of Messiaen’s (C Major chord with added sixth A and F# Major chord with added sixth D#), rather than the conventional dominant to tonic. (See figure 3.22)

Figure 3.22: *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin*, m. 237:

⁶² Olivier Messiaen, and John Satterfield, *The Technique of My Musical Language* (Paris: Alphonse Leduc, 1956), 47.



Performing *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin*

1. Technical challenges

For an advanced pianist, this is an ideal piece for the study of many different virtuosic techniques such as double notes, big leaps, and successive octaves. In addition, since the pentatonic mode contains many intervals of a 2nd and a 3rd, there are many situations in the music itself where the fingers are “crowded,” requiring the pianist to use specific skills and cultivate flexibility in these unusual figurations. The pianist must master the physical aspect of the technique to play it effortlessly.

In Variation 4, the fast 16th notes should not be difficult for an advanced player. However, it is not so easy to play the C[#] *gong* and the B^b *gong* mode, where the space between the keys is very narrow, and it is especially awkward for the performer who has big hands. Without using the correct technique, the hand will tire easily. The best

solution for passages like this is to “choreograph” the passage. For example, in m. 112, the ideal fingering of the first six notes is 323212. In order to avoid twisting from A to F[#], the right hand should be close to the fallboard, and the thumb should also move in toward the fallboard. (See figure 3.23)

In many passages, organizing the phrasing of groups that always move in the same direction could help to achieve maximum speed. For example, the performer can group four 16th notes into one gesture, in the left hand in m. 59, or mm. 60-61, or in the right hand in mm. 165-167. (Figure 3.24)

Figure 3.23: *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin*, m. 112:



Figure 3.24: *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin*, Grouping

m. 59:



mm. 60-61:



mm. 165-167:



Another technical challenge is the octaves in both hands as in mm. 126-132 and mm. 165-175. The pianist must stay relaxed and use the correct arm movement to play the octaves. During slow practice, the pianist needs to feel the arms falling freely toward the keyboard, using gravity, and then allow the arms to rebound upward off the keys. Use a slight “pulling” motion from the fingertips as the fingers contact the keyboard. Eventually, performers can minimize the gesture for better efficiency and speed. In the passage with the descending octaves, mm. 165-175, the pianist can create a legato effect through re-striking the key without allowing the key to rise completely.⁶³

⁶³ Milanovic, Therese. *Learning and Teaching Healthy Piano Technique: Training as an Instructor in the Taubman Approach* (Scholars' Press, 2014), 176.

Figure 3.25: *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin*, m. 166:



Beginning in Variation 6, the left hand has large leaps, a challenge for pianists. (See figure 3.26) This is similar to the melodic contour in the beginning of Debussy's last prelude *Feux d'artifice*. In *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin*, m. 188, the pianist must concentrate on the accuracy of the leap between the quarter note and the sixteenth notes and also get back into position quickly. At the same time, the left hand needs to create a beautiful singing line. To accurately and easily achieve big leaps, normally, in large leaps, the focus will be always on how to quickly release the first note to jump to the second note. If the pianist mentally “takes a breath” before the first note of the leap and uses the rotation and the forearm to send the hand to the second note of the leap, the pianist will feel much more secure. Another mental technique for technical accuracy in big leaps is to *imagine* that the first note is longer without actually holding the note longer than its notated value.

Figure 3.26: *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin*, m. 188:



In variation 3, mm. 87-93, the hands are playing leaps in contrary motion. Here, performers should sense the distance the arm needs to travel, and the distance should be calculated from the closest notes between two chords. For example, in m. 87, the two closest notes are the two lowest notes in the right hand. The right hand moves the entire chord upward but using the lowest notes of the two chords to sense the distance between the chords will make the leaps much easier. (See figure 3.27)

Figure 3.27: *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin*, m. 87:



2. Pedaling

Pedaling is very important in the *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin*. Chen Qigang marks very few pedal indications in the score. However, in order to achieve particular effects of timbre, the pedal needs to be used precisely. In places where notes cannot

be held by the hands, such as mm. 11-19, mm. 214-216, and mm. 237-238, the pedal should be used to create the musical effect.

I suggest that the pianist put the pedal down even *before* the piece starts to enable the tones to vibrate instantly. In m. 4, a single unchanging pedal should be used to create a mystical effect and resonance, without regard to the change in harmonies.

Some places require just the right amount of pedal. For example, at mm. 210-214, the pianists could use half – pedals, “vibrating” the foot quickly on the pedal to avoid blurring the texture.

3. Interpretation and Tone Color

Sonority, timbre and tone color are just as important as technique in this work. Chen Qigang said: "Because this was a special work created for the piano competition, I considered the skill level of the pianist. The piece needed to be technically challenging but also present sophisticated challenges in sound production. I tried my best to achieve both in a short time."⁶⁴ (Translated by the author) In the challenges relating to sound production, the influence of French composers is obvious. The French impressionist style is reflected in Chen’s use of colorful textures and sensuous harmonies. As he said: “As I was in France for 17 years, the influence of color on me was deeply ingrained.”⁶⁵ (Translated by the author) Various textures,

⁶⁴ Youdan Zhang, “戏味十足的京剧瞬间[The Dramatic Effect in *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin*],” in *People’s Music no.4* (2008): 38.

⁶⁵ Shuang Zhang, “回望《京剧瞬间》—兼谈陈其钢的音乐语言[Retrospect *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin* – Qigang Chen’s music language],” in *People’s Music 5* (2008): 109.

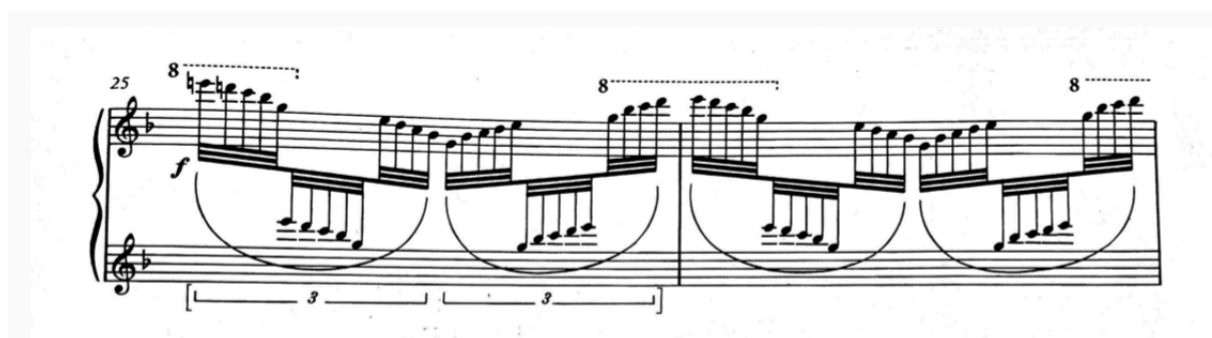
as well as different colors and timbres, can be found in this piece. For example, the mysterious sense of “weightlessness” as demonstrated in the introductory part can be partly attributed to the use of harmonic planing – a composition technique frequently used by Debussy. Another example is passagework with fast flowing arpeggiated broken chords, which can be found in both Debussy and Chen Qigang’s *Instants*. (See Figure 3.28)

Figure 3.28: arpeggiated broken chords

Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin, mm. 194-195:



Debussy’s *Feux d’artifice*, mm. 25-26:



There are obvious similarities between this work and works by Debussy in terms of sound and image. The aesthetic of vague outlines and subtle colors can be heard in Chen Qigang's musical works. If Debussy's music is a manifestation of the essence of French Impressionism, Chen Qigang's music represents the essence of Peking Opera – movements with dazzling radiance, ever-changing shadows, and varied patterns. To fully appreciate *Instants*, the pianist can watch the ballet *Raise the Red Lantern*. The incredible visual and auditory richness of this ballet suggest the image Chen Qigang might have had in mind while composing this piano work. When I was watching this performance, I was amazed by the lighting and the stunning choreography in the performance. Watching this performance will be very helpful to understanding the Chinese “Impressionism” in *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin*.

The ideal sonority the performer wants to achieve is closely associated with a specific touch. Debussy's ideas about touch in his piano music can be very useful in considering the kinds of touch the pianist might use in *Instants*. Speaking of *Image Book I*, Debussy described how to treat the sound in *Reflets dans l'eau* [Reflections in the Water]. It was reported that Debussy recommended “to play with laterally moving fingers, drowned in pedal.”⁶⁶ Debussy also required great sensitivity in the fingers to produce sound—Dumesnil recalls that Debussy directed the pianist to: “Play with more sensitivity in the fingertips. Play chords as if the keys were being attracted to your fingertips and rise to your hand as to a magnet.”⁶⁷

⁶⁶ François Lesure and Roger Nichols, *Debussy Letters* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 160.

⁶⁷ Maurice Dumesnil, *How to Play and Teach Debussy* (Schroeder & Gunther: New York 1932), 9.

These particular techniques can be used in *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin*. For example, the parallel “*pipa*” chords in both hands in m. 4 should be played just like the rising octaves, fifths, and fourths in Debussy’s prelude titled *La Cathédrale Engloutie* [*The Engulfed Cathedral*] using a flatter hand shape and less arm weight. Since the speed and depth of the keystroke directly affect the tone, the pianist should control the speed of the key, going down with weight from the forearms and using a slow finger stroke, then moving laterally with a light touch, to create a hazy and dreamlike effect, what Debussy calls “dans une brume sonore” [“in a gently sonorous haze”] in *La Cathédrale Engloutie*.

Conclusion

During the ten-year period of the Cultural Revolution in China (1966-1976), the production of musical works was catastrophically affected. Many forms of music, compositions and music performances were restricted or banned during this time. The Cultural Revolution officially came to an end in 1976 after Chairman Mao's death. Following the Cultural Revolution, reform and a gradually increasing openness to Western ideas changed the musical environment in China. Musicians in China were living in a stimulating environment that encouraged cultural experimentation. Chinese composers drew on many different sources for new sounds and modes of expression. The music of Chen Qigang offers a model for creating a musical style through the fusion of cross-cultural elements. As we see throughout this piece, Peking Opera and Chen's experience in France played a significant role in Chen's artistic and personal life. The fusion of the musical elements of Chinese Peking Opera with Western compositional techniques has been a recurring theme of his work.

The *Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin* is a fascinating piece to learn and to perform, both technically and musically. I hope that, by analyzing the compositional techniques and technical challenges of this work, this document guides pianists to a better understanding of Chen Qigang's remarkable creative and artistic achievement.

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