

**POETIC IMAGERY IN LISAN WANG'S PIANO COMPOSITIONS**

by



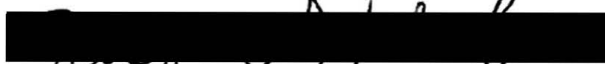
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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

When the Second Opium War ended in 1856, China was forced to make concessions to Britain, France, and Russia. These countries were granted a permanent diplomatic presence in Beijing. At the same time, Christians living in China won full civil rights, including the right to own property and to proselytize. The organ and piano used to accompany choral singing in Western churches inspired a new generation of Chinese music educators and composers. By the end of the 19th century, "New Chinese Music" was about to be born.<sup>1</sup>

From that point, Chinese piano music started to evolve. The composer Lisan Wang, whose works form the primary focus of this paper, entered the scene as part of the generation after the "May Fourth New Cultural Movement" in 1919.<sup>2</sup> Wang accepted the style he inherited and took the music to a much higher level of virtuosity.

Today, the world is witnessing an increasing number of advanced Chinese composers, pianists and students. Two of the top world-class performers, Lang Lang and Yuja Wang, have already earned their reputations and recognition. While the majority of these pianists tend to play repertoire composed by Western composers, I believe it would advance the cause of music internationally if students, performers, and teachers became more aware of piano music by Chinese composers.

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1. Meng Bian, 中国钢琴文化之形成与发展 (The Formation and Development of Chinese Piano Music Culture), Beijing: Huayue Press, 1996: 10.

2. The Institute of Chinese Academy of Arts Music, 中国音乐词典 (Chinese Dictionary of Music), People's Music Publishing House, 1992: 208.



## **1.1 Preliminary Review of the Literature**

In recent years, more and more articles and scholarly papers about Lisan Wang's music have been written. These papers either discuss Wang's compositions as a whole, or only focus on the form or harmonic analysis of specific piano works, or partially relate his music to compositions by Western composers such as Bartok or Stravinsky. Some scholars discuss Wang's nationalism and aesthetic meanings in his music. The musicologist Bian Meng, in his article "The Formation and Development of Chinese Piano Music Culture," stated that Chinese composers are more likely to cultivate a national style that was influenced by great poets like Li Bai and Bai Juyi from ancient literature; he also analyzes Wang's *Sonatina* for solo piano. The pianist Yiming Zhang, who has recorded all of Wang's piano music, discusses Wang's music in terms of aesthetic ideal.

However, very few of these papers have discussed a pedagogical approach to Wang's piano works. I hope to make a contribution to the scholarly literature by filling in the gaps in this research area.

### **The Development and the Overall Characteristics of Modern Chinese Piano Music**

By the 1970s, the recognition and expression of an aesthetic ideal in music became the goal for most Chinese composers. The pianist and educator Xiaosheng Zhao argued that many changes in piano music occurred after the Chinese Cultural Revolution, especially in the timbre, structure, rhythm, and tone in his article "Speech, Foreword and Phonology of Chinese Piano Music" in 2003. Wen Yang concludes that the most important characteristic of the new style of Chinese piano music is the integration of Chinese traditional folk tunes or aesthetic naturalism with Western harmonic language in

“The National Features of the Chinese Piano Music Works” (2003).

### **Lisan Wang’s own writings and articles**

As a musicologist, Wang wrote many articles and reviews about his musical inspirations, and also contributed his own thoughts on the new style of Chinese piano music. In this paper, I will explore Wang’s observations about the relationship between Chinese culture and Chinese piano music, including his own compositions. Wang proposed using bold compositional techniques, including the twelve-tone technique in the “The Words from the Composer of ‘Heavenly Dreams’.” He advocated the new path that blends nationalistic elements with modern harmonic language in his article “New Trends and Old Roots – A Speech on the ‘First Chinese Contemporary Composers’ Music’ in Hong Kong.” Wang believed that borrowing ideas from foreign sources is not a sign of weakness but the valid basis of a new style for Chinese composers. He wrote several articles to encourage composers along this path, for example, “A Theoretical and Practical Review of the Relationship between Chinese New Music and Chinese Language Features.” He also presented these ideas as a lecture at the National Symphonic Works Conference.

### **Interviews of Lisan Wang and musicologists who specialize in Wang’s music**

There are only a few interviews with Lisan Wang by musicologists, educators, and pianists. In musicologist Su’s interview in 1998, Wang talks about his compositional career through different stages. Wang discusses the influence of Bartok on his compositions. According to Wang, the unconventional technique of using two counter-melodies and modes in the left and right hand in his *Sonatina* and *The Sound of*

*Waves* was inspired by Bartok. In other interviews, Wang focused more on his perspectives on the development of Chinese modern music.

I interviewed the director of the Chinese National Academy of Arts, Tingge Wei, who has been researching Wang's music for many years. Wei specifically focused on Wang's compositional techniques in "The Sound of Waves" and also discussed the most effective ways to perform this work.

### **Articles and Dissertations on Wang's Music**

There are several articles and dissertations that have explored Lisan Wang's compositional style and essential piano works. These papers can be divided into two main categories. In the first category, there are articles that focus on Wang's general compositional style based on his piano music, such as pianist Xiang's article "An Analysis of Selected Piano Works of Lisan Wang" (2010), musicologist and educator Wang Yuhe's research on "Wang Lisan – To Explore the New Realm of Chinese Piano Works" (1996), and pianist Yiming Zhang's dissertation "The Underlying Folk Music in Wang Lisan's Music" (2014).

The articles in the second category provide a detailed analysis of one or more movements from piano suites of *Prelude and Fugue in F# Shang Mode* and *Impressions of Paintings by Higashiyama Kaiti*. Wei discusses Wang's innovations in two pieces *Sunset Drum* and *The Sound of Waves* (2007). Wang Wenjun's "The Analysis on Teaching the Piano Piece – *The Sound of Waves*" (2004) is one of the very few papers that suggests a teaching approach to the pieces; however, Wang Wenjun does not relate this piece to other pieces or provide methods to solve the considerable technical difficulties of this piece.

## 1.2 Methodology

Lisan Wang was greatly influenced by Chinese culture and other art forms. This paper will discuss poetic imagery as a tool to fulfill the aesthetic expressions in Wang's music. In addition to musical analysis, this paper will also consider the pedagogical aspects of Wang's piano compositions in order to focus attention not only on performing but also teaching his works.

This paper will first identify the poetic imagery in Wang's music. A brief overview of the development of modern Chinese piano music will be given, highlighting the influence of Western composers such as Bela Bartok and Claude Debussy, and how these influences affect Wang's compositional style.

I will analyze Wang's poetic imagery in his most representative piano works, including the piano suites *Impressions of Paintings by Higashiyama Kaiti* and *The Other Mountains*.

Finally, I will categorize all Lisan Wang's piano works into preparatory, elementary to intermediate, advanced, and concert levels as a teaching reference.

## CHAPTER II

### BACKGROUND

#### 2.1 The Development of Modern Chinese Piano Music

The concept of “New Music” has been proposed several times in Chinese modern music history. The transformative process of “New Music” is essential to the formation and development of the modern Chinese piano music.

The music educator Zeng Zhimin first proposed “New Music” in 《Yue Dian Jiao Ke Shu》 in 1904<sup>3</sup>, specifically referring to church music that had been brought by European missionaries. Xiao Youmei, the educator, musician and composer who studied music in Germany, and Zhao Yuanren, the linguist and composer who studied music in the United State, together established the National Conservatory in 1927 in Shanghai.<sup>4</sup> Strongly influenced by western music, Xiao re-proposed the “New Music” after the “May Fourth New Cultural Movement,” referring to applying the compositional approach of combining Western harmonic language with original Chinese music. This new definition greatly influenced their students, such as Xian Xinghai, Huang Zi, He Luting, and Nie Er, members of the first group who graduated from this conservatory. They were also the first generation of the advocates of “New Music,” and some of them went abroad to study music after they graduated. It was students such as those who established the standard of a new style of Chinese music and provided guidance for the next generation.

At first, keyboard music was limited almost entirely to the church music. Later on, keyboard music was secularized during the Qing Dynasty thanks to the Emperor Kangxi’s liberal diplomatic policies. Keyboard music completely stagnated in the final

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<sup>3</sup> Meng Bian, 中国钢琴文化之形成与发展 (The Formation and Development of Chinese Piano Music Culture), 14.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 15.

During the anti-Japanese War period (1931-1945), there were not enough piano teachers who could work at the conservatory. Many Russian and Italian pianists and music educators came to teach in Shanghai, including the Italian pianist Mario Paci, who studied with Franz Liszt's student Giovanni Sgambati, and Russian pianist Boris Zakharoff, who studied with Anna Yesipova and was classmate to Sergei Prokofiev. The first generation of Chinese pianists and composers included Mario Paci's students Zhou Guangren and Fu Cong, as well as Boris Zakharoff's student (Wang Lisan's teacher)



Example 2.1.1 Zhao Yuanren "The March of Peace" mm. 1-4

modern Chinese piano music "officially" began. After the success of this experiment and the establishment of the National Conservatory, progression, on the other hand, Zhao applied the traditional Western progression I-IV-V-I phrase structure which resembles Chinese folk songs (Example 2.1.1). For the harmonic already appear in this piece, such as a melodic contour in major thirds and a simplified relatively short and without complicated textures, some traditional Chinese characteristics considered to be the earliest published piano work by a Chinese composer. Although it is The piano work *The March of Peace*, composed by Zhao Yuanren in 1914<sup>5</sup>, is modern Chinese piano music began to develop.

years of Kangxi's reign, however, when he decided to close the gate and stop almost all cultural exchange. It was only when the National Conservatory was established that

Ding Shande. These musicians were all strongly influenced by Impressionism and by the Russian style of performing, along with various other genres of repertoire introduced by Paci and Zakharoff. Rather than remaining limited to a few Baroque works or classical sonatas, the concert repertoire of many Chinese pianists expanded to include works by such composers as Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel.<sup>6</sup>

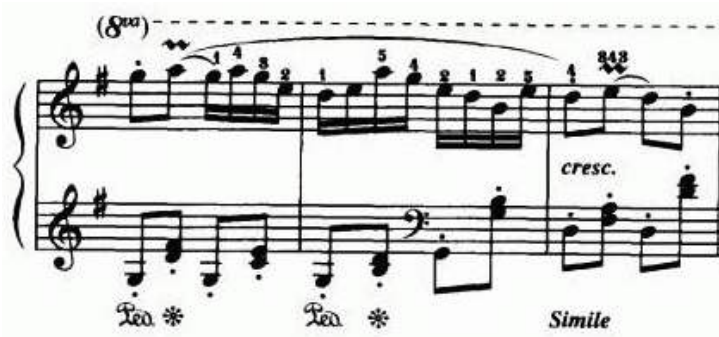
In 1934, Russian pianist and composer Alexander Tcherepnin organized a competition “Piano Music in Chinese Style,” with the goal of encouraging Chinese composers to create music that had traditional Chinese characteristics within a framework of original Chinese compositional techniques and Western harmonic language. The first prize was awarded to He Luting’s piano composition, “The Shepherd Boy’s Flute.” Tcherepnin himself performed this piece, which was considered a milestone in the history of Chinese piano music, during his world-tour concerts; he even published the piece in Japan.<sup>7</sup> Compared to *The March of Peace*, which contained traditional Chinese elements within the Western harmonic language, this composition applied a more advanced compositional technique. The overall form is in simple ABA. The right hand introduces the opening theme, and the left-hand responds with a counter-melody imitation in thirds. The B “Vivace” section is a folk dance-like section, imitating the rapid playing technique and light and bright tonal colors of the Chinese flute (Example 2.1.2). The final A section is a recapitulation of section A. The theme returns with slight decorations, suggesting the improvisatory playing of the Chinese flute.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>7</sup> Lanshen Su, “纵一苇之所如凌万顷之茫然——汪立三先生访谈录” (An Interview with Mr. Wang Lisan), *Piano Artistry*, no. 2 (1998): 5.

Example 2.1.2 He Lvting, “The Shepherd Boy’s Flute” mm. 33-35



What makes this piece so successful is the poetic imagery He's arrangement evokes. Greatly influenced by Franz Schubert, He blended Chinese poetry with traditional folk music and songs. Tcherepnin described the piece as “appreciating a painting when hearing the music.”<sup>8</sup> The *Shepherd Boy’s Flute*, can be considered the first truly successful example of Chinese piano music.

## 2.2. Lisan Wang’s Life As A Musician

Lisan Wang (1933 - 2013), came from a highly educated family with a liberal background. His grandfather was a renowned scholar of the late Qing Dynasty, and his father was an economist and linguist. Profoundly influenced by his family's cultural heritage, Wang grew up with a keen interest in traditional Chinese arts and literature and developed an open, scholarly attitude and independent, inquisitive spirit. Wang’s grandfather had a particular interest in the Peking Opera; the younger Wang often accompanied his grandfather to the theatre. He also frequented the bookstores.<sup>9</sup> This appreciation of traditional Chinese arts became deeply ingrained during Wang’s youth.

Following the Anti-Japanese War, Wang's entire family moved to Chengdu. It was

<sup>8</sup> Meng Bian, 中国钢琴文化之形成与发展 (The Formation and Development of Chinese Piano Music Culture), 17.

<sup>9</sup> Tingge Wei, 中国近现代音乐家的生平简介 (The Modern Chinese Musician’s Biographies), Shenyang, China: Spring Wind Cultural Press, no. 4 (1994): 414.



during that time that Wang was exposed to church and Western music and developed an interest in keyboard music. In 1948, Wang learned to play the violin and piano at the Sichuan Conservatory of Music while remaining intent on becoming a composer.<sup>10</sup>

Three years later, Wang applied to study piano performance and composition at the Shanghai Conservatory and was accepted into both departments; however, he chose to pursue his dream and focused his studies on composition.

At one point, Wang was asked to give a speech as an outstanding representative of the conservatory. In his speech, Wang mentioned He Luting's "The Shepherd Boy's Flute" as a piece he loved, but also considered to have limitations.<sup>11</sup> In attendance was the composer Luting himself, who was now president of the Shanghai Conservatory!

The president took no offense at the younger composer's remarks. On the contrary, he said he very much appreciated Wang's honesty and boldness as well as his progressive thinking. He assigned Wang to study piano with Ding Shande and other piano teachers. And He Luting himself, along with Russian composer F. G. Azarmonov, gave Wang lessons in composition.<sup>12</sup> In this way, Wang officially started his professional life as a composer.

Wang's composition life can be divided into three main periods. The first was his school years (1953-1957). The next period was his "exile" (1958-1967) after the "Cultural Revolution," a time of great creativity for the composer.<sup>13</sup> The last period was a fruitful time not only for music composition but also for his essential writings on Chinese piano music.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 415.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 415.

<sup>12</sup> Meng Bian, 中国钢琴文化之形成与发展 (The Formation and Development of Chinese Piano Music Culture), 24.

<sup>13</sup> Tingge Wei, 中国近现代音乐家的生平简介 (The Modern Chinese Musician's Biographies), Shenyang, China: Spring Wind Cultural Press, no. 4 (1994): 415.

Wang's first composition was a piano piece "Lan Hua Hua," which he performed in 1953.<sup>14</sup> It was such a success that it quickly became part of regular concert repertoire at the Conservatory. The piece is an arrangement of a Chinese traditional folk song that describes a tragic love story between Lan Hua Hua and Ren Xiaoxi. The novelty, virtuosity, and ingenuity of this work brought Wang recognition at the Conservatory.

Another remarkable composition of Wang's student years was a piece for the piano, *Sonatina*. Wang composed this piece as part of an assignment to write Chinese atonal music. Interestingly, the class was taught by Arnold Schoenberg's student Sang Tong. This piece, which combined modern elements with traditional folk components, pointed in the direction modern Chinese piano music would take in the years to come. The piece won first prize in Shanghai Conservatory's composition competition. Wang's teacher F. G. Azarmonov described the work as "very complete, with not one note more or less."<sup>15</sup>

Unfortunately, after Wang published his "A Discussion and Analysis of Xian Xinghai's Symphonies," the talented, young composer was labeled a "rightist," exiled from Shanghai and forced to work in the wasteland at the far northern region of China. Even so, Wang continued to compose, while also trying to organize more music events. With limited resources at his disposal, Wang played as many of the instruments as he could. Before the Cultural Revolution officially began in 1966, Wang composed several vocal pieces for local choirs and opera companies, pieces for dance, and the piano music titled "Walking Along the Road." From 1966-1967, Wang was not allowed to compose. Meanwhile, due to forced labor and incredibly difficult living conditions, Wang wrote no compositions at all. Still, even under such extreme circumstances, Wang kept his passion

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 416.

<sup>15</sup> Meng Bian, 中国钢琴文化之形成与发展 (The Formation and Development of Chinese Piano Music Culture), 25.

for music. His observations of everyday life provided valuable material for his later compositions.<sup>16</sup>

By 1977, Wang's rightist label was finally removed. His life as a musician was at last restored. In the days that followed, Wang devoted himself thoroughly to writing music and advocating for the development of modern Chinese piano music. Just one year later, Wang composed two piano works: *Brothers and Sisters Reclaiming the Wasteland*, based on a traditional opera from north China, and the ballade *Song of the Guerillas*, arranged originally from the song composed by He Luting. In the years 1979 to 1982, Wang explored different genres of compositions, including orchestral works, operas, and China's first-ever twelve-tone piano piece, entitled "Heavenly Dreams" from the piano suite *Two Poems by Li He*.<sup>17</sup> In addition to these compositions, Wang wrote important articles, some of which he published and others he presented at conferences. Most of these articles addressed the development of New Music or explored how this genre was closely related to Chinese literature and language.

After Wang was promoted to Dean of the music department at the University of Harbin in 1985, he shifted his attention to teaching and attending conferences around the world. He continued to encourage the development of modern Chinese piano music until he became seriously ill in his final years.

### 2.3 Overview of Wang's Piano Compositions

My primary motivation for researching Lisan Wang's compositions was my own reaction to his piano work *Sonatina* the first time I heard and played this piece. This was

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 416.

<sup>17</sup> Tingge Wei, 中国近现代音乐家的生平简介 (The Modern Chinese Musician's Biographies), Shenyang, China: Spring Wind Cultural Press, no. 4 (1994): 417.

a completely different experience from hearing and playing Mozart's and Beethoven's sonatas when I was 12 years old. I also felt that the music was more familiar because I heard Chinese-like folk tunes blended with Western harmonies. It was a puzzle to me for a long time until I played another work by Lisan Wang, "The Sound of Waves" from his piano suite *Impressions of Paintings by Higashiyama Kaiti*. I was amazed by how Wang created the bell sound as one of the poetic imagery and linked this sound to the storyline of the entire piece. Musicologist Tingge Wei commented that Wang initially created a bell sound of China.<sup>18</sup>

Of the approximately 70 existed piano works Wang composed, all are character pieces and can be divided into three categories. One type is the arrangement of folk songs or operas, including *Lan Hua Hua*, *Walking Along the Road*, and the ballade *Song of the Guerillas*. Within the preservation of the traditional components, Wang largely applied western harmonic language in music. In the second category, there is music based on a particular subject, event, or folk story, for example, the piano suite *Paper-cut Window Decoration*, *Animal Caprices* and *Red Soil*. In this type of composition, Wang typically used relatively free compositional techniques to musically describe the characteristics of the subjects or the emotional changes of the character. The last category concerns those compositions that focused on creating the unified atmosphere as a poem, for example, the piano suite *Impressions of Paintings by Higashiyama Kaiti*, *Other Mountain – Five Preludes and Fugues*, and also the *Two Poems by Li He*.

In this paper, I will focus on the last type of Wang's piano compositions to explore how the master created poetic imagery using musical language as a tool. Specifically, this document analyzes the piano suites *Impressions of Paintings by Higashiyama Kaiti* and

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<sup>18</sup> Interview with Tingge Wei by author.

*The Other Mountain.*

Throughout his lifetime, Wang's piano compositions exhibited a consistency in style and compositional technique. In one of his interviews, he said he appreciated Bartok's compositional technique of ostinato accompaniment with free-flowing folk melodies.<sup>19</sup> Wang applied a similar method in many of his piano works, successfully combining Chinese folk elements with ostinato accompaniments. His compositional style was also significantly influenced by French Impressionists and Russian music, which was inherited from Wang's teachers.

Wang proposed bold and new techniques in composition. He composed highly creative piano works that blended modern techniques with nationalism and established a model for the next generation. When he published the piece "Heavenly Dreams," Wang wrote:

.... The "crab" of twelve-tone system cannot be eaten before tasting. There is no technique that is all encompassing in the arts. Each technique has its own advantages.... I do not believe that borrowing ideas from the western system is a sign of weakness but the valid basis of a new style for Chinese composers.<sup>20</sup>

Wang's musical creations reflected his exploration of artistry, creativity, nationality, and internationality. With his strong national spirit and the modern language of his compositions, he set an example for the next generation.

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<sup>19</sup> Lanshen Su, "纵一苇之所如凌万顷之茫然——汪立三先生访谈录" (An Interview with Mr. Wang Lisan), 7.

<sup>20</sup> Translated by author.

CHAPTER III  
POETIC IMAGERY IN THE *IMPRESSIONS OF PAINTINGS BY*  
*HIGASHIYAMA KAI*

**3.1 The Background of *Impressions of Paintings by Higashiyama Kai***

In 1979, the well-known Japanese modern landscape painter Higashiyama Kai exhibited some of his watercolor paintings in Beijing. Due to his poor financial situation, Wang was unable to view the exhibition in person; however, he was able to view the paintings on the China Pictorial. The paintings immediately inspired Wang to compose the “Winter Flower.” Although the work was not initially planned as a piano suite, Wang went on to complete “The Lake” and “The Sound of Waves.” When Wang first recorded the suite in Beijing, a literary critic stated that the music was rather dark and dull throughout and lacked emotional contrast. Even though the critic was not a musician, Wang respected his opinion and immediately added a fast movement: “Fall in the Forest”<sup>21</sup> to make the four movements of this suite: “Winter Flower”, “Fall in the Woods”, “The Lake”, and “The Sound of Waves”. Each movement has its own distinct and contrasting characteristic. “Winter Flower” is delicate but lonely, cold; “Fall in the Woods” is short but lively, dreamy; “The Lake” is quiet and intangible, soft but profound; “The Sound of Waves” is the longest and most difficult, spinning an epic tale of Master Jian Zhen’s five attempts to sail eastward to Japan in his quest to disseminate Chinese culture. Throughout the entire piece, Wang depicts Jian Zhen’s fearless and faithful spirit.

Wang not only gave titles to each movement, he also wrote short introductory poems. The poetic imagery in his poems is realized fully in his music. The following discussion

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<sup>21</sup> Lanshen, “纵一苇之所如凌万顷之茫然——汪立三先生访谈录” (An Interview with Mr. Wang Lisan), *Piano Artistry*, no. 2 (1998): 6.

will reveal how Wang unified the poetic imagery in words and music throughout the entire suite.

Wang sent the music to the painter himself Kaii in Japan, who immediately wrote a letter back in response after listening to the entire work, saying: “Your depth of understanding for my works is truly admirable!”<sup>22</sup>

Wang’s profound appreciation for Asian arts and literature and the sensitive way in which he blended the Chinese pentatonic scale<sup>23</sup> and Japanese mode<sup>24</sup> make this piano suite deeply moving. The work continues to be regarded as an exceptional example of cross-cultural excellence at the hand of a Chinese composer.

### 3.2 “Winter Flower”

“Winter Flower” was the first piece Wang composed after seeing Kaii’s paintings. Here is the short poem he wrote:

沉淀，冷清....一颗银白色的大树	Subsidence, desolation.... A silver tree with
晶莹剔透，它那搓栎繁密的枝啊	lush stalks and branches, bright and glittering
在寒光中唱着生命的歌	Singing the song of life in coldness.

From the poem, we feel the breathtaking beauty and tiny sparks of life even in extreme coldness and loneliness. Musically, the scene begins with two Japanese mode-scales. The first scale seems to ask a question and the second scale seems to answer it an octave lower. The two scales suggest an impressive silver tree standing desolate in the

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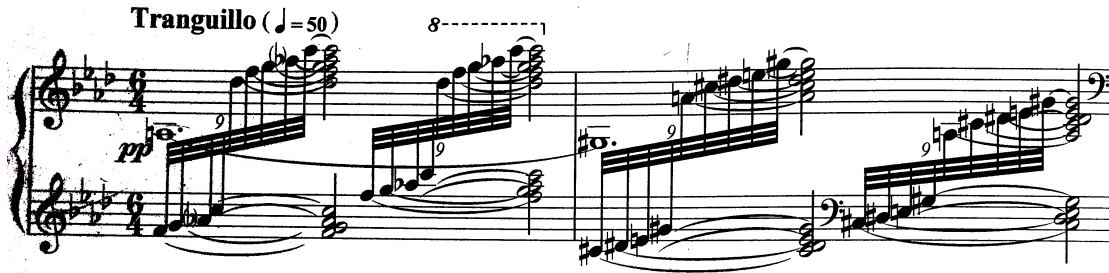
<sup>22</sup> Min, “浅析汪立三的钢琴作品《涛声》” (Analysis of Wang Lisan’s Piano Piece “The Roaring Waves”), *Piano Artistry* 170, no. 2 (2010): 43.

<sup>23</sup> The pentatonic mode is the main mode construction in Chinese traditional music, and the pitches of such a scale may be played in any order or combination without much dissonance. The basic scale is C, D, E, G, A, C. This basic scale is called “C-Gong five-tone mode.” There are also five scales in this harmony system; each one is called “Gong,” “Shang,” “Jiao,” “Zhi,” and “Yu.”

<sup>24</sup> Japanese mode or Du Jie mode is commonly used in traditional Japanese music, and the intervals of Japanese mode scale are a major second, minor second, major third, minor second, and major third. For example, the notes A, B, C, E, F and up to A.

cold, white world. By contrasting the “question” and “answer” gestures, the music seems to also question a process of life (Example 3.2.1). The cold is palpable.

Example 3.2.1 Lisan Wang, “Winter Flower,” mm. 1-2



After the two-measure introduction, the rest of the movement can be divided into five sections. In the first section (mm. 3-25), the first theme appears in measure 8 in the left hand. In measure 9, the right hand introduces the first theme in counterpoint. The first theme re-enters in the middle voice. In this section, the mixture of high and low register and the fugue-like four-voice texture creates the poetic imagery of dense branches and the thick trunk of a silver tree.

In the next section, Wang marks a tempo change from the previous *Tranquillo* to *Allegretto*, portraying the poetic idea of snow falling. Wang indicates “tintinnire” (tinkling) in measure 28, and the groups of triplets suddenly expand into large intervals, as if imitating the free dance of the “winter flower.” The texture then becomes thicker and the rhythm shifts to quintuplets, suggesting snow coming down much more heavily. The atmosphere is still quiet and extremely cold. Only a few sparks of life can be seen glittering. From measure 41 to measure 52, Wang borrows Bartok’s compositional approach in using Japanese folk tunes with an ostinato accompaniment in the left hand. The right hand presents the full scale of the A Japanese mode, and the left hand has the partial scale in a contrary motion (Example 3.2.2). However, from measure 53 to measure



62, instead of the Japanese mode, Wang uses the Chinese pentatonic scale in A-flat-Gong mode with the same accompaniment in the left hand (Example 3.2.3). These two modes suggest different colors. The pentatonic mode sounds warmer, representing the song of life humming beneath the extremely cold surface. Wang also marks “p” for the Japanese mode and “mp” for the pentatonic mode. Instead of the pure dynamic change I interpret this as a color change. Measures 53-62 are the only part in this piece that has the Chinese mode. Wang uses this mode as a musical “metaphor,” suggesting the dissonance between two rival cultures. However, by including both modes in the same piece, he seems to say that art and music should be appreciated equally, without discrimination, no matter how different one culture seems from the other. This is one of the aesthetic meanings, a deeper resonance, Wang wished to convey through his musical and poetic imagery.

Example 3.2.2 Lisan Wang, “Winter Flower,” mm. 41-2



Example 3.2.3 Lisan Wang, Winter Flower, Pentatonic Mode mm. 53-4



Furthermore, the rhythm of two against five throughout this section reflects the color and the scenery of the “winter flower” dancing against the immobile silver tree. Similarly, in Debussy’s *L’isle joyeuse*, the two-against-three figure represents the flowing waves off

the beach of the “island of joy.” The syncopated rhythm “paints” the sound imagery for the overall color and impression of the passage (Example 3.2.4).

Example 3.2.4 Debussy, “L’isle Joyeuse,” mm. 40-43.



After the transition (mm. 75-86), the first theme returns. Interestingly, the last section reverses the order of the first section. After the first theme is restated, the opening introduction appears, but with thicker chords and a sustained low F. Everything seems to be going back to where it was at the very beginning, as if the song of life never sang, and the fire never burned. Only the silver tree remains, motionless, in the white and silent world.

Each section seems to musically illustrate Wang’s appreciation for the painting (Figure 3.2.1).

Figure 3.2.1 Form Structure of “Winter Flower”

Introduction	Section 1	Section 2	Section 3	Section 4	Section 5
mm. 1-2	mm. 3-25	mm. 26-74	mm. 75-86	mm. 87-96	mm. 97-102
Background	The tree	Snow & Life fire	Transition	The tree	Peaceful Ending

The imagery of the piece becomes a metaphor for the cinematic scene Wang has created in both music and poetry, a profound understanding of the artistic meaning of Kaii's paintings.

### 3.3 “Fall in the Forest”

The second movement was added to the suite to brighten the color of the suite. Musically, the dotted melody and the core motivic figure reinforce the Japanese folk dance style. The poem Wang wrote:

树，	Trees,
也醉了，	are tipsy,
小白马呀，	oh, the little white horses,
你还流连于	Do you still nostalgically enjoy
金色的梦？	the golden dream?

In the forest during this golden season, the little white horse reluctantly awakes from a dream and enjoys the idyllic landscape. Instead of musically depicting every poetic image that the poem or painting created, Wang composed a dream scene for the little white horse’s light and elegant movements.

This movement is relatively simple. It is in binary ABA’ form in D Japanese mode. The joyfulness and lightness of the little horse’s movements are conveyed in the first two measures with the combination of eighth notes, sixteenth notes, and eighth and sixteenth rests. This rhythmic pattern pulls the music forward, suggesting the horse jumping and dancing (Example 3.3.1).

Example 3.3.1 Lisan Wang, “Fall in the Forest” mm. 1-2

**Grazioso** (♩ = 120)



In Bartok's piano work *Three Rondos*, a similar rhythmic pattern is used in the last rondo to create a lively character (Example 3.3.2). Likewise, in the second movement of the *Romanian Folk Dances*, Bartok uses the same rhythmic patterns in the right hand and melodic lines in left hand (Example 3.3.3). Wang, on the other hand, uses a similar technique but reverses the texture.

Example 3.3.2 Bartok, "Three Rondos" III, mm. 1-5.



Example 3.3.3 Bartok, "Romanian Folk Dances," II, mm. 13-15

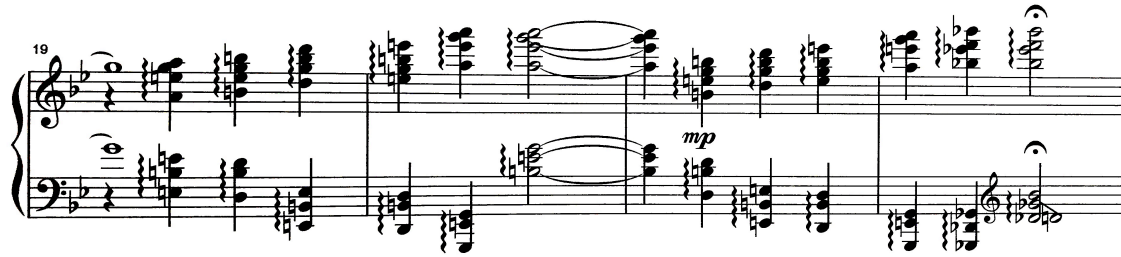


Right after the vivid rhythmic opening dance sequence, the dreamy melody appears in the right hand, suggesting a thick leafy forest moving gently with the breeze. Compared to the "Winter Flower," the texture is rather simple; yet the alternation of short motives interwoven between different voices makes the music satisfying.

There is only four-measure music in Chinese G-Gong mode (Example 3.3.2). The rolling chords begin with "f" and diminish to "mp," eventually disappearing in the fermata. The last chord changes back to the Japanese mode with the D natural in the left hand, harmonically preparing the A' section. The texture changes to the consecutive rolling chords, evoking the image of creatures swinging in the trees of the forest. This sudden mode change indicates a shift in color as the forest, and the little horse, fade away

into the dream.

#### Example 3.3.4 Pentatonic Mode mm. 19-22



The last section has the same rhythmic pattern and melodic lines as the first but is set an octave higher. One imagines the white horse frolicking in a realm somewhere between reality and dream.

In this movement, Wang created the poetic imagery of a lively creature enjoying the dreamy and beautiful forest in the golden autumn. The pianist should interpret and express the dreamy and light poetic imagery in performance.

### 3.4 “The Lake”

For the opening, Wang marks *Quasi recitativo* (like a recitative) and *rubato*. The constantly changing time signatures give this movement a free and poetic effect. In the poem, Wang writes:

明镜，明镜！

Oh, Jingbo, Jingbo!

你让朴素的山林

It's through you the mountain forest

认识他自己的美。

sees his beauty.

明镜，明镜！

Oh, Jingbo, Jingbo!

我爱你无言的深邃

I love your wordless profundity.

Wang does not even specifically mention the lake but metaphorically speaks of a

“crystal mirror.” By using a choral texture in the A section, the composer suggests the tranquility and gentle surface of a lake. In the B section, mm. 8-15, the combination of duplets, triplets, and melodic contours in the right hand depict gentle movement inside the forest. Meanwhile, the left hand paints the serenity of a quiet lake by maintaining the same accompaniment throughout with only minor variation. Symbolically, Wang changes the chord progression to suggest the reflection of the forest in the lake. (Example 3.4.1).

Example 3.4.1 Lisan Wang, “The Lake” forest movement & its reflection, mm. 9-10



The recapitulation starts in measure 18. Wang adds rolling octaves in 3/4 instead of the 5/8 that began the piece. The variation of Theme A evokes the image of flowing water and light dancing across ripples on the surface. The poetic imagery of this piece is expressed in the beauty of the intermezzo as it shifts between movement and tranquility, a profound aesthetic principle for Wang.

### 3.5 “The Sound of Waves”

“The Sound of Waves” retells the epic legend of Master Jian Zhen’s five attempts to sail eastward to spread the Chinese culture to Japan. Throughout the piece, Wang depicts Jian Zhen’s fearless and faithful dedication to his cultural mission. In music and poetry Wang describes character of the waves, the sea, and the ringing of the bells, and also the work’s profound moral spirit. The last piece is the most challenging movement of this piano suite.

Wang writes:

古老的唐招提寺啊！

Oh, the ancient Toshodaiji!

我遥想

I imagine,

一苇远航者的精诚，

the sincere faith of a seafarer,

似闻天风海浪，

Resounding as the wind and waves

化入暮鼓晨钟。

Dissolving into the night drum and  
morning bell

Weaving together formal structure and character development with poetic imagery, Wang musically tells the story of master Jian Zhen's faithful quest.

In each of the previous three pieces of the suite, there are only a few measures where Wang combines the Chinese and Japanese modes. In "Winter Flower" the middle section varied from Japanese mode to pentatonic mode. In "Fall in the Forest," only two measures of the music are in pentatonic mode. In "The Lake," we barely hear the pentatonic scale. In this last movement, nevertheless, the two seemingly contradictory modes are perfectly and constantly interwoven with each other.

Wang used a comparatively complex rondo form for this movement which can be divided into five parts, each harmonically and structurally connected through a transition (Figure 3.5.1). Wang used this structural form as poetry imagery to express the struggle between Jian Zhen and nature.

Figure 3.5.1 Formal structure of “The Sound of Waves”

Theme A	Transition I	Theme B	Transition II
“Jian Zhen” Theme		Sea-crossing Theme	
mm. 1 - 11	mm. 12 - 17	mm. 18 - 31	mm. 32 - 38
B-Jiao pentatonic mode	B-flat-Zhi pentatonic mode	D Japanese mode	D-Zhi pentatonic mode

Theme B’	Transition III	Theme B’’	Transition IV
Sea-crossing Theme		Sea-crossing Theme	
mm. 39 - 56	mm. 57 - 76	mm. 77 - 103	mm. 104 - 106
F-D-A Japanese mode	F-Gong pentatonic mode	f-d-G-A Japanese mode	D pentatonic mode

Theme A’	Theme A’’ (Coda)
“Jian Zhen” Theme	“Jian Zhen” Theme
mm. 107 - 112	mm. 113 - 127
A-flat-Gong pentatonic mode	B-Jiao pentatonic mode

The primary theme of Jian Zhen's quest begins directly with the B - Jiao pentatonic mode. This theme is derived from the Chinese Buddhist chant which depicts Jian Zhen’s courage as a disciplined and dedicated master carrying forth his faith. The Jian Zhen theme of a hero steadfast in his mission appears again at the end of the piece. It is carried through in the same tempo, but with modulations and variations. The result is a turbulent coda responding to the central theme introduced at the beginning (Example 3.5.1).

Example 3.5.1 Lisan Wang, “The Sound of Waves,” “Jian Zhen” Theme mm. 1-3

**Maestoso** (♩ = 46)



The dotted rhythmic figures in the “Jian Zhen” theme resemble the opening of the first movement, “The Peacock,” from Bartok’s piano suite *Three Hungarian Folksongs from Csik* (Example 3.5.2). Wang’s dotted sixty-fourth notes with tied sustained chords are similar to Bartok’s combination of thirty-second notes and tied long notes. Furthermore, the constantly shifting time signatures in both pieces also reflect Bartok’s influence on Wang.

Example 3.5.2 Bela Bartok, “The Peacock” from *Three Hungarian Folksongs from Csik*, mm. 1-8.



The second theme, “sea-crossing,” starts at measure 18. Throughout the rondo form, Wang emphasizes the main idea, gradually developing the musical material until it reaches its climax.<sup>25</sup> Through the powerful dynamics the listener experiences Jian Zhen’s journey as he faces the difficulties of his arduous quest.

The four transitions, of equal importance, are the most delicate and clever part of this piece. Wang connects the themes with great skill.<sup>26</sup> The last transition carries the

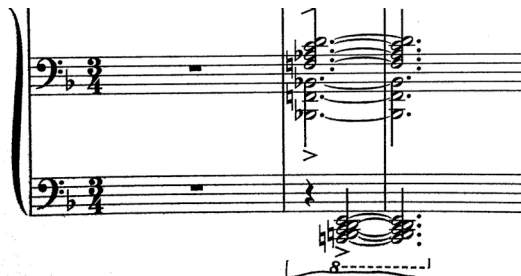
<sup>25</sup> Tingge Wei, “探求新的美的境界——评钢琴曲《夕阳箫鼓》、《涛声》” (To Explore A New Beauty: On The Piano Piece “Sunset Drum” “The Roaring Waves”), in *Wei Tingge Music Anthology*, 2.

<sup>26</sup> Kui Xiang, “汪立三钢琴音乐作品的演奏分析与研究” (The Analysis of Performing the Wang Lisan’s Piano Works), *Master* 318, no. 8 (2010): 108.

most significance for the entire formal structure, functioning as the turning point. Although it begins with a fading Japanese A - mode, the emotions of the piece change radically with the introduction of the brilliant D - pentatonic mode. When we reach the coda, peace returns, and the final feeling is one of joyful gratitude. The constantly changing modulations create tension between the two themes, especially when the themes are used to illustrate the challenges our hero faces during his voyage.

The four thematic “characters” together help to create the poetic imagery as well. The first character, the ringing bell, first appears in measure 2. As a cluster of the lowest five white keys played together, this dissonance creates a booming resonance, and its special tone builds a character that sounds like the ringing of a bell coming from a distant temple across the ocean (Example 3.5.3). The Bb7th chord gives a sense of purpose and courage in the face of danger, and represents Jian Zhen's determination. The music educator Wei Tingge once remarked that Lisan Wang single-handedly created the “Chinese bell sound.”<sup>27</sup>

Example 3.5.3 Lisan Wang, “The Sound of Waves,” bell sound, m. 2



Following the introduction of the “Jian Zhen” theme and the first transition, the second “character,” the wave, appears for the first time. Wang uses the Japanese mode in

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Tingge Wei by author.

the upper voices in contrast with the Chinese Buddhist chant in the lower voices. The upper melodic line is decorated with fast sixteenth-note sextuplets, implying the difficulties and hardships our hero encountered on his journey. Simultaneously Wang continues the unwavering Buddhist melody line in the left hand, which begins with a chord in the low register, as if responding to the bell.<sup>28</sup> This chant melody evokes the character of the ocean, the forces of nature, and also creates a mysterious grandeur as the background for Jian Zhen's story.

The intervals of this chant melody expand from 3rds to 8ves, increasing the sense of intensity, suggesting the difficulties of Jian Zhen's voyage. Two groups of triplets and the syncopated rhythmic figure that follows also create more rhythmic tension and push the story forward. In this theme, two different melodies seem to oppose each other, but the melodies also complement each other, and unity exists between two different tonal melodies. Wang seems to suggest the hardships of cultural transmission.

After the appearance of the "wave" character, the ringing bell returns in the second transition, following a rapid octave ascending scale (Example 3.5.4). Here the ringing seems to signal the failure of Jian Zhen's first attempt; the ringing comes to a sudden stop. The two beats of rest in measure 38 indicate the silence of pre-dawn darkness and the calm before another, more torrential, oncoming storm. This compositional technique creates the poetic imagery of tension, anticipating our hero's final attempt.

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28. Xiang, "汪立三钢琴音乐作品的演奏分析与研究" (The Analysis of Performing the Wang Lisan's Piano Works), 108.

Example 3.5.4 Lisan Wang, “The Sound of Waves,” Octave ascending scale and silence, mm. 34-38



When the “wave” character reappears in measure 39, the Japanese mode of the main melody goes through three different modulations, suggesting the furious storms and the huge waves breaking over the ship (Example 3.5.5). The melody in the left hand has the same pattern but with a different rhythm (Example 3.5.6). Triplets replace the syncopation, creating a sustaining sequence that builds up to the climax. The composer wants to create the feeling of the sea becoming increasingly turbulent and treacherous as the means to emphasize Jian Zhen's bravery.

Example 3.5.5 Lisan Wang, “The Sound of Waves,” three modulations, mm.39 – 46

A Japanese mode



D Japanese mode



F Japanese mode



Example 3.5.6 Lisan Wang, “The Sound of Waves,” left-hand melody mm. 39 - 40



The ringing bell returns in the third transition before the final wave appears. This time, to illustrate Jian Zhen's hesitation and doubt after two failed attempts, the time signature changes from 4/4 to 3/2 and back to 4/4, depicting Jian Zhen's vacillation and doubt. From mm. 69-72, the left-hand figure alters in different octaves, implying the two different voices in Jian Zhen's mind – keep up or give up? Wang switches the duple to triple and back to duple meter again to build a sense of anxiety for his listeners, and suggesting Jian Zhen's inner turmoil between committing to continuing onward or giving up.

When the main theme returns in measure 107, we hear the most exciting part of this piece. Roaring and turbulent waves crash around us like a rampaging monster determined to swallow everything in its path, but Jian Zhen never loses his unbreakable faith. He crosses the roaring ocean courageously; if necessary, he will even tame it. Indeed, it is when he finds himself at the edge of giving up when suddenly sunshine pushes through the dark clouds. The ocean stops roaring, the wind stops howling, everything becomes at

peace, bright and splendid. Jian Zhen finally reaches the island where he finds civilization, and that island is Japan. Wang used a sustaining ascending scale to push the melody to the climax. In this exciting cadenza, parallel 4ths and 5ths are used to imitate the Buddhist chant. The last chord is the ringing bell; but this chord is different, changing to a bright pentatonic mode in G – Gong. This ringing bell announces the final glorious success of the strong and courageous Jian Zhen.<sup>29</sup>

The last movement serves as not only the grand dramatic conclusion to the entire suite but also conveys Wang's ultimate wish for peace and respect, the inner meaning of this movement. Wang weaves this story by gathering poetic imagery from both traditional and modern sources and from the two cultures to make a powerful statement: There may be diversity and even conflict between the Chinese and Japanese cultures, but appreciation for each other's uniqueness should be the path toward respecting each other to create a more peaceful world.

### **3.6 Pedagogical Perspective of *Impressions of Paintings by Higashiyama Kaiti***

The previous analysis focused on how Wang presented poetic imagery through music. Pedagogically speaking, how can we understand this poetic imagery and express that imagery through musical language?

First of all, we should read and understand the poem that Wang composed for each movement. Those words are Wang's eloquent response to the paintings and suggest how he might express those images through music.

Polish-born pianist, musician and composer, Theodor Leschetizky believed that a

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<sup>29</sup> Xiang, “汪立三钢琴音乐作品的演奏分析与研究” (Analysis of Performing the Wang Lisan's Piano Works), 110.

performer could not only learn to hear every note in the inner ear but also gain the ability to see in the mind's eye a passage or image with precise clarity of detail.<sup>30</sup> Applying Leschetizky's theory to this piano suite, the second step would be to imagine a short film scenario as a visual narrative for each movement, based upon Wang's poetic images. For example, the movie for the first movement, "Winter Flower," opens with the scene of the big silver tree standing motionless in the middle of a crystal world. There is no sound – almost like a silent film. The dense branches may occasionally tremble slightly because of the increasing pressure from the heavy snow. Suddenly, you can see the snowflakes, gently fall from the sky, first one by one then cluster by cluster. Snowflakes are dancing in the air, the wind is tossing them up and down, all the while whitening and quieting the entire scene. It seems that we can almost hear the "flowers" bumping into each other until you hardly can see the silver tree at all through the blanket of white. Gradually, though, it is revealed within the scene and everything returns to silence as if nothing had ever happened.

This is one scenario of the "Winter Flower," but every performer could produce their own, based upon personal interpretations. No matter what movie you may imagine, the poetic imagery Wang created with his music will inspire you to choose your own sound-colors and create your own tone-painting.

But how does one choose sound-colors for a piece or passage? The ability to imagine and distinguish different colors, and even to develop a sensitivity to change in color is vital for conveying poetic imagery, as motives seldom remain static throughout this piano suite. The performer needs to be able to identify what kinds of sound best represents which sound-colors and how those colors relate to specific emotions. For

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<sup>30</sup> George, *How Leschetizky Taught*, Music & Letters, Vol. 35, No. 3 (1954): 223.

example, in the first movement of this suite, there are two different modes present: the Japanese mode, which tends to produce cold, dark colors; and the pentatonic mode in A-flat Gong (mm. 51-62), which has naturally warmer colors. Both can be heard within similar melodies, with the same accompaniment in the left hand. For the Japanese mode, the performer needs to keep a light and sensitive touch, emphasizing the legato melodic lines. It is not necessary to force the projection of the melody. When the dynamic grows from piano to mezzo piano in measure 51 in pentatonic mode, the volume in both hands needs to grow in a way that is balanced. The touch for mezzo piano should not be too soft or gentle, producing the “sparks of fire” or “song of life” within the wintry scene. Likewise, even as the sparks of fire, they are still beneath a layer of ice. The performer should not touch the key softly, but with slightly firm fingertips. At the same time, to produce the top melodic legato lines that are fluent and beautiful, the wrist should be free of any stiffness.

Another example of skillful transitioning and balancing between different colors, or moods, is Wang's "Fall in the Forest." The master composer changes the texture from dotted rhythmic patterns to big, rolling chords. To emphasize this sudden change in color and to create a deeper, warmer sound, the pianist should introduce more arm-weight and use a flatter and more extended hand position. To voice the top melody, as in the G Gong mode scale, save the forte for the first group of rolling chords, until the arrival of the A-chord in the G Gong mode. Let the sound dissipate for three beats or longer if needed. *Rubato* is acceptable. Restart another group in *mp* and gradually change back to the Japanese mode. A little firmness in the fingertips can be added to voice the G pentatonic scale, and let the sound completely disappear at the fermata.



The last example of producing different sound colors is in the last movement. Wang created few characters to express the poetic imagery for this movement. One of the characters, the ringing bell, is important to the story line. The bell character is built by the cluster of the lowest five white keys played together. This dissonance creates a booming sonority, and its tone builds a character that sounds like the ringing of a bell coming from a distant temple across the ocean. The music educator Wei Tingge once remarked that “Lisan Wang single-handedly created the “Chinese bell sound.” The bell sound appears eight times in this movement. We have to produce different colors to musically tell the story. The first 3 bells announce Jian Zhen’s departure and also suggest his determination. The bell ring also represents good luck. The temple bell rings three times consecutively to encourage Jian Zhen and bring him the best luck for the quest. The performer needs to produce a deep and full sound.

Then the bell rings again in the first transition in m. 37, Jian Zhen failed the first time. However, he did not give up. He heard the bell ring as if telling him that he should never give up so easily. The performers need to play this bell sound with faith and determination. When the bell reoccurs in the second transition, Wang marks forte. This failed attempt struck him so hard and Jian Zhen began to hesitate. Instead of conveying faith, the performer should strike the key stronger and deeper with arm-weight.

The next two bell sounds appear before Jian Zhen reaches his destination – Japan. These are marked mezzo piano and piano. Why does the bell sound becomes softer? Because he finally made this impossible mission happen and the bell sound is disappearing from the Chinese temple. For interpreting these two sonorities, the *una coda* should be used and the touch should be soft and gentle. The final bell celebrates this great

master's success. Play with a deep, strong attack to suggest his glorious triumph!

### 3.7 Conclusion

Wang wrote poems for every movement in this suite. In one of his interviews, he said:

I do not intend to restrain or limit the performer's interpretation and imagination of music because of me adding the poem. I just want to write out the part that music cannot deliver. Like the Chinese tradition, poets would write inscription on the paintings. Sometimes the poem reflects the painting; sometimes the poem complements the painting.... If my poems could enlighten the performer, they can read them; if they have disagreement, they may discard them.<sup>31</sup>

The influence of Wang's family in appreciating traditional Chinese literature and arts strongly affected Wang's unique approach to music. By accompanying his extraordinary compositions with his own poetry, Wang created rich, multi-layered imagery that celebrated the strengths of his Chinese heritage while also furthering his vision for a new kind of music that incorporated the best of both western and Asian cultures. In 1997, Wang published an article elaborating on the linguistic contributions he believed western music could make that, when combined with the tonal beauty of his own language, could lead to the development of a new aesthetic: modern Chinese music. He wrote:

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<sup>31</sup> Translated by author.

Nowadays, the linguistic effect has become an active scenario influencing the compositional technique. About this fact, it can be proved in the history of Western music. From Monteverdi to Wagner, and also Mussorgsky, Debussy, Prokofiev, and Schoenberg, they all place great value on linguistic effect. It is can be said that their success in music relies on the success of linguistic expression and understanding.<sup>32</sup>

The compositional style Wang employed for his suite *Impressions of Paintings by Higashiyama Kaiti* was uniquely modern in the way he took inspiration both from Asian traditions as well as from Western influences. French composers such as Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel inspired Wang to create different colors to build poetic imagery in the style of the great Impressionists. From the 20<sup>th</sup>-century Hungarian composer Bela Bartok, Wang borrowed the approach of combining traditional elements with modern compositional techniques.

Wang successfully achieves the aesthetic meaning through creating different poetic imagery in both poetry and music for the piano suite *Impressions of Paintings by Higashiyama Kaiti*.

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<sup>32</sup> Translated by author.

## CHAPTER IV

### POETIC IMAGERY IN *THE OTHER MOUNTAIN*

There are only nine piano works Wang composed that include his own poetry and these works all come from the two piano suites: *The Other Mountain* and *Impressions of Paintings by Higashiyama Kaii*. For this reason, I chose these works to illustrate Wang's approach to creating poetic imagery. *The Other Mountain* is perhaps Wang's most successful work.

In this chapter, I will discuss how Wang created the poetic imagery in each of the movements and included his own original poetry, as well as employing formal structure and thematic motives by borrowing from traditional elements of Chinese folk music. I will also examine the influence of Bartok. Finally, I will compare Wang's prelude with that of Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750).

#### 4.1 The Background of *The Other Mountain*

Wang himself once said about this piano suite:

I personally loved this work and I think it is even more interesting than the *Impressions of Paintings by Higashiyama Kaii*, even though the compositional technique is not “modern”<sup>33</sup> enough. This work, a prelude and fugue - a Western formal structure - is the fusion of Chinese traditional culture, the river and the mountain, and life and dream...<sup>34</sup>

Wang composed this piano suite in 1980, immediately after finishing *Impressions of*

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<sup>33</sup> Lisan Wang meant that the form of the suite is in prelude and fugue, which is not considered as the modern compositional technique.

<sup>34</sup> Translated by author.

*Paintings by Higashiyama Kaii*. The suite was published in 1983 and premiered in 1985.<sup>35</sup> The second movement, “Patterns in A-Yu Mode” was originally Wang’s unfinished counterpoint project during his college years. The fugue is based on the Hua Gu folk tune from Hunan Province. Wang finished the fugue and later added the prelude when he was in Harbin. In 1980, he was able to complete the whole suite in five basic Chinese modes: Gong, Shang, Jue, Zhi, and Yu.<sup>36</sup>

The title of the suite, *The Other Mountain*, seems odd; however, Wang was referring to the essential meaning of the poem “The Books of Odes,” which was that stones from other mountains can carve jade.<sup>37</sup> Later, it became a metaphor, suggesting that people should take advice from others if they want to achieve greatness. Wang borrowed this idea to argue that integrating the prelude and fugue forms with traditional elements of Chinese culture would allow Chinese modern piano music to not only improve but also accomplish great things. As mentioned earlier in this paper, Wang said “borrowing ideas from foreign sources is not a sign of weakness but the valid basis of a new style for Chinese composers.”

The first movement, “Calligraphy and Qin in F-Sharp-Shang Mode,” represents one of the calligraphic styles “Cao Shu” and the instrument Qin of the ancient Chinese culture.<sup>38</sup> The second movement, “Patterns in A-Yu Mode,” is based on traditional patterns, such as that which is used in wax dyeing. The next movement is “Song of the Earth in A-flat-Zhi Mode,” depicting the tragic and oppressive history of exploiting the

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<sup>35</sup> Tingge Wei, 中国近现代音乐家的生平简介 (The Modern Chinese Musician’s Biographies), Shenyang, China: Spring Wind Cultural Press, no. 4 (1994), 419.

<sup>36</sup> Lanshen, “纵一苇之所如凌万顷之茫然——汪立三先生访谈录” (An Interview with Mr. Wang Lisan), *Piano Artistry*, no. 2 (1998): 8.

<sup>37</sup> Translated by author.

<sup>38</sup> Gu Qing, one of the most ancient instruments with plug strings and seven strings total, was invented three thousand years ago. There are many treatises on Gu Qin’s performance and compositional techniques. Confucius was one of the representative Gu Qin masters.

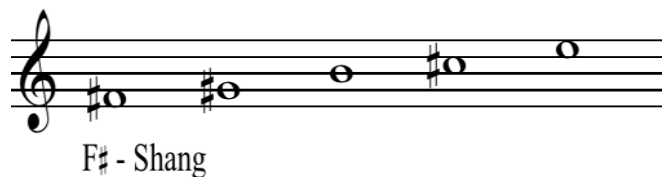
land. The fourth movement is “Folk Toys in G-Jiao Mode,” a lively impromptu. For the last movement, “The Mountain Village Dance in F-Gong Mode,” Wang is said to have visited the village in Yunnan Province of southern China which he later immortalized in his song. In his composition, he painted the people and their daily lives, transforming them into the language of music.<sup>39</sup>

Wang adopted the prelude and fugue form that originated in the Baroque period, but he introduced the Chinese five-tone mode to create a remarkable work. Wang added poems to clarify the beauty and meaning of each movement. *The Other Mountain* is one of the very few piano works in the form of a prelude and fugue that has a programmatic title.

#### 4.2. “Calligraphy and Qin in F-Sharp-Shang Mode”

The first prelude and fugue uses the F-Sharp Shang mode based on the five-note scale starting with F sharp (Example 4.2.1).

Example 4.2.1 F-Sharp-Shang five-note scale



Calligraphy and Gu Qin performance are considered to be traditional Chinese arts. The standard of an outstanding piece of calligraphy, or a talented performance of Gu Qin, is to determine whether the performer creates poetic imagery beyond the literal

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<sup>39</sup> Lanshen, “纵一苇之所如凌万顷之茫然——汪立三先生访谈录” (An Interview with Mr. Wang Lisan), *Piano Artistry*, no. 2 (1998): 8.

interpretation of the Chinese characters or Gu Qin music. Specifically, a masterpiece of calligraphy should exhibit, through the formation of every curve, and by the weightiness and lightness of each stroke, a balanced overall structure, along with the formation of an individual structure for each character. Similarly, a good performance of Gu Qin music is valued by how naturally and freely the music is expressed through the techniques of vibration and timbre differentiation. Mastering calligraphy and performing Gu Qin are both symbols of being a great scholar.

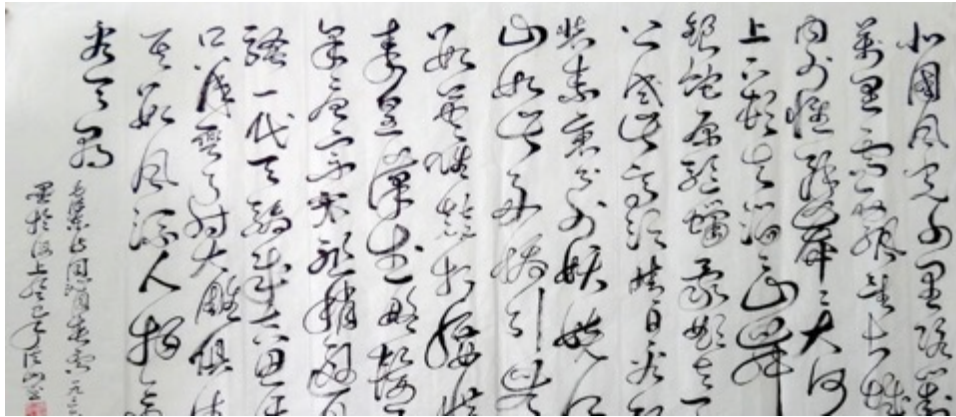
Wang wrote the poem for this movement:

我想登上另一个山头去回顾，	I aspired to another top of the mountain,
去瞻望。	to look backward and forward.
那激荡的是线条吗？	Are those enchanting melodies?
那呻吟的是音响吗？	Are those groaning sounds?
正如在古老的中国艺术里，	As in the ancient Chinese arts
我看见求索上下的灵魂。	I see the exploring souls.

In the poem, Wang's "mountain," which allows him to look forward and backward, is a metaphor for modern Chinese piano music. He is standing at the top of the mountain of Western music, metaphorically using the formal structure of a prelude and fugue. But he also wishes to look "backward" to see the other mountain - the ancient Chinese arts - and to carry those "forward" to explore the direction modern Chinese piano music could take in the future. This time, instead of directly creating poetic imagery, Wang sought to express his emotions and deeper understanding of music. In the prelude (mm. 1-33), Wang emulates the flexible movements of calligraphy through variable rhythmic patterns and constantly changing time signatures. There are five main types of calligraphy; Wang

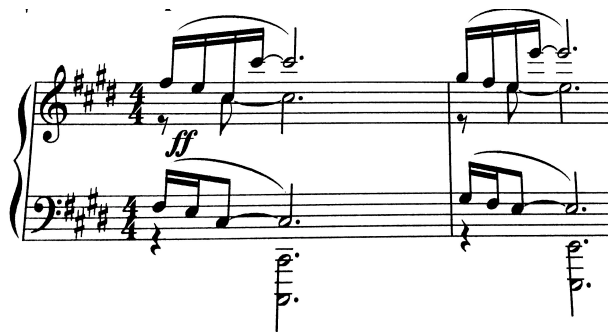
imitates one type specifically: Cao Shu.<sup>40</sup> (Figure 4.2.1).

Figure 4.2.1 Calligraphy of Cao Shu



As shown in Figure 4.2.1 above, the calligrapher may connect a few characters with one stroke. The opening motive may represent one single character. Then the short motive develops into longer phrases, indicating tied characters. The groups of four or six notes figures embody the fluent and rapidly moving writing of the calligrapher (Example 4.2.2).

Example 4.2.2 Lisan Wang, Calligraphy and Qin in F-Sharp-Shang Mode, mm. 1-2



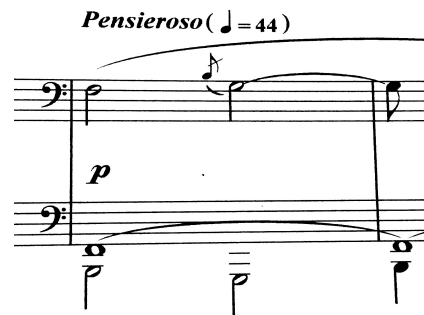
<sup>40</sup> Meng Bian, 中国钢琴文化之形成与发展 (The Formation and Development of Chinese Piano Music Culture), 北京: 华乐出版社 (Beijing: Huayue Press), 1996: 7.





performance techniques of playing the Gu Qin. The appoggiaturas in the fugue imitate the sound of the right hand gliding with the left hand pressing the strings (Example 4.2.3). The grace note should be played on the beat instead of before the beat.<sup>41</sup> The intervals between the grace note and main note are either minor 3rds or major 2nds

Example 4.2.3 Lisan Wang, Calligraphy and Qin in F-Sharp-Shang Mode, mm. 34



Another technique Wang used to create the effect of a Gu Qin performance is the special mark he included with this minor 2nds and the accompanying instruction for how that chord should be played: "finger leaves the key rapidly" (Example 4.2.4). The equivalent Gu Qin technique is when one hand plucks the string while the other hand vibrates the string. The dissonance of the minor 2nd with the sustained G-sharp recreates the "groaning sound" of the Gu Qin to which Wang referred in his poem. This appears five times in the fugue section.

Example 4.2.4 Lisan Wang, Calligraphy and Qin in F-Sharp-Shang Mode, mm. 39



<sup>41</sup> Simin Ye, "他山之石,这样攻玉——汪立三《他山集》的艺术成就" (Lisan Wang's Artistic Accomplishments in The Other Mountains), *Musical Arts*, no. 3 (2004): 51.

The final technique Wang employed to mimic the experience of the Gu Qin performance is the rolling octave, which Wang marks with a down-pointing arrow. He uses this specifically to indicate the gliding-down technique of playing the traditional Chinese seven-string instrument (Example 4.2.5).

Example 4.2.5 Lisan Wang, Calligraphy and Qin in F-Sharp-Shang Mode, mm. 47



In his first prelude and fugue, Wang creates poetic imagery by imitating the ancient Chinese arts of calligraphy and Gu Qin performance which ultimately contribute to the aesthetic meaning of his music.

### 4.3 “Patterns in A-Yu Mode”

Wang’s poem reads:

一个个小小的漩涡折射着， A small vortex reflecting a boundless universe in diverse  
大千世界纷纭不灭的光和影。 and confused everlasting light and shadow.

The world may be reflected by the small vortex, like the Hua Gu tune, reflecting the daily life of people from Hunan province, in southern China.

This prelude and fugue, which remains Wang’s unfinished project, is based on a folk tune from Southern China – Hunan Province (Example 4.3.1).

Example 4.3.1 Hua Gu Tune from Hunan Folk Tunes

**湖南花鼓**

行板

The Hua Gu tune scale is slightly different from the traditional Chinese five-note pentatonic scale, as it contains only four notes: A, C, E and G. The G is usually sung nearly up to a half-step higher. When the Chinese instruments perform the Hua Gu tune, the performers either tune the G string sharper or use other techniques to imitate the sharper G.<sup>42</sup> To preserve this characteristic of Hua Gu tune, Wang raises almost every G to G sharp in the prelude (Example 4.3.2).

Example 4.3.2 Lisan Wang, Patterns in A-Yu Mode, mm. 1-4.

**Chiaroscuro** (♩ = 120)

In the prelude (mm. 1-53), the Hua Gu tune modulates from A to C to G-sharp to C-sharp back to A mode. The continuous melodies interweave between the two hands throughout the prelude. The modulations and the gradually denser texture reveal the splendid reflections from the small vortex.

<sup>42</sup> Yiming Zhang, Wang Lisan and His Other Hill, *Piano Artistry*, no.11 (2013): 6.

Right before the fugue (mm. 54-135) starts, there is a whole measure of rest. It seems that Wang intends to expect the bright Hua Gu tunes to completely disappear and then build anticipation with the dissonant interval for six beats to set the scene for the fugue. A similar technique can be found in “The Sound of Waves” from the previously discussed suite *Impressions of Paintings by Higashiyama Kaiti*. In this poetic image, silence wins out over everything. The great German composer Ludwig van Beethoven used this technique as well in many of his piano sonatas.

To prepare the character change, Wang marked "*Grottesco ma espressivo*" (meaning, strangely humorous but expressive). It is in this fugue section wherein Wang introduces his musical depiction of the traditional handicraft technique known as *batik*: the process of producing multi-colored textiles by preventing dye from reaching selected parts of the fabric that have been coated with wax (Example 4.3.3).<sup>43</sup> Wang translates the entire artistic process of producing these wax paintings into musical language.<sup>44</sup>

#### Example 4.3.3 Wax Dyeing Technique from Southern China (Batik)



<sup>43</sup> Feng, Guiying, “蜡染的艺术” (The Art of Batik), *Printing and Dying*, no. 8 (2006): 19.

<sup>44</sup> Batik requires a high degree of skill because the hot wax must be quickly applied in small amounts, otherwise the wax will cool and not be properly absorbed into the fibers of the fabric and the image’s contours will lack sharpness. The batik artist needs to draw the object on canvas reversed in freehand so that the wax can be applied to the reflective areas, not to the shadow areas. To create a complete piece of image may require the batik artists to repeat the whole process three or four times.

The fugue section begins relatively simply with just two voices but then moves into a more complex structure with a three-voice fugue, a metaphor for the three-dimensional process of wax dyeing. The fugue form also represents the reversed images that the batik artists draw on their canvases.

The subject of the fugue is stated in soprano, then alto, and finally appears in the bass within an interesting rhythmic pattern (Example 4.3.4). The long notes (indicated here by the blue circle) suggest the fluent and steady movement of artists' free-hand drawing. The 32<sup>nd</sup>-note dotted rhythm (indicated here by the red circle) represents the quick movements required to apply hot wax on isolated areas of the fabric.

Example 4.3.4 Lisan Wang "Patterns in A-Yu Mode" mm. 51-62

The image shows a musical score for Example 4.3.4, Lisan Wang "Patterns in A-Yu Mode" mm. 51-62. The score is in G major, 3/4 time, and is marked "Grottesco ma espressivo" with a tempo of quarter note = 104. The score is divided into two systems. The first system (mm. 51-52) shows the bass clef with a piano (p) dynamic and a triplet of eighth notes. The second system (mm. 53-54) shows the treble clef with a pianissimo (pp) dynamic. A blue circle highlights a long note in the bass clef of the first system, and a red circle highlights a 32nd-note dotted rhythm in the treble clef of the second system.

Approaching the final episode (mm. 94-110), the counter-subject in soprano develops into a trill on E, which it sustains for a full ten beats (Example 4.3.5). Referring back to Wang's batik metaphor, this is the final step before the wax dyeing: washing out the wax after repeating the dyeing process as many as ten times, or even more. The artist has reached the magic moment where the color of the wax-dyed fabric changes from yellow to blue and white. The long trill indicates the flowing water, increasing the

intensity of the music until it reaches the much-anticipated climax with the chord marked *sfz* in measure 110. The subject and counter-subject are repeated in the recapitulation (mm.110-135) and the fugue ends with the 32<sup>nd</sup>-note dotted rhythmic figure in the low register, followed by the fermata.

Example 4.3.5 Lisan Wang “Patterns in A-Yu Mode” mm. 106-110



In this prelude and fugue, Wang chose a Hunan folk tune and traditional dyeing technique to serve as a metaphor for his composition. By integrating the elements of two otherwise unrelated art forms - batik handcraft and fugue - Wang fulfilled the promise of his goal, and ultimately of his entire suite: borrowing the best from “other mountains” to engrave the exquisite jade.

#### 4.4 “Song of the Earth in A-flat-Zhi Mode”

Whereas in the previous two movements the prelude and fugue represented different art forms (calligraphy and Gu Qin, patterns and wax dyeing) the prelude and fugue of the third movement is much more unified. Wang chose the land of China itself and the earth from which all living things originate and to which all return as the poetic imagery for his music.

大地还活着，还活着。

It is alive, the earth is alive.

苦难的大地，希望的大地，

Miserable earth, hopeful earth,

平凡的大地，神奇的大地；                      Ordinary earth, miraculous earth;  
我歌，我泣，我的跟在你深深的心里    I sing and I cry,  
I am deeply rooted in your heart.

In this poem, Wang expressed his patriotism, his sense of loyalty and connection to the country which ironically had both raised and rejected him. When he says the “miserable” earth, he was identifying the toil, the sacrifice, even the exploitation which his land and the people in it had experienced - much like his own experience toiling in the wasteland. Nevertheless, Wang remained hopeful; he believed life would improve. Musician and music educator Wei Tingge once asked Wang in an interview if Wang ever felt that life had treated him unfairly. Wang responded that he had never felt frustrated or desperate. “There are more people out there who are even more desperate than me, such as Peng Dehuai<sup>45</sup> or Hu Feng,<sup>46</sup>” The composer insisted: “We always need to remain positive and have faith in our lives.”<sup>47</sup>

In his prelude, Wang used repeated octaves in the low register to represent the earth. The group of five octaves (indicated here by a green circle) and the other four octaves (shown with a blue circle), especially the added G natural along with the G flat octave, represent the folk tune “Xin Tian You” (Example 4.4.1) from the Shanbei Province of northern China (Example 4.4.2).

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<sup>45</sup> Hu Feng was a Chinese writer and literary and art theorist. Later he was labeled as “Rightist” in Cultural Revolution and died tragically.

<sup>46</sup> Peng Dehuai was a prominent Chinese Communist military leader and minister of national defense. He was labeled as the leader of the “Rightist” in Cultural Revolution. After ten years of torture, Peng died of cancer tragically.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Wei Tingge by author.



Example 4.4.1 Shanbei Folk Tune, Xin Tian You



Example 4.4.2 Lisan Wang “Song of the Earth in A-flat-Zhi Mode” mm. 4-6



Two innovations can be found when comparing Wang's fugue, structurally, to a fugue by Bach. The first is the expanded episodes. A new countersubject appears in measure 83 before the theme becomes fully developed in the second episode (mm. 83-100). This material appears eleven times in seven different modes in this fugue section.<sup>48</sup> In this fugue, there are three countersubjects and two answer-subjects with additional new material. Also, Wang used the technique of “silent keys.” At the beginning of the fugue section (mm. 52-126), the pentatonic tone cluster in A-flat-Zhi mode is to be played silently, pushing the keys down and holding to allow sympathetic vibration of the piano. (Example 4.4.3).

<sup>48</sup> Simin Ye, “他山之石,这样攻玉——汪立三《他山集》的艺术成就” (Lisan Wang’s Artistic Accomplishments in The Other Mountains), *Musical Arts*, no. 3 (2004): 53.

Example 4.4.3 Lisan Wang “Song of the Earth in A-flat-Zhi Mode” mm. 52-57

Accompanying the single melody with a muted A-flat pentatonic scale as the background, Wang created the poetic imagery of the massive earth. In this way, the piece now reflects the title of the movement: “The Song of the Earth.”

#### 4.5 Folk Toys in G-Jiao Mode

你也喜欢布老虎，泥公鸡，糖关刀，纸风车吗？	Do you like cloth tiger,
	mud roosters, sugar swords,
	paper pinwheels too?
还有那不知疲倦的走马灯，傻里傻气的，	And the untiring spinning lanterns,
	Foolish-looking puppets...
傻里傻气的木偶人...啊！那是我童年的梦。	Oh! That is my childhood dream.

Following the third movement, marked, "*tragico*," this next movement comes almost as a relief, full of innocence and joy. Here, Wang marked "*umoristico*," meaning humorous. For this section, Wang created many musical motives as he did in “The Sound of Waves” from the previous discussed suite, each representing a specific character from

his poem, “Folk Toys in G-Jiao Mode.”

The first character is the cloth tiger (Example 4.5.1), whose fierceness is represented by a sudden interruption of a sixteenth-note rest, leaving the motive feeling somewhat unfinished. Immediately following this interruption comes a whole measure of rest. This emotionally contrast creates anticipation for the next character: the mud rooster. To create a distinct sense of contrast, Wang uses *f* for the tiger and *p* for the mud rooster. Furthermore, he changed the time signature from 2/4 to 3/4. The repeated G of the rooster motive appears throughout the prelude, and the minor 2nds imitate the sound of the rooster crowing. The minor 2nds in the rooster motive also introduces the character of the sugar sword, as well as the character of the crystal.

Example 4.5.1 Lisan Wang, Folk Toys in G-Jiao Mode, mm. 1-5

Umorestico (♩ = 120)



Bartok, in many of his piano works, introduced similar elements, such as the parallel figures in *Fifteen Hungarian Peasant Song No. 5 and No. 6* (Example 4.5.2) and the ostinato accompaniments in the left hand in *Romanian Folk Dances* (Example 4.5.3).

Example 4.5.2 Bartok, Fifteen Hungarian Peasant Song No. 5, mm. 13-16

Andante (♩ = 114)





than six times. The subject is introduced in measures 5-6 (Example 4.6.1). The shifting time signatures symbolize the diverse cultural background and the complexity of the dance rhythms.

Example 4.6.1 Lisan Wang, Mountain Village Dance in F-Gong Mode mm. 1-6

The musical score for Example 4.6.1 is written for piano in F major and 2/4 time, marked 'Maestoso' with a quarter note equal to 48 beats. The piece consists of six measures. The left hand plays a rhythmic ostinato figure, while the right hand plays agile dance steps. The score includes dynamic markings such as *f*, *m.d.*, *m.s.*, *mp*, and *rit.*. The time signature changes from 2/4 to 3/4 and back to 2/4 throughout the piece.

In the prelude, Wang uses an ostinato figure in the left hand, imitating the rhythms of bamboo tinkling in the bamboo dance.<sup>49</sup> The right hand suggests the agile dance steps. We can also find many similarities between this piece and Bartok's *Romanian Folk Dances*.

The fugue (mm. 33-106) has a tempo change ("poco a poco accel." in mm. 36-38); the gradual accelerando does not usually happen in a fugue, especially when the subject first appears. In addition, the countersubject uses musical material that is similar to the subject, giving a sense of "echo" and suggesting the mountainous space where one might hear echoes. Last but not least, the subject first occurs in octaves between soprano and alto. The music of many minorities from southern China employs parallel major 2nds and the music even occasionally ends with open parallel major 2nds.<sup>50</sup> Consequently, the major seconds in measures 61-62 function as a topical reference to ethnic music (Example 4.6.2).

<sup>49</sup> 竹竿舞(Bamboo dance), is part of culture of the ethnic Li, Miao, Dai minorities in southern China. Two long bamboos on each side serve as the base, two people hold two pieces of bamboos on top of the base bamboos and either open or close the bamboos to create the dancing rhythms. The dancer needs to follow the rhythm to avoid the bamboos obstructing their feet, and successfully move from one side to the other.

<sup>50</sup> Yiming, "The Underlying Folk Music in Wang Lisans Music," DMA diss., 2014, 79.

Example 4.6.2 Lisan Wang “Mountain Village Dance in F-Gong Mode” mm. 61-2



#### 4.7 Pedagogical Perspective of *The Other Mountain*

A sensitivity to the mood changes created by variations in tone and "color" is the pedagogical focus for the successful realization of *Impressions of Paintings by Higashiyama Kaiti*. The key to this suite, nevertheless, is the vertical harmonic lines and the ability to express the musical motives. Wang said that to create the sound effect of this suite, the performer should pay attention to the harmonic element instead of only listening to the single melodic line.<sup>51</sup> This is how Wang creates poetic imagery in this suite.

For example, in the third movement, “Song of the Earth in A-Flat-Zhi mode,” the two groups of the octaves should be played steadily to establish the background for representing the profoundness of the land. These left-hand octaves should carefully line up with the melodic lines in the right hand to produce harmony and sonority. The pedaling should be coordinated with the left-hand octaves. In measures 52-57, the left hand should press the A-flat-Zhi mode chord silently and evenly to establish a pentatonic sonic resonance throughout the instrument. Simultaneously, the right hand begins the subject. The trills alternatively appear in subject and countersubject in all four voices. The performer should create a more blended sound effect rather than articulating trills too

<sup>51</sup> Lanshen, “纵一苇之所如凌万顷之茫然——汪立三先生访谈录” (An Interview with Mr. Wang Lisan), *Piano Artistry*, no. 2 (1998): 8.

clearly.

Another good example would be the fourth movement, “Folk Toys,” in which there are six musical characters. The performer needs to play each character distinctly, meanwhile delivering the precise poetic imagery each represents. The first character, the tiger, should be played with strong fingertips non-legato, to create the feeling of violence and ferocity. For the character of the mud rooster, the three notes in the right hand should be played together to create dissonance. This dissonance also symbolizes the Shanbei folk tune as the G is sung sharper. In the fugue, the performer must follow the rhythm precisely to illustrate the character of the clumsy puppet.

In the final movement, the prelude offers some technical challenges for the right hand. First, fingers need to be prepared in advance before jumping to the next interval, and the wrist should be relaxed. Second, the passage can be regrouped. From measure 7 to measure 10, and measure 13 to measure 16, the pianist can play in groups of three. From measure 11 to measure 12, and measure 17 to measure 18, the pianist can divide the passage into groups of two, and the wrist should move up and down along with the change in the position of the intervals.

In summary, to do justice to this exquisite piano suite *The Other Mountain* and to make the most of the poetic imagery Wang created, the performer must play close attention to bringing out the rich harmonies, keeping in mind to accent the traditional Chinese elements that distinguish this music from Western compositions.

#### **4.8 Conclusion**

When I interviewed Wei Tingge about this piano suite, he told me that many students could not recognize the prelude and fugue form. After performing and analyzing

the suite, I found it two reasons to explain this.

First: Wang uses the traditional prelude and fugue form very freely. In one of his interviews in 1986, Wang mentioned:

I try to hide it. I always like to weaken the feeling of traditional formal structure, and I would rather the audience does not recognize the “face” of a fugue, which reminds them of Bach or Shostakovich.<sup>52</sup>

Wang successfully hides the “face” – or traditional appearance – of the fugue; however, he definitely “borrowed from the Other Mountains.” The following chart will compare Wang’s form with Bach’s traditional form.

Figure 4.8.1 The Comparison of Bach and Lisan Wang

	<b>J. S. Bach</b>	<b>Lisan Wang</b>
Harmonic System	24 Major and Minor Keys	Five Pentatonic Modes
Formation	Key-wise, prelude and fugue organically integrate with each other. - Prelude and fugue are relatively independent from each other.	- There is no clear cadence for the prelude and fugue appears right after. - Prelude and fugue closely integrate by motives and modes.
Fugue	- Fugue appears singly in one voice - Both parallel and vertical harmonic progressions are important.	- Left-hand accompanies when subjects appear. - Countersubjects may occur before the full statement of the subjects. - Both parallel and vertical harmonic progressions are important.

Second, the fusion of Chinese cultural components creates completely different

<sup>52</sup> Translated by the author.



sound effects and poetic imagery. Wang added more dimensions and layers to this suite. These dimensions and layers bring fresh new effects to the music, and creates exciting performance possibilities. Wang once stated:

I could have composed the entire suite in a completely different formal structure. However, borrowing the fugue form increased the attractiveness of the music even though it is harder to do so.<sup>53</sup>

The method Wang used to integrate cultural components creates the ethnic poetic imagery for this suite. Indeed, combining folk elements is also a traditional compositional technique. Beginning with Chopin's Mazurkas, the Polish folk dances, all the way to Bartok and compositions by Russian composers, ethnic and folk elements enrich the compositional materials, a technique that both Western and Chinese composers use.

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<sup>53</sup> Lanshen, “纵一苇之所如凌万顷之茫然——汪立三先生访谈录” (An Interview with Mr. Wang Lisan), *Piano Artistry*, no. 2 (1998): 9.

## CHAPTER V

### CATEGORIZATION OF LISAN WANG'S PIANO COMPOSITIONS

In this final chapter, I will categorize Wang's existed piano works into different pedagogical levels based on my previous analysis.

In addition to the purely technical demands, the difficulties of Wang's works are due to the necessary and thorough comprehension of poetic imagery Wang created in his music. That imagery is suggested through the use of the pentatonic mode combined with Western harmonic language and includes references to Chinese traditional arts, literature and folk songs. I will also list some works by Bela Bartok or the French "Impressionist" composers to build the relationship between Wang's works and their works in order to provide even more possibilities for interpretation.

The categorization establishes several levels from the most accessible ones to concert pieces. The four levels are: preparatory, elementary to intermediate, advanced, and concert levels. I will also provide pedagogical goals and expectations for each level.

#### 5.1 Preparatory Level

Since most of Wang's works are involved with the understanding of the poetic imagery, there are only relatively few pieces at this level. For this level, the students also need to be able reach an octave. There are few big rolling chords in these pieces; the pianist can leave out a few notes or introduce more arm and wrist moving depending on the size of students' hands in order to avoid potential injuries.

Movements from suite *Childlike Innocence*: (movements are not in progressive order and not all seventeen movements are for preparatory level.)

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. “Little Rain Drops No. 2, <i>Allegro</i> |  |
| 2. “The Doll” No. 14, <i>Andante</i>        | Octaves are in right-hand melody.  |
| 3. “The Sunset” No. 12, <i>Moderato</i> :   | Sustained D flats are in left hand; needs a large span for the rolling chords.                                       |
| 4. “The Sunny Day” No. 4, <i>Andante</i>    | Triplets in the left hand. In m. 23, the pianist can leave out the A flats in the second and third beats.            |
| 5. “Morning Song” No. 13, <i>Allegro</i>    | The rolling octaves are in the right hand; in the left hand, the sustained A and B in mm. 20-1 can be held by pedal. |

These pieces are relatively easy, not only because of the less demanding technique, but also because of the familiar characters and concrete subjects which can be found in our daily lives. Along with these character pieces, the students can also study Bartok’s piano suite *Ten Easy Pieces*, Sz. 38, BB. 51, *14 Bagatelles*, Sz. 38, BB 50, and *Three Rondos* Sz. 84. These works share similar compositional techniques with the movements from Wang’s *Childlike Innocence*.

## 5.2 Elementary to Intermediate Level

In this level, the musical character has greater variety, with more technical demands, including complex rhythmic patterns, constantly shifting time signatures, and challenges related to pedaling. Pianists need to create precise imagery. Wang uses many motives or musical figures to portray the characteristics of each subject. A full understanding of the character is the basis for the successful performance of these works.

### *Childlike Innocence*

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 6. "Childhood Carriage" No. 1, <i>Moderato</i>     |   |
| 7. "Children are Playing" No. 3, <i>Allegretto</i> | Repeated fourths                                      |
| 8. "Making Phone Calls" No. 5, <i>Allegro</i>      | Shifting between duple and triple                     |
| 9. "Distorting Mirror" No. 6, <i>Allegretto</i>    | Complex rhythmic patterns                             |
| 10. "Boat Song" No. 7, <i>Moderato</i>             | Big chords and constantly shifting<br>time signatures |
| 11. "Young Pals" No. 8, <i>Allegro</i>             | Dotted rhythms  |
| 12. "Dreams" No. 9                                 | Five-against-three/two rhythmic<br>pattern            |
| 13. "Pastoral" No. 10                              | Big rolling chords in the left hand                   |
| 14. "Noisy Talking" No. 11                         | Complex rhythms in left hand                          |
| 15. "Folk Songs 1" No. 15                          | Large jumps   |
| 16. "Folk Songs 2" No. 16, <i>Moderato</i>         | Large jumps and<br>complex rhythms in left hand       |
| 17. "Folk Songs 3" No. 17, <i>Andante</i>          |   |

### *Prophets*

- |   |                |
|---|----------------|
| 18. "Sparkling Stream Following on," <i>Allegro</i> | A little etude |
| 19. "Schumann's Foreign Country," <i>Moderato</i>   |                |

### *Animal Caprices*

- |   |                                 |
|---|---------------------------------|
| 20. "Elephant Dancing" No. 1, <i>Andante</i>              | Big Chords and<br>rapid octaves |
| 21. "Camel's Bell in the Desert" No. 2, <i>Allegretto</i> | More advanced pedaling          |

- |                                     |  |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| 22. “Frog’s Band” No. 3, Allegretto | Complex rhythmic patterns                  |
| 23. “Bear’s Accordion” No. 4        | Double thirds and<br>rapid parallel chords |
| 24. “Trapped Serpent” No. 9         | Scary character                            |

*Young Brother’s Drawing*

- |   |       |
|---|-------|
| 25. “Tough Floweret” No. 1, <i>Animato</i>                                    |       |
| 26. “Big Head Doll Dance” No. 2, <i>as if it were</i> (Pretend to be serious) |       |
| 27. “Under the Traffic Lights” No. 3, <i>Never-ending</i>                     | Etude |

*Sonatina*

- |  |                                     |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| 28. “Under the Sunshine” No. 1, <i>Vivente</i>   | Constantly shifting time signatures |
| 29. “After the Rainfall” No. 2, <i>Sereno</i>    |                                     |
| 30. “The Village Dance” No. 3, <i>Festivo</i>    | Constantly shifting time signatures |
| 31. <i>Sketches – The Impression of Dulcimer</i> |                                     |

Some of the works listed above require an understanding and imagination of abstract subjects, including the big-headed doll dancing, or the pastoral. The last work in this level even requires the knowledge of the Chinese instrument dulcimer’s timbre and basic playing skills.

For a better understanding of Wang’s works, students can study these works along with Bartok’s *Two Romanian Folk Dances*, *Fifteen Hungarian Peasant Songs Sz. 71* and selected pieces from *Mikrokosmos Book I & II*. In addition to Bartok’s works, Debussy’s harmonic color also impacts Wang’s style as we have seen. Selected Debussy works include *Arabesque No.1*, “Reverie” from *Album Leaf*, “Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum” from *Children’s Corner*, Preludes No. 6 “Des pas sur la neige” and No. 7 “Ce qu’a vu le

vent d' Ouest" from Book I.

### 5.3 Advanced Level

The pianist should be able to produce many different sound-color effects and possess the technique to evoke different musical characters and the imagery in the music. Wang's advanced works will require a fairly high and precise appreciation of abstract subjects, or poetic imagery and story-telling. Some of the pieces may not require a virtuoso technique, but are demanding in terms of sound-color and imagery.

32. *Lan Hua Hua* A ballade on a folk love story

33. *Brothers and Sisters Reclaiming the Wasteland*: With the historical background of a generation's experience

#### *Three Music Poems*

34. "Golden Rimmed Floating Clouds" Sensitivity of variable colors and poetic imagery

35. "Legend of Mountains" Imitation of echoes

36. "Tricks" Etude

37. *Poems* Focusing on poetic imagery

38. Read "*The Grasses*" by Lu Xun A musical literary response with simple technique

#### *Paper-cut Window Decoration*

Five folk events

39. "Nursery Rhythms" No. 1

40. "Yangko Dance" No. 2

41. "Folk Song" No. 3

42. “Elegy” No. 4

43. “Actor with Painted Face” No. 5

44. *Walking Along the Road*

Arrangement of the vocal work

composed by Li Jiefu

*Animal Caprices*

Technically demanding

45. “Spider’s Eight Diagrams” No. 5

46. “Swallows Anxious to Return” No. 6

47. “Coral Polyp in Glass Vat” No. 7

48. “Butterflies in Dream” No. 8

*Prophets*

49. “Prophets” No. 1

50. “On the Vastland I, IV, V” No. 2

51. “The Poem ‘Ru Meng Ling’” No. 4

Color sensitivity and

poetic imagery

The pianist can study works by Debussy and Ravel to improve their sensitivity to changes in sound-color. Ravel’s *Sonatine* and *Mother Goose for Two Pianos or Four Hands*, and Debussy’s *Jardins sous la pluie*, *Images I* and *Masques* are recommended. To prepare for the concert level pieces, technical exercises should also be included. For example, to train the “hold and lift” technique and fast fingers, the pianist could use the *Gradus ad Parnassum* of Clementi and selected studies from *School of Technic for the Pianoforte* by Isidor Phillip.

## 5.4 Concert Level

The pianist needs a comprehensive knowledge of all related cultural components, the ability to create poetic imagery through virtuoso technique and sensitivity to sound-color. The pianist also needs a thorough understanding of the harmonic language and formal structures. The following works are effective for concert repertoire, including the two piano suites mentioned in previous chapters.

### *Impressions of Paintings by Higashiyama Kaiti*

52. “Winter Flower”

53. “Fall in the Forest”

54. “The Lake”

55. “The Sound of Waves”

### *The Other Mountain*

56. “Calligraphy and Qin in F-Sharp-Shang Mode”

57. “Patterns in A-Yu Mode”

58. “Song of the Earth in A-flat-Zhi Mode”

59. “Folk Toys in G-Jiao Mode”

60. “The Mountain Village Dance in F-Gong Mode”

### *Two Poems by Li He*

61. “Heavenly Dreams”

The first Chinese piano work to use the twelve-tone compositional technique.

62. “Qin Emperor Drinking”

Based on a historical story

63. *Fantasy Sonata “Black Soil” – Memory of Er Ren Zhuan (A Folk Song and*



*Dance Duet*”

*Red Soil*

Based on folk festival musical events

64. “Growing Wheat and Ripening Barley”

65. “Dances”

66. “Springs”

67. “Mask Dances”

68. Ballade “Song of the Guerillas”

Arrangement of He luting’s vocal  
work

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

Before I decided to focus my research on the piano compositions of Lisan Wang, I studied several piano pieces by other modern Chinese composers. I studied pieces by Wang's teacher, He Luting, Sang Tong, and the works of pianist/composers who came after Lisan Wang's generation, including pieces by Tan Dun, Du Mingxin, and Chen Peixun. Although these pianist/composers produced significant works, their output was somewhat limited and did not justify consideration for this paper. More importantly, their compositional styles were too strongly influenced by previous composers rather than reflecting a true sense of originality.

My research focused on the origins of the new style of Chinese music that paid homage to the traditional folk music while bringing in elements of Western harmonic language. Although Wang was not the first Chinese composer to create this "hybrid" style, he combined Chinese and Western musical components with a genius for creating poetic imagery in music. While the works of other composers can be uneven in terms of quality, Wang's compositions are consistently on a very high level in compositional technique.

In 2012, I researched "The Sound of Waves" from Wang's piano suite *Impressions of Paintings by Higashiyama Kaiti*. I discovered that only a few articles had been written about this piece and there was even less information about his other compositions. I wondered why Wang's compositions have not received the attention they deserve?

One reason is that most Chinese musicians and pianists tend to be more interested in Western compositions. Works by Chinese composers are often viewed as less significant.

Wang said in an interview in 1998: “Our composers should feel ashamed! There are so many outstanding compositions and some of our Chinese composers have received worldwide recognition and have won competitions throughout the decades. However, the overall quality and quantity of Chinese compositions and their impact remain less than ideal. I understand that there were many obstacles to Chinese composers before; however, all the obstacles are gone and composers are now free to compose.”<sup>54</sup> It is clear that Lisan Wang’s contribution to modern music goes beyond his remarkable compositions; equally noteworthy is his advocacy for the development of Chinese modern music.

Another reason Wang’s works have been overlooked involves his political views. Even though the label of “Rightist” that became attached to his works and writings was eventually removed, his perspective on modern Chinese music is still ignored.

My research had two ultimate goals: first, to introduce Lisan Wang’s piano compositions to a large audience and help his compositions gain the wide recognition they deserve; and second, to attract more attention to his work and other exemplary works by contemporary Chinese composers. This paper focused on Wang’s most two representative piano suites: *The Other Mountain* and *Impressions of Paintings by Higashiyama Kaii*. I have identified Western influences on the Chinese composer, or, as Wang put it, how he metaphorically “carved the jade with other stones,” relating Wang’s work to compositions by Bartok and Debussy. Finally, the pedagogical analysis and categorization of Wang’s piano works fills in the gaps left by previous researchers, allowing music teachers and performers in the future to access Wang’s compositions more easily. Unfortunately, this study cannot cover more of Lisan Wang’s works and provide a thorough analysis of each work. Nevertheless, it is the hope of the author that

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<sup>54</sup> Translated by author.

this research will provide a preliminary guide for performers, scholars, and pedagogues in years to come. It is imperative that modern Chinese music receive greater attention and study if Wang's ultimate wish is to fulfilled: "Only when Chinese compositions begin to flourish will modern Chinese music at last be heard by the world."<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Translated by author.

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