

PERFORMANCE GUIDE ON TWO CHINESE CONTEMPORARY PIANO SOLO WORKS

"THE WILLOWS ARE NEW" BY CHOU WEN-CHUNG

AND "NUMA AME" BY ZHANG ZHAO

A LECTURE-DOCUMENT

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## Chapter I Introduction

Piano performance is a complex activity that involves establishing connections, transforming emotions, and communicating with an audience. For performers, the ability to express a wide range of music across various cultures and styles is essential. This skill becomes particularly important when engaging with the diverse repertoire of Chinese contemporary compositions.

Chinese contemporary piano repertoire can be broadly categorized into two main types: one based on traditional instruments and the other adapted from folk music and characterized by nationalist themes. Many celebrated Chinese composers draw from rich Asian cultural influences while employing innovative techniques to redefine instrumental sounds. Understanding these cultural nuances allows performers to convey the depth and richness of the music, enhancing the overall interpretive experience.

- Research Scope

In this document, my analysis starts with each piano work's cultural inspiration and background information. This is followed by a musical analysis covering melody, harmony, and form analysis.

Chapter II and Chapter III will focus on the piano work "The Willows are New." Chapter II delves into the harmonic styles of ancient Chinese music, particularly focusing on the Guqin and traditional modes, followed by a comprehensive introduction to the Guqin, a Chinese traditional instrument, from notation, sound, and timbre to the performance technique. In Chapter III, we will discuss Wang Wei's farewell poem and the Guqin work Yang Kuan. The composer

adapts the poem's symbolic willows and the melody from Yang Kuan. The study examines how Chou's use of pentatonic scales, dynamic variations, and tempo choices reflect the structure and aesthetics of traditional Guqin music and follows the performance guidance with various music excerpt analyses.

Chapter IV and Chapter V will focus on another piano work, "Numa Ame," by Zhang Zhao. Chapter IV provides an in-depth exploration of the Hani nationality, focusing on their unique folk music traditions and cultural values within the multi-ethnic landscape of China. It conveys the Hani people's cultural heritage, emotions, and social customs across generations. This chapter also includes a brief folk instrument introduction, which relates to the inspiration and musical ideas illustrated in this piano work. Chapter V examines how the composer combined the cultural elements with different compositional techniques and musical conceptions, addressing two different themes with specific selections of dynamic and tempo markings.

## **Chapter II Chinese Modes and Guqin**

### **1. Chinese Modes and Harmonic Style**

- Overview:

Western music history can be traced back as far as ancient Greek times, however, music as a 'high art' form was not meant to be shared among everyone before the 17th century. Music served the purpose of religious or philosophical beliefs, and it also served as entertainment for aristocrats. In addition to amusement, music also played a political role as a tool for centralizing state power in the Western world. The French king Louis XIV asserted his power through ballet and opera to emphasize his superiority. Louis XIV was obsessed with the sun, which can be observed in his

musical ideas and costumes. The idea of the sun comes from the Greek god Apollo, the "god of sun and music,"<sup>1</sup> giving the impression that he was the center of the universe.

The earliest evidence of Chinese music dates to the Shang Dynasty, which existed from approximately 1600 to 1046 B.C. Music-related activities can be traced back as early as the Neolithic era (around 6000–5000 B.C.). From approximately 2600–2100 BC, during the early stages of civilization, music was often shrouded in mystery and used in religious ceremonies, particularly witchcraft.<sup>2</sup> Based on the excavation and research of different archaeological sites, scholars condensed two distinct types of music and dance from depictions on pottery shards dating back 5000 years. The first type of music and dance reflects the life of tribes, and another one reflects music that celebrates the legendary ancient emperors. Due to how music is seen and used as it relates to the development of politics and culture, we can see how it evolved and improved from one Dynasty to the next. The most remarkable periods are the Zhou and Han dynasties.

The Zhou Dynasty (1046 BC-256 BC) was the longest dynastic period in Chinese history, lasting for 789 years. A wealthy government and prosperous society provided an ideal environment for cultural and musical development. Two of the most famous Chinese philosophers were born during this time. Confucius promoted a series of conceptions representing the root of traditional Chinese culture, and Laozi founded Taoism. Taoism is a fundamental religion in China that emphasizes the connection with nature<sup>3</sup>. Laozi also promoted the concept of Wu (nonbeing), which primarily means being "free of specification" and carries the secondary meaning of "potentiality."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Brown, Kacie. "Agenda-Driven Music in the Court of Louis XIV." *Aesthesis: The Interdisciplinary Honors Journal*, No.2, 10 (June 3, 2019). <https://pubs.lib.umn.edu/index.php/aisthesis/issue/view/129>.

<sup>2</sup> Jin, Jie. *Chinese music* 3rd ed. *Introductions to Chinese Culture*. Cambridge University Press, March 2011

<sup>3</sup> Shaw, Miranda. "Buddhist and Taoist Influences on Chinese Landscape Painting." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 49, no. 2 (1988): 183–206. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2709496>.

<sup>4</sup> Qiang, Yu, and Xin Yan. "The Theme and Logical Construction of the Taoist Philosophy." *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* 1, no. 1 (2006): 133–43. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30209958>.

He was a royal archivist for the Zhou court<sup>5</sup>. Zhou was a hierarchical dynasty that shared many similarities to medieval Europe. The King created very strict rules to enhance his power, such as dividing five classes by royal ranks, and each level required certain duties. Besides the law and the rules, he also used music to enhance his supreme power. The supreme form of hierarchical music in the Zhou Dynasty was Liu Dai Yue Wu, also known as Six Pieces of Music. This musical ensemble was regularly presented in the presence of the emperor, showcasing elaborate settings and many participants. There are very specific rules about Liu Dai Yue Wu, such as the number of dancers and the arrangement of instruments. Liu Dai Yue Wu represents the privilege of power and nobility; it is not meant for common people.

The development of folk music in the Zhou dynasty was also very remarkable. Because of the improvement of instrument-making techniques, Guqin became the most popular instrument among common people. Guqin, also called Chin, is a plucked string instrument. During the Zhou Dynasty, Confucianism focused on the inner world with virtuous and noble values. Chin music, therefore, became an excellent tool for people to express their spiritual worlds. Chin music is also associated with literati<sup>6</sup> and poetry, and it is the embodiment of Chinese literati's thoughts and spiritual realm. All the Chinese literati are inclined towards self-cultivation, firmly believing that mastery of four essential skills epitomizes noble virtue: Guqin (Qin), Go (Qi), calligraphy (Shu), and brush ink painting (Hua).

After the Zhou Dynasty, the first emperor, Qin Shi Huang, unified China and established the Qin Dynasty. He established the first official musical organization, which was called Yue Bu. This organization oversaw setting the rules of music used in the court, as well as collecting folk

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<sup>5</sup> Wright, Edmund. *The Desk Encyclopedia of World history*. Oxford England: Oxford University Press, 2006.

<sup>6</sup> literati, scholars in China and Japan whose poetry, calligraphy, and paintings were supposed primarily to reveal their cultivation and express their personal feelings rather than demonstrate professional skill.

music. These rules were only used within the palace and court.<sup>7</sup> Guqin music experienced significant developments during this period, reaching new heights, particularly during the Han Dynasty. The Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-220 A.D.) was a considerable period in Chinese history. The government adopted Confucianism as the dominant ideology and emphasized education, which impacted the rise of the literati class (also known as the scholar-officials). People from the literati class were highly educated, especially in literature, music, and arts, including calligraphy<sup>8</sup>. During the Han Dynasty, Chinese music became one of the core activities in the literati class. They even held regular meetings for Chin performers as a social activity, which was known as Yaji (雅集).

As court and folk music developed across the various dynasties mentioned earlier, the theory of music and the notation system became more mature. Han Dynasty was one of the most significant periods because of the establishment of Yue Bu, which acknowledged that music existed in all different levels of society. Yue Bu was a court organization with a comprehensive music production system. It contains four parts: Yue (music), qi (instrument), gong (musicians), and Yi (uniform). All the activities of Yue Bu are legally sanctioned under the Yuelin (law on music).<sup>9</sup>

- Scale and mode system:

Chinese music that is built on a pentatonic scale can be performed on a modern piano without deviating from the acoustic nature of the intervals as perceived by the human ear. The

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<sup>7</sup> Jin, Jie. Chinese music 3rd ed. Introductions to Chinese Culture. Cambridge University Press, March 2011

<sup>8</sup> Qiao, Cong-Rui. "Su Li (Author), Zhang Yongle, and Daniel A. Bell (Eds.), Edmund Ryden (Translator), The Constitution of Ancient China (Princeton University Press, 2018) 16-210 Pp. ISBN 9780691171593 (Online)." Cross-cultural Human Rights Review 1, no. 1-3 (2019): 205-.

<sup>9</sup> Xiaodun, Wang, Sun Xiaohui, and Chang Shijun. "Yuebu of the Tang Dynasty: Musical Transmission from the Han to the Early Tang Dynasty." Yearbook for Traditional Music 36 (2004): 50-64. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20058791>.

establishment of the Chinese scale and mode system required extensive research and analysis to fully comprehend. The earliest historical mention of the pentatonic scale comes from the books Master Lü's *Spring and Autumn Annals* (吕氏春秋) written by scholars Lü Buwei (吕不韦) in 241 B.C. and Guan Zi(管子) in the fourth century B.C. Guan Zi mentioned the method of adding and subtracting a third (三分损益法) in this book, and this method brings a foundation for the calculation of intervals and scales. Chu Tsai-Yu (朱载堉), an outstanding scientist and artist during the Ming Dynasty, discovered the method of twelve-tone equal temperament, which was almost a hundred years before Werkmeister did so in Europe. Based on his method, the most fundamental pentatonic scale was devised, Gong 宫, Shang 商, Chiao 角, Chih 徵, Yu 羽

C	D	E	G	A
Gong 宫	Shang 商	Chiao 角	Chih 徵	Yu 羽

Tablet 2.1: Chinese Pentatonic scale

Two more tones were added to the five-note pentatonic scale, creating something equivalent to the Greek Lydian mode. The two added tones are known as Bian Chih 变徵 and Bian Gong 变宫.

C	D	E	#F	G	A	B
Gong 宫	Shang 商	Chiao 角	Bian Chih 变徵	Chih 徵	Yu 羽	Bian Gong 变宫

Tablet 2.2: Chinese Heptatonic Scale

The Chinese pentatonic scale can be easily transformed into certain notes on the musical staff, thus, if we determine Gong as the C, the Gong mode as the five-tone notation is grouped as CDEGA, and DEGAB means Shang mode, EGACD as Jue mode. If we determine a different note as the tonic note of Gong mode, the other notes of the scale can be switched easily based on the intervals in Gong mode. For example, D Gong mode is DE#FBC, with #F as Bian Chih. Because of the similarity of intervals, the Chinese pentatonic scale is linked to the construction of Western church modes.

Ancient Gong tiao	F G A B C D E F
F Lydian mode	F G A B C D E F
Ancient Chih tiao	A B C D E F G
Aeolian mode	A B C D E F G

Tablet 2.3: Chinese Heptatonic Scale Compare with Western Church Modes

## 2. Guqin

- Technique and Notation

Guqin (usually pronounced as Chin) is also known as the seven-stringed zither. The earliest example of this instrument was discovered in the fifth century B.C. Earlier versions are shorter and have ten strings, indicating that the music was likely different from what we hear today. During the Western Jin dynasty (265-316), the instrument evolved into its current form, with seven twisted silk strings of varying thicknesses<sup>10</sup>. The structure of the Chin contains seven parallel strings attached to a wooden surface platform, and each part of it has a meaning. The entire length of this instrument (in Chinese measurements) is 3 chi, 6 cun and 5 fen, and those numbers correspond with the 365 days of the year.

The two main philosophical systems of China, Confucianism, and Taoism, promote the idea of Junzi 君子 (known as Gentleman) and Wenren 文人 (known as literati), people who are well-educated and focus on moral and ethical aspects. Finding a good balance between the inner and outer world is an essential ability that takes much effort. The Confucians and Taoists think that the choice of music could influence society. The intentional use of music can positively influence human behavior, catalyzing moral guidance and social order. Conversely, the absence of music may disrupt a well-balanced societal harmony. The Confucians promote four arts ( 琴棋书画 ) as the four required skills that Chinese literati need to learn. Having a good technique to perform Guqin is one of those skills. Many literati and poets write poems to represent their appreciation of the Guqin music. In “Chuan Ye Yuan Chin” 船夜援琴 (A Boat in the Night, Playing the Chin), Bai Juyi writes:

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<sup>10</sup> Moore, J. Kenneth. “The Qin.” In Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. [http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/mqin/hd\\_mqin.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/mqin/hd_mqin.htm) (October 2003)

A Boat in the Night, Playing the Chin	船夜援琴
Roosting birds, immobile fish	鳥棲魚不動
Moonlight on the night river deepens it	月照夜江深
Beyond me, there's nothing	身外都不是
Just a qin in the boat	舟中只有琴
Seven strings, my beneficial friends	七弦為益友
Two ears their knowing listeners	兩耳是知音
A quiet heart and mind make sounds bland	心靜即聲淡
In the intervals, it's neither now nor antiquity	其間無古今

In Bai Juyi's poem, the universe is compared to a vast boat, where music encompasses the entirety of existence and serves as the only reliable possession. Through techniques such as vibrato resembling grace notes and the subtle tonal shifts of the qin, humans and nature converge into a profound emptiness, transcending the boundaries of time and space to reveal the fundamental essence of existence in the universe.<sup>11</sup> This poem represented an idea that captivated the defined sensibilities of ancient Chinese culture.

During the Ming Dynasty, there was a trend of Guqin performance within the literati class. They suggested that Chin should be played outdoors with mountains around or near an old pine tree (symbol of longevity) while incense perfumed the atmosphere. Performing Guqin music under the moonlight at night was considered the most appropriate way. From those perspectives, Chin's

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<sup>11</sup> Qing, Tian, and Scott Davis. "The Ancient Qin 琴, Musical Instrument of Cultured Chinese Gentlemen." *Journal of Chinese Literature and Culture* 3, no. 1 (2016): 108-136. [muse.jhu.edu/article/618683](http://muse.jhu.edu/article/618683).

performance also reflects a Taoist conception, Tian Ren He Yi (天人合一), which reflects the balance between nature and humans. This perspective is one of the most fundamental ideas of traditional Chinese music, and it has influenced the style throughout the entire period until the contemporary era. Based on this trend, many ink-brush paintings of Guqin performers playing alone with beautiful views surrounding them, such as mountains and waterfalls.



Figure 2.1: Chinese traditional Ink-brush painting of Guqin performer under the pine tree


During the development of the Guqin over 2000 years, many pieces have been recorded and collected by musicologists and Guqin players in a source called Chin-Pu. The collections of

Chin-Pu can be traced back to the Tang Dynasty<sup>12</sup>. They offer a diverse repertoire and serve as a valuable resource for performers and musicians to gain a deeper understanding of this instrument and its music. Chin-Pu also introduces notations and finger techniques used in playing the instrument. The notation form of Guqin was called Jianzi Pu (减字谱), it was written in a tablature with Chinese characters. It is interesting to note that each note (Character) contains all the information for performers, such as tones, fingerings, finger positions, and finger technique.

For example, here is a list of Guqin fingering.

大	Ta, Thumb
中	Chung, Middle finger
夕/名	Ming, Ring finger
食	Shih, Second finger

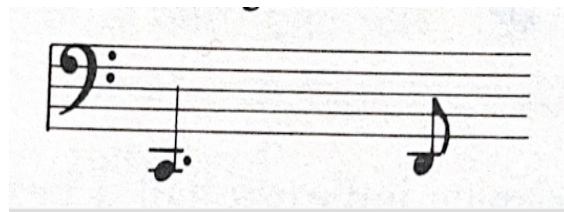
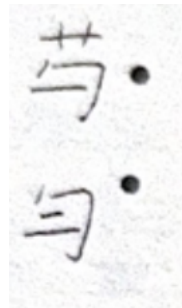
Here is a typical compound character followed by an explanation of each part.


 夕 **left-hand ring finger**  
 九 **presses at *hui* position 9**  
 勺 **while right middle finger**  
     **plucks inward**  
 三 **on string 3**

Figures 2.2: Example of Guqin notation with specific explanation from *The Mei-An Chin Pu*

<sup>12</sup> Wang, Binlu, and Fredric Lieberman. *A Chinese Zither Tutor = the Mei-an Chin-Pu*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1983.

However, the information on rhythm in Jianzi Pu is less specific than the five staves in Western musical notation. The most important element of Guqin music is not the rhythm but the sound. Therefore, Jianzi Pu only contains rhythmic clues and not specific note values. In Guqin notation, a dot followed by a symbol character represents one beat, but when it is placed to the upper right of two characters in a vertical position, it means the first character contains one and a half beats, and the second one contains half of a beat.



Figures 2.3: The explanation of rhythmic notation from The *Mei-An Chin Pu*

In one of the studies of Chinese qin music, Frank Kouwenhoven mentioned the significance of rhythmic freedom in Guqin performance. He provides a parallel between Guqin's performance practice and the *parlando-rubato* style found in the 18th-century French harpsichord music, suggesting a shared emphasis on expressive freedom and emotional depth. This comparison illustrates how rhythm in both traditions serves not only as a structural element but also as a carrier of musical expression.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Kouwenhoven, Frank. "Meaning and Structure: The Case of Chinese Qin (Zither) Music." *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 10, no. 1 (2001): 39–62. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3060771>.

Guqin playing demands precise coordination between both hands, each employing unique techniques. These finger techniques help create the subtle nuances of the Guqin sound. In "Chin-Pu," Guqin scholars offer various illustrations of finger techniques, often adapting inspiration from nature to explain hand gestures and motions. Additionally, certain illustrations contain deeper meanings and clues regarding tone quality and dynamics at the precise moment when the finger plucks the string. For example, there are two finger techniques for the right hand, called Tuo 托 and Pi 擘, which require the performer to pluck the string with energy using the thumb.

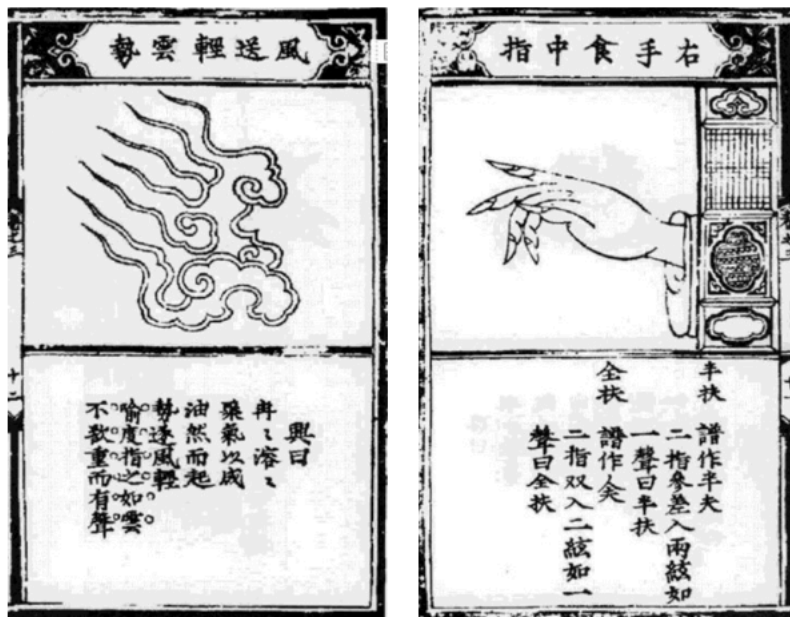


Figures 2.4: The crane dances when the wind startles (风惊鹤舞势)<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Yang Fen. "Imagery in Fingers, Meaning in Gestures: Structure, Connotations, and Interpretation of the Life Spirit of Guqin Finger Techniques." *Journal of Nanjing University of the Arts (Music and Performance Edition)*, no. 1 (2020): 100–108.

In the example above, the left page is titled "The crane dances when the wind startles." This title indicates a symbolic connection to the picture on the right, which portrays the hand gesture and finger placement. As the thumb plucks the string, the right hand's gesture subtly tilts, positioning the thumb to rest lightly on the Guqin's surface while creating a delicate space between the thumb and index finger. This stance mirrors the graceful spread of a crane's wings, evoking an aura of confidence and poise.

All Guqin finger technique markings contain dynamic guidance, along with the function of finger motion and hand gesture. Fu 扶 is a special finger technique for the index and middle fingers of the right hand, considering the approach to dynamics with sensitive nuance.



Figures 2.5: Guqin Hand Position- The wind blows, and the soft clouds move (风送轻云势)<sup>15</sup>

In the example above, the left page can be translated as "The wind blows, and the soft clouds move," reflecting the soft sound produced by the index and middle fingers touching the

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

strings together. However, this technique does not mention a specific finger position, which requires that both fingers touch the string together at the same time or with the same weight. Thus, the sound can be slightly different.

The sound and finger technique of Guqin has over 40 different types of notations. In addition to the technique and various sound effects, the reverb of the notes also represents another significant feature of Guqin music. This refers to the concept of extending sounds beyond the range perceivable by the human ear. Musical rest encompasses more than just breaks and disruptions; it includes gradually fading audible tones. This effect is sustained by hand and finger movements, which may persist for a duration even after any audible pitch has vanished.<sup>16</sup>

- Features of sound

The range of the Guqin roughly contains three and a half octaves, but alternative tuning can extend its range even further. Due to its limited dynamic range and soft sound quality, it is not a suitable instrument for public performances. This is part of the reason that many Guqin performers from the Literati class mainly make music for themselves in private. However, for a long time, Guqin used to be considered part of the orchestra for court ritual music.<sup>17</sup> Even though the scores and records of music from the court ritual performance have been lost, scholars can still trace those activities back to the remains of cultural relics. In this dissertation, we will mainly focus on Guqin as a solo instrument.

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<sup>16</sup> Kouwenhoven, Frank. "Meaning and Structure: The Case of Chinese Qin (Zither) Music." *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 10, no. 1 (2001): 39–62. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3060771>.

<sup>17</sup> Bell Yung. "An Audience of One: The Private Music of the Chinese Literati." *Ethnomusicology* 61, no. 3 (2017): 506–39. <https://doi.org/10.5406/ethnomusicology.61.3.0506>.

The tone of Guqin can be roughly divided into three types: San Yin(散音), An Yin (按音) , and Fan Yin(泛音). San Yin is the sound produced by the right hand plucking the open string. There are seven San Yin pitches on the Guqin, like the diatonic scale.

The three types of Guqin tones bear resemblance to the sounds produced by string instruments. The San yin corresponds to natural harmonics, as it involves techniques that generate specific pitches through the manipulation of open strings. This is achieved by varying the length of the string when it is touched, allowing for a rich tapestry of sound that enhances the expressive quality of the performance. San Yin is only played by the right hand, with the whole string vibrating and having a bell-like sound. Fan Yin is lighter compared to San Yin; a light touch on the string can produce it. Fan Yin is like artificial harmonics on the violin, where a whisper-like sound is created an octave higher than the fundamental pitch.

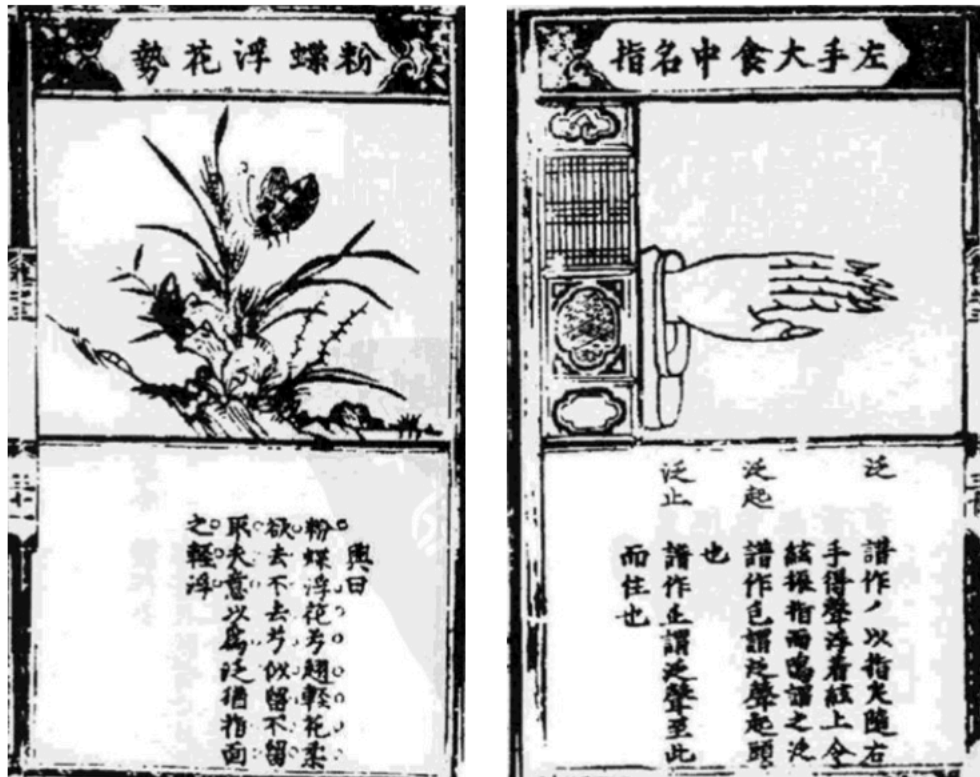
Here are two symbolic pictures illustrating the sound and technique of Fan Yin from Chin Pu. Both images implement the sound and indicate hand posture.



Figures 2.6: Guqin Hand Position- Dragonfly Touching the Water's Surface (蜻蜓点水势)<sup>18</sup>

In the example above, the left page can be translated as "Dragonfly Touching the Water's Surface." This image captures a dragonfly delicately skimming or lightly tapping the surface of the water with its abdomen, creating ripples. It can be considered a symbolic concept, easily interpreted with the Fan Yin technique. A light touch creates sound vibrations akin to the ripples formed by a dragonfly.

<sup>18</sup> Yang Fen. "Imagery in Fingers, Meaning in Gestures: Structure, Connotations, and Interpretation of the Life Spirit of Guqin Finger Techniques." *Journal of Nanjing University of the Arts (Music and Performance Edition)*, no. 1 (2020): 100–108.



Figures 2.7: Guqin Hand Position- Butterfly Drifting among Flowers (粉蝶浮花勢)<sup>19</sup>

Another example in the top picture can be translated as 'Butterfly Drifting among Flowers.' It captures the moment when a butterfly flies and drifts among the flowers to suck nectar from them. This example mainly showcases the relationship between the fingers and the strings, gently touching the surface of the string without immediately lifting the finger to maintain a soft and sustained sound.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

### Chapter III Analysis of "The Willows Are New"

#### 1. Background information:

"The *Willows Are New*" is the only piano solo composition Chou Wen-Chung wrote during his lifetime. He is the first composer from China to achieve acclaim in Western countries, and his compositions have inspired younger generations of composers for more than two decades. As a composer and pioneer, Chou created the compositional concept of 'Confluence,' symbolizing the merging of diverse cultures. This concept reflects his main philosophy as a composer and illustrates the fundamental context of his musical works.

- The connection between "Yang Kuan" and "The willows are new"

Wang Wei (699-759 A.D), one of the most significant poets from the Tang Dynasty, composed a poem *To Yuan Erh on his way to Ansi*, which is one of the most famous farewell poems in China.<sup>20</sup> The poem represents a deep emotional resonance of farewell and longing, which is also associated with traditional Chinese culture. The emotions of departure were described with control and subtle hints of potential challenges and dangers that would decrease the traveler's chance of returning home in the future.

Here is the context of this poem, which was translated by the composer:

*In this town by the river,*

*morning rain*

*Has cleared the light dust.*

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<sup>20</sup> Yin-Liu, Yan, and Isabel Wong. "A Preliminary Study of "Three Variations on Yang Kuan 陽關三疊", an Ancient Song." *Asian Music* 5, no. 1 (1973): 10–23. <https://doi.org/10.2307/833730>.

*Green, green around the tavern,*

*The willows are new.*

*Let us empty another cup of wine!*

*For, once west of Yang Kuan*

*There will be no more friends<sup>21</sup>.*

Yang Kuan, symbolized as agate, is situated on the border of China's landscape, known for its desolation due to persistent warfare. The poet captures a poignant moment of farewell, expressing reluctant emotions toward his friend. This poem gained immense popularity and was eventually set to music in the Yee Chou Ta Ch'U collection during the Tang Dynasty<sup>22</sup>. Yee Chou Ta Ch'U is a renowned folk song collection featuring melodies from the border of China. Over time, this folk song was adapted into Guqin music, structured in three sections, and continued to be performed through subsequent dynasties to this day.

The melody of *The willows are new* was adapted from the Guqin piece "Yang Kuan," which is associated with a poem of the same title. However, rather than retaining the same title as the Guqin piece and the poem, Chou chose to adopt the most significant symbol from a line in the poem as the title of his piano composition. The willow tree is a common symbol in Chinese culture, representing the emotions one goes through when bidding farewell to loved ones. In the Chinese language, because "liu" (willows) and "liu" (stay) share the same pronunciation, Willow trees also reflect a reluctant feeling in literature.

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<sup>21</sup> "The willows are new (after Wang Wei's Yang Kuan)." New York: C.F. Peters Corp., 1960.

<sup>22</sup> Yin-Liu, Yan, and Isabel Wong. "A Preliminary Study of "Three Variations on Yang Kuan 陽關三疊", an Ancient Song." *Asian Music* 5, no. 1 (1973): 10–23. <https://doi.org/10.2307/833730>.

- Three Variations on Yang Kuan

Wang Wei's poem gained much popularity, and many Guqin musicians decided to transcribe and adapt it as a Chin song. A Chin song is another significant music form of Guqin music, which is a combination of instrumental playing and poem. Guqin musicians composed melodies suitable for the poem to sing and play for self-enjoyment. The lyrics of Chin songs are typically inspired by poems written by literati and poets, and they are adapted in various forms or lengths to suit the flowing melody. These songs often represent various themes, such as landscapes, emotions, or narratives from the past. Guqin can convey a wide range of emotions through its sound and can match the human voice, many of its music can be performed as solo pieces or involve singing together with the lyrics.

When Wang Wei initially wrote this poem for Yuan Erh, it may not have been intended as a musical piece. It is very likely that shortly after the poem was finished, this four-line poem was revised and extended into a song format that could be performed publicly. The first version of this piece was traced back to the Tang Dynasty, and it was included in the book *Yi Chou Da Qu*. The earliest Guqin score was collected as *Zhe Yin Shi Zi Chin-Pu*, which was edited and collected by Gong Jing in the Ming Dynasty.

## 2. Performance Guide to "The Willows are New" :

This work effectively embodies Chou's distinctive aesthetic vision and compositional approach. It is characterized by continuously evolving pentatonic themes viewed from various perspectives. To fully understand and appreciate this work, I will provide a detailed analysis that

includes form, harmony, notation, and sound features. One of the most significant characteristics of this piano work is the seamless integration of pentatonic scales and the process of mood change.

- Structure and Mode

The piece can be divided into four sections: an introduction, two variations, and a coda. This is the typical structure of Guqin Music. The pentatonic scale plays an important role in this piece. The composer uses half-step modulations to connect different sections smoothly.

Intro	First variation			Second variation			Coda
	A	B1	B2	A'	B1'	B2'	
<b>1</b>	2-22	23-30	31-47	48-74	75-106	107-124	125-145
<b>F# Yu</b>	E Chih	#F Yu- G Yu	G Yu	#F Yu	#F Yu- G Yu	#F Yu	#F Yu

Tablet 3.1 *The Willows are New* sections and key center

According to Chou, two important processes relate to mood changes. 1. Using common tones as a pivot note between tonal planes. 2. Emphasizing or sustaining a neighbor tone or a chordal tone (unrelated to the scale tone) at the end of a running passage or after a fermata to usher in a new tonal plane.<sup>23</sup>

Regarding structure and key center relationships between each variation, the half-step modulation is very evident. As shown in the table of sections and key centers above, the first theme

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<sup>23</sup> Nicolas Slonimsky, "Chou Wen-Chung," American Composers Alliance bulletin, 9 (1961) :4

of the first variation is in the key of E, and it moves up by one step to F# in the first theme of the second variation. The melodic line extends from E-F#-A-B to F#-A-B-C. Unlike typical Western music, which emphasizes the harmonic tension and release of phrase structures to form cadences, the focus is more on melodic structure, in which the pitches move in smaller intervals to ensure a smooth transformation between each section.



Music Excerpt 3.1: *The Willows are New*, the First theme of the first variation



Music Excerpt 3.2: *The Willows are New*, the First theme of the second variation

Other examples of this modulation technique can be found when comparing the first two variations. As shown in the table above, theme A moves up by one step from the first variation to the second variation, while the B2 theme moves down by half step, from G-F-G to F#-E-F#.



Music Excerpt 3.3: *The Willows are New*, B2 theme from the first variation



Music Excerpt 3.4: *The Willows are New*, B2 theme from the second variation

Unlike Western music, which emphasizes the tonic-dominant connection and dramatic contrasts between major and minor keys, this piece utilizes melodic techniques like transposition by small intervals and harmonic progressions that give it a flowing character. For example, comparing measures 23-25 and measures 31-33, the melodic material B-A-F#-A moves up a half step to C-Bb-G-Bb, a decision based on the original melodic ideas of Guqin music. Additionally, the bass voice is arranged to modulate by half steps to match the horizontal harmonic progression of the top voice. The parallel motion of both the top and bass voices enhances the flowing and peaceful character of the piece.

Music Excerpt 3.5: *The Willows are New*, mm.23-34

- Tempo and Dynamic Choice

This piano piece retains the essence and musical characteristics of the original Guqin music. Its structure is simple, but musically, it deeply reflects Chinese musical aesthetics with an elaborate musical design. The composer incorporated various dynamic and tempo markings, not only in line with Guqin music features but also reflecting choices based on Chinese classical aesthetic principles. This choice is deeply connected with Chou's earlier career and educational background.

At the beginning of Chou's career, his passion for blending Eastern and Western music was notably embraced by Nicolas Slonimsky, who encouraged him to focus on Chinese music study. After exploring Chinese classical music, he concentrated on subjects like qin music, compared different Chinese art forms, and delved into the impact of Chinese philosophy and religion on the arts. A moral principle that has consistently guided Chou throughout his career is *Wenren* (文人), translated as Chinese literati. This notion encompasses the idea of cultivating oneself to be cultured, well-educated, and focused on moral and ethical aspects. Guqin and traditional Chinese music

provide a valuable platform for Chinese literati to express their inspiration and spirit. These experiences molded his distinctive compositional style and musical ideas, and this piano piece serves as a notable example reflecting his compositional philosophy.

One of the most significant differences between Western and Chinese classical music is that Western music mainly focuses on harmonic development, with melody placed in a secondary position. Chinese classical music, on the contrary, is mainly concerned with pure melody. Additionally, due to the close relationship between language and music, the alternation of higher and lower pitches tightly connects with the phonetic elements of the Chinese language. Yang Kuan is a strong example of this phenomenon.

In both Guqin music and the Piano transcription, the melodic line emphasizes simplicity, focusing on horizontal development rather than chordal progression. This deliberate choice results in a piece characterized by a smooth and organic unfolding of the melody. From the opening section, the tempo and dynamic markings provide a clear indication of the overall character of the piece, conveying a sense of peacefulness. Chou writes meticulous performance indications for the performers in this piece. In the beginning, he writes with both intense and restrained feelings, incorporating Rubato, which may seem like conflicting ideas. This choice mirrors the tempo characteristics of Guqin music, where there are no specific tempo markings on the Chin-pu, and emotional expression is meant to relate to the lyrics or title of the piece.

Lento ma non troppo ♩ = c. 80 (♩ = c. 160)  
with intense but restrained feeling  
Rubato (loco)

CHOU WEN-CHUNG  
allarg.

ppp poco più

Sua bassa al fine

Tempo giusto

mp mf

Music Excerpt 3.6: *The Willows are New*, mm.1-6

At the close of the first measure, he marked '*allarg.*' to facilitate a smooth transition into '*Tempo giusto*' (a return to strict time), marking the onset of the main theme at measure two. The time signature alternatively switched between 3/4, 5/8, and 2/4, indicating the *Tempo giusto* and showing the clear direction of the music development.

Another example of Chou's thoughtful tempo marking selection involves his integration of tempo with dynamic interpretation to depict subtle changes within the phrase. For instance, he created an impactful effect by indicating a gradual decrease in sound at the end of the phrase. Throughout the piece, he marked 'Morendo' (Slow down with the sound dying away) with 'PP' dynamics three times to signify the gradual fading of sound at the end of each Variation and the Coda section.

The image shows two systems of a musical score for piano. The first system is marked 'Tempo primo' and includes the instruction 'Espirando' in a red box. The piano part features dynamic markings: 'più f' (highlighted in red), 'poco p', and 'poco f'. The second system also includes 'Espirando' in a red box and features 'loco' and 'poco p' markings. Both systems conclude with 'Poco animando' and 'mp' markings. The score includes treble and bass clefs, various time signatures (3/4, 2/4, 3/4, 2/4), and dynamic markings such as 'più', 'poco', 'mp', 'f', and 'p'.

Music Excerpt 3.7: *The Willows are New*, mm.53-64

In the music excerpts from mm. 53-64, Chou marked 'Espirando' (Dying away) and 'Estringuendo' (literally translated to 'extinguishing' in English) later at mm.98-99, both indicating a gradual decrease in sound.

The image shows a musical score for piano, specifically measures 98-103. The score is marked 'Tempo primo' and includes the instruction 'Estringuendo' in a red box. The piano part features dynamic markings: 'ff', 'poco p', 'poco f', 'f', 'mp', and 'meno f'. The score includes treble and bass clefs, various time signatures (2/4, 3/4, 2/4, 3/4, 2/4), and dynamic markings such as 'ff', 'poco', 'f', 'mp', and 'meno f'.

Music Excerpt 3.8: *The Willows are New*, mm.98-103

However, the composer placed them after the energetic rolling chords from the high register with fortissimo dynamics. Chou controlled the volume range of the sound extremely well, emphasizing

the flow of the music and avoiding precise sound peaks within musical phrases, which is also one of the important sound characteristics of Guqin music.

The choice of dynamic signs also reflects an important conception from ancient Chinese aesthetics: "start with feelings and control with propriety"(发于情，而止于礼). This aesthetic conception was originally associated with the literati and literature works. The literati believe that poetry and lyrics stem from authentic emotions, but these literature works should be composed implicitly, avoiding excessiveness and overreaction. In this piano work, Chou incorporates this idea into the music, with subtle understatement connected well with restraint in musical expression. Emotional expression is achieved through a restricted range of tempo and dynamics, complemented by a wider and extended vocal range. Due to its intentional design, unlike typical Western classical music, the entire piece lacks important peaks or climaxes.

- Voice range and tone feature from Guqin to Piano

Despite the Guqin's capability to play pitches within a range of four octaves, the composer chose to extend the range of the sound by enriching the texture into a broader expansion and maximizing the display of the piano's reverberation. The short one-measure introduction provides a clear hint of a strong connection and voice features from Guqin music. Chou marked *8va bassa al fine* at the bottom of the score, which indicated that all notes in the Left Hand are to be played an octave lower. The composer aimed to extend the range of the keyboard and imitate the border range and various timbres on the Guqin.

Lento ma non troppo ♩ = c. 80 (♩ = c. 160)  
 with intense but restrained feeling  
 Rubato

CHOU WEN-CHUNG  
 allarg.

*ppp*

*(loco)*

*poco*

*più*

*8va bassa al fine*

Music Excerpt 3.9: *The Willows are New*, mm.1

Figure 3.1: Range of the Guqin

Comparing the range between Yang Kuan's original Guqin score and Chou's transcription, the widest range extends from one octave on the Guqin to five octaves on the piano. This adaptation hugely increases the emotional expression of piano music. For example, here are two music excerpts from the Guqin and Piano scores. The blue frame represents the peak of the first variation from both instruments.

瑟五四竽瑟 荀瑟<sup>上七六</sup>荀瑟<sup>上七六</sup> 繁琶瑟琶<sup>色上九</sup> 瑟 荀  
 霜夜與霜晨 遠行 遠行 長途越度 关 津,

Music Excerpts 3.10: Guqin Yang Kuan

4  
 Meno mosso  
 p poco f  
 Tempo  
 gva gva  
 Stringendo  
 p cresc.  
 loco...  
 A tempo ma meno mosso  
 Tempo primo  
 p poco f p cresc.  
 loco...  
 (Svā ba.) (Svā ba.)  
 Poco più mosso

Music Excerpts 3.11: *The Willows are New* mm.23-34

According to Guqin performance traditions, performers are encouraged to approach the instrument with sincerity and creativity, as this is essential for discovering different timbres and sound qualities. Summarizing the relationship between musical tone and meaning, Chou writes:

... every single tone or aggregate of tones is a musical entity and a living spark of expression if it lasts.

Therefore, it was also believed that the meaning of music lies intrinsically in the tones themselves, and that

maximum expressiveness can be derived from a succession of tones without resorting to extraneous procedures.<sup>24</sup>

Based on the conception of transcription, Chou extended and divided the score into three voice ranges to illustrate the basic concept of three typical tones of the Guqin on the piano: San Yin (散音), An Yin (按音), and Fan Yin (泛音), which also related with Tian (天), Di (地), Ren (人) three philosophy conceptions.<sup>25</sup> He divided the melodic lines and arranged them in different pitch ranges, greatly reflecting the differences in the piano's high, middle, and low registers and successfully corresponding to the three tones found in Guqin music. At the same time, the extremely low pitch range in the left-hand helps enhance the rich sound effect.

Music Excerpts 3.12: *The Willows are New*, mm.24-35

<sup>24</sup> Chou, Wen-Chung. “Excerpts from ‘Towards a Re-Merger in Music.’” Chou Wen-Chung Official Website. Accessed March 17, 2024. <https://chouwenchung.org/en/writing/excerpts-from-towards-a-re-merger-in-music/>.

<sup>25</sup> More explanation from Chapter 1

- Timbre and Sound between Guqin and Piano

Timbre and sound between Guqin and Piano are particularly evident in *The Willows Are New*, especially in how articulation and dynamics are structured. The composer highlights the fundamental guiding principle for performers in the performance notes on the first page of the score.

1. Performance of the disjointed melodic line should aim for a smooth continuity.

2. The expressiveness of the phrases, marked with slurs, can best be achieved through following the careful gradation of the dynamic marks.

To match the original sound from Guqin, a flat finger touch will help the performer project a soft and smooth sound. It is very important to clearly intend to notate the structure of the phrase to illustrate its direction.

Music Excerpts 3.13: *The Willows are New* mm.2-11

For example, in the red and blue frames marked on the score, Chou uses minor ninth and minor second intervals throughout the bass voice and top voice to imitate the microtonal pitches

of Guqin. The composer deliberately adapted many dissonant intervals to break the limitation of the piano's fixed pitches while replicating the subtle sound variations between individual notes on the Guqin resulting from different plucking techniques. In the Guqin music tradition, a sliding tone is called *Zou Shou Yin* (走手音), which can be translated as "running hand tone." It is one of the most characteristic tones in Guqin music, typically produced through vibrato and portamento techniques. The section highlighted in blue provides an additional example akin to the running hand technique on the piano, which is usually executed using the Yin finger technique on the Guqin. However, to accurately replicate the sound and timbre of the original Guqin tone, the pianist needs to use a flat-finger approach and maintain the pedal throughout the entire passage to produce the microtones.

At m.26, at the top of the figure, Chou extended the distance between the bass and the top major seventh chord five octaves apart, and the accent added an extra melancholic mood here.

Music Excerpts 3.14: *The willows are new*, mm.83-88

This piece contains many rolling chords and ornamentations with active dynamic signs. For example, in the red-circled section, except for 3.14, the rolling chord must be played with a gesture that produces a smooth and flowing sound effect. A flexible wrist and a flat-finger approach will be helpful for the pianist to produce the appropriate sound, and it will also be helpful for the performer to control the slight volume changes within the dynamic sign. It reflects the rich depth of Guqin music since it illustrates the combination of softness and solidity with subtle nuances and various tone colors through complex plucking techniques.

## **Chapter IV Hani Nationality and Folk Music Character**

### **1. Background information on Hani's nationality**

China is a multi-ethnic nation composed of 56 distinct ethnic groups and has cultivated a vast array of intangible cultural heritage throughout its extensive history and civilization. This has fostered the emergence of diverse and unique artistic expressions. Notably, China's folk music encompasses a wide variety of genres, including more than three hundred forms of xiqu (traditional operatic performances), an extensive collection of folk songs, and a sophisticated repertoire of folk instruments alongside unique local and regional instrumental ensembles.<sup>26</sup> Considering the rich musical features of various regions and reflecting its vast cultural and geographic diversity, Chinese folk music can be roughly divided into six geographic areas: south of the Yangtze River region, the Chinese northern plain, the Northwest Mountain region, the Southwest region, Inner

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<sup>26</sup> Boyu, Zhang, Yao Hui, and Huib Schippers. "Report: The Rise and Implementation of Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection for Music in China." *The World of Music* 4, no. 1 (2015): 45–59. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43561466>.

Mongolia, and the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. This chapter will introduce the folk music style of the Hani ethnic group from the Yunnan region in the Southwest Mountain area of China.

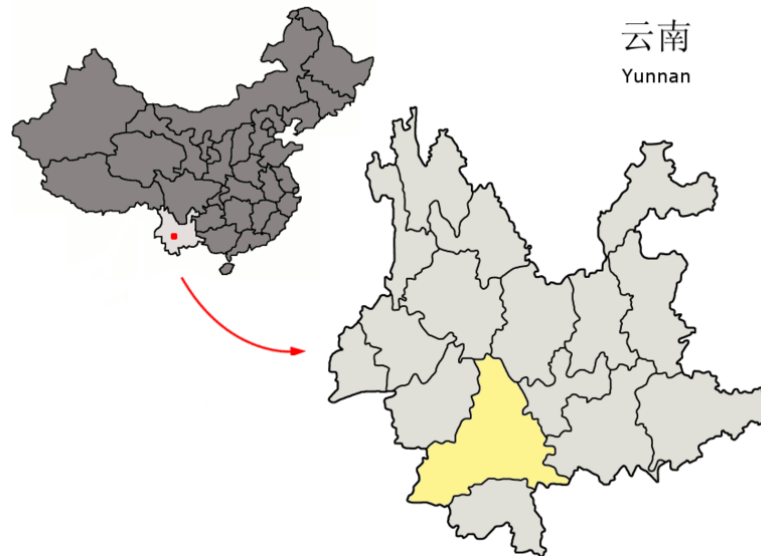


Figure 4.1: The map of Yunnan province

Yunnan Province is a typical multi-ethnic region in China. In addition to the Han (汉) nationality, there are 25 ethnic minorities, with the Hani (哈尼) being one of the most significant due to their unique culture and historical background. The Hani people mainly live in the mountainous terrain near the Hong River in southern Yunnan, also known as the Ailao mountain range. The ancestors of the Hani ethnic group originally lived in a distant northern area with a pastoral lifestyle in a plain called "Numa Ame."<sup>27</sup> Due to disturbances from other ethnic groups, they migrated south and settled in the Ailao mountain range. This significant change in habitat,

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<sup>27</sup> Sun, Min. "The Flow of Rural Sentiment from Fingertips: Performance Research and Emotional Expression of the Chinese Piano Piece 'Numa Ame'." *Voice of the Yellow River* 09 (2023): 110-113. <https://doi.org/10.19340/j.cnki.hhzs.2023.09.010>.

from plains to mountains, impacted their culture and agricultural practices, marking a transition from nomadism to settled agriculture.



Figure 4.2: View of Hani Village

The Hani people hold the belief that water is the essential element that sustains life and forms the basis of the world. They also emphasize the importance of harmony between humans and nature, seeing the two as interconnected rather than in conflict. The Hani people have developed a comprehensive agricultural system known as Terraced Rice Fields, which has a history of over 1300 years. To protect and develop their principal source of livelihood, they ingeniously constructed a channel system to bring water from the forest mountaintops to the terraced fields. This traditional farming method protects the natural environment and nurtures the grain; it also builds up a good balance between forests, rice fields, villages, and rivers. After the autumn harvest season, the Hani people continue to divert water into the Terraced Rice Fields to cultivate fish. This effective irrigation system not only nourishes the Hani people but also creates a stunning landscape. In 2013, the Terraced Rice Fields have been collected into a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The agricultural culture of primitive Hani people and their reliance on nature for survival instilled a deep sense of reverence for the natural world among the local people. This respect gradually gave rise to a variety of rituals and blessing ceremonies. They believed that music and dance could serve as a bridge to communicate with the gods, expressing their hopes for a bountiful harvest and praying for favorable weather in the coming year.

- Folk music of Hani - Vocal

The Hani people do not possess a written language and rely entirely on oral tradition to preserve and transmit their cultural heritage and history. Folk songs play a vital role in this process, being passed down and transformed from generation to generation. As civilization progressed, Hani folk songs gradually evolved beyond their initial purpose of ritualistic worship, becoming expressions of the emotions, daily lives, and social customs of the people. Generally, Hani folk music can be categorized into different types based on function, such as polyphonic choral singing and instrumental dance music. These include love duets between men and women, work songs, and other forms.

The polyphonic chorus is one of the most significant and unique types of performance by the Hani people. The term 'polyphony' refers to a form of performance in which two or more singers simultaneously perform multiple vocal parts within a folk song. Hani polyphonic folk songs can be divided into two categories: those accompanied by instruments and those performed without instrumental accompaniment but with vocal support from other performers.<sup>28</sup> Both

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<sup>28</sup>Tan Ruiwen. "Exploration of the Polyphonic Folk Songs of the Hani People in Honghe, Yunnan." *Home of Drama*, no. 34 (2020): 76–77.

categories of polyphonic folk songs are mainly performed during their planting occasion, ceremony, and harvest celebration.

The performance forms of the polyphonic chorus contain different types: *a cappella* and choir with instrumental accompaniment, all-female chorus, mixed choir, and solo with orchestra accompaniment. The folk song of planting ( 栽秧山歌 ) is the most representative polyphonic chorus of the Hani people. Hani polyphonic folk songs have developed alongside social activities, particularly rice farming in terraced fields. The lyrics of planting songs are deeply connected to the Hani people's agricultural practices and are reflective of their planting scenes. These folk songs also express their emotions and beliefs about nature, the mountains, their reflections on love and life. The occasions for performing Hani polyphonic folk songs are diverse, with terraced fields, forests, and villages all serving as performance spaces. Typically, there is one lead singer accompanied by six female singers providing harmonies. These performances may be accompanied by instruments or sung a cappella. The instruments used are usually handmade by the residents and include the sanxian, Yi Ethnicity flute, drums, and leaves.



Figure 4.3: The Performance events of Planting Folk song

In ancient times, people utilized drums to convey information and signals. Among the Hani people, who reside in the numerous mountains and valleys of the Ailao Mountain range, each village was isolated, and transportation was severely hindered. Consequently, drums became a vital means of communication. When natural disasters approached, the urgent beating of drums served as a warning for the people to exercise caution and avoid danger. Over time, drumming was integrated into ceremonies and the daily life of the Hani people. They express their emotions and positive attitudes through drumming and dancing. The drum evolved into a form of entertainment and an important accompaniment for folk music.



Figure 4.4: The Performance of Planting Folk Song with Drummer and Dancer

- Folk music of Hani - Instrument

#### I. Percussion instrument: Máng and Drum (铙鼓)

Across Yunnan, more than 20 ethnic groups have developed distinct drum dances and cultural practices centered around drumming. Historically, drums were used as signaling instruments, transmitting information across the isolated mountainous villages. Their loud sound and energetic rhythmic patterns made them the essential percussion instruments for a wide range of occasions, from ceremonies to communal gatherings. The Máng, a gong-like instrument, often accompanies the drum in performance, further enriching the sonic landscape with its resonant, metallic timbre.



Figure 4.5: Máng and Drum (铙鼓)

#### II. String instrument: Lagu (拉祜)

Another type of folk instrument is Lagu (拉祜). This is a string instrument, also known as the Yue lute or Xianzi, originating from the southwestern regions. It is one of the most popular

string instruments used to accompany singing and dancing performances of the Yi, Miao, Bouyei, and Hani ethnic groups<sup>29</sup>. The playing techniques employed are plucking and rolling. Each pluck is executed with the plectrum returning to rest on the string, naturally producing a short-long rhythmic pattern. This technique creates a dynamic sound effect, moving from lighter to heavier articulation, enhancing the rhythmic expressiveness of the passage.



Figure 4.6: String instrument Lagu (拉祜)

## 2. Harmonic and Rhythmic Characteristics

Most folk music in Yunnan is based on the pentatonic scale. Given the diverse ethnic groups and their isolated living environments, folk music from different groups or even individual villages exhibits unique characteristics, including variations in interval choices and rhythmic patterns. A notable harmonic feature of Hani folk music is its preference for the heptatonic scale, which includes half-step intervals. This harmonic character and distinctive sound illustrate the

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<sup>29</sup> Xia, Fan. "Study on the Tendency of Four-String Music in Southern Yunnan: Taking the North and South Banks of Yuanjiang in Hong he Prefecture as an Example." *Chinese Musicology*, no. 02 (2015): 116-129. <https://doi.org/10.14113/j.cnki.cn11-1316/j.2015.02.014>.



## 傈米阿卡 滇航嘹(1)



Music Excerpt 4.2: Xiding Township, Menghai County, Xishuangbanna Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan, China<sup>32</sup>

There is a valuable musicological project relevant to Hani folk music by Rui Fan.<sup>33</sup> This research focuses on the Hani-Akha cross-border ethnic groups in China and Thailand, providing valuable insights into its harmonic characteristics. This research reveals that some Hani folk music incorporates a three-note mode or tritone structure. Much of the music is based on the Yu mode, often performed with improvisational freedom, where the final note may resolve to the supertonic rather than the tonic, creating harmonic ambiguity. The melodic motion primarily involves stepwise movement in seconds and thirds, while descending leaps of fourths, fifths, sixths, and octaves are also common, giving the music its distinctive character. This study enhances our understanding of the unique musical and cultural identity of the Hani people.

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<sup>32</sup> Fan, Rui. 2014. "A Study on the Music Culture of the Hani-Akha Cross-border Ethnic Groups in China and Thailand." Master's thesis, Xinjiang Normal University.  
<https://kns.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbname=CMFD201501&filename=1014051094.nh>.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

## Chapter V Analysis of "Numa Ame"

This piano piece, *Numa Ame*, was composed by Zhang Zhao in 2017 and drew inspiration from ethnic folk music and regional traditions. It is dedicated to his father, Zhang Nan. The title originates from the Hani dialect and translates to 'The most beautiful home.' The composer adeptly integrates elements typical of minority music with creative influences from the picturesque landscapes of his native Yunnan, infusing the piece with characteristics of folk music and dance. Rather than employing overly complicated compositional techniques or ambiguous harmonic textures, which are commonly associated with contemporary music, the composer seeks to evoke a musical line that is natural, rich in sonority and expressiveness.

### 1. Musical themes and Culture based conceptions

*Numa Ame* has two themes: a lyrical theme with a slow and free tempo and a dance theme that mainly emphasizes various rhythm pattern changes. The first theme is in binary form, and the second is in Rondo form with a coda.

	First theme		Second Theme										
	A	B	Intro	C	C1	Transitio n	C	C1	D	Transitio n	C2	Transitio n	Coda
Measure	1-17	18-36	37-53	54-96	97-110	111- 122	123- 140	141- 160	169- 179	180- 192	193- 222	223- 229	230- 246
	C# Yu	F# Yu	G# Yu	C# Yu				Eb Chi	C Yu	F Yu	C# Chi	C# Yu	

Tablet 5.1 *Numa Ame* sections and key center

- The first theme with Yunnan Folk tune

The opening section is marked *Rubato Adagio* (measures 1–36), where the musical expression exhibits a wide variety of tonal layers with tempo rubato. The lyrical, musical language reflects the composer's childhood memories and deep longing for his homeland. In this section, the phrase structure can be divided into three-measure groups, with the eighth note and triplet serving as the primary rhythmic materials.

Music Excerpts 5.1: *Nume Ame*, mm. 1-8

In the first theme, the composer captures the core melodic and harmonic materials from the distinct tones and accents of the local dialect. There are four major folk tunes from southern Yunnan, "Hailai Tune" (海菜腔), "Shanyao Tune" (山药腔), "Wushan Tune" (五山腔), and "Si Tune" (四腔). In the first theme, the composer mostly adapted the Hailai Tune. The Hailai Tune is based on the seven-note Yu mode. It builds on the traditional five-note Yu mode by adding two altered notes: *Biangong* (变宫), which is a half-step below the Gong note, and *Bianzhi* (变徵),

which is a half-step below the Zhi note. This modification introduces a distinctive tonal effect, different from the traditional pentatonic harmony.

羽(Yu)	变宫 (Biangong)	宫(Gong)	商(Shang)	角(Jue)	变徵 (Bianzhi)	徵(Zhi)
i	ii	iii	iv	v	vi	vii
C#	D#	E	F#	G#	A#	B

Tablet 5.2 The Hailai Tune Heptatonic scale in the first theme

The first theme is constructed in the C# heptatonic Yu mode, with the composer incorporating a raised sixth degree (#VI), aligning with the characteristics of the Hailai Tune. The Pentatonic tritone tonal structure is characteristic of the Hani people from Yunnan's Mile and Shilin regions<sup>34</sup>. In measure 5, the introduction of the accidental E# into the phrase highlights a tritone (B-E#) harmony that evokes the sound of the Yunnan Hani folk tune. In measure 7, the composer seamlessly modulates to a C# major chord, transitioning into an arpeggio phrase that features an E# note.

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<sup>34</sup> Huang, Chenglong. "The Application of the Yi People's 'Pentatonic Trichord' in Musical Composition: A Case Study of Searching for the Place Where the Sun Rises." *Ethnic Music*, no. 1 (2024): 64-67.

Rubato adagio (♩ = 42)

Music Excerpt 5.2: *Numa Ame*, mm. 1-8

In the first theme, the composer uses different ways to organize the rhythmic material, enhancing the music's lyrical and flowing sense, as the previous example illustrates. In the Rubato Adagio section, the composer emphasizes the tonal center of C# by using it as the starting note for each phrase. The rhythmic material is progressively condensed, shifting from triplets to sixteenth notes and sixteenth-note triplets. This rhythmic compression enhances the sense of fluidity and causes the phrase to move forward.

Music Excerpt 5.3: *Numa Ame*, mm. 6-15

In measure 23, the composer marks the section *Agitando*, indicating a shift to a more active tempo. The sixteenth-note arpeggio combined with a triplet ascending pattern serves as a transitional function, intensifying the harmonic texture and creating a sense of restless motion through ambiguous harmonies. For instance, in measure 27, the addition of C natural within a B major triad as part of the sixteenth-note arpeggio contrasts with the left hand, which operates under a different harmonic structure, as an F# diminish seventh chord.



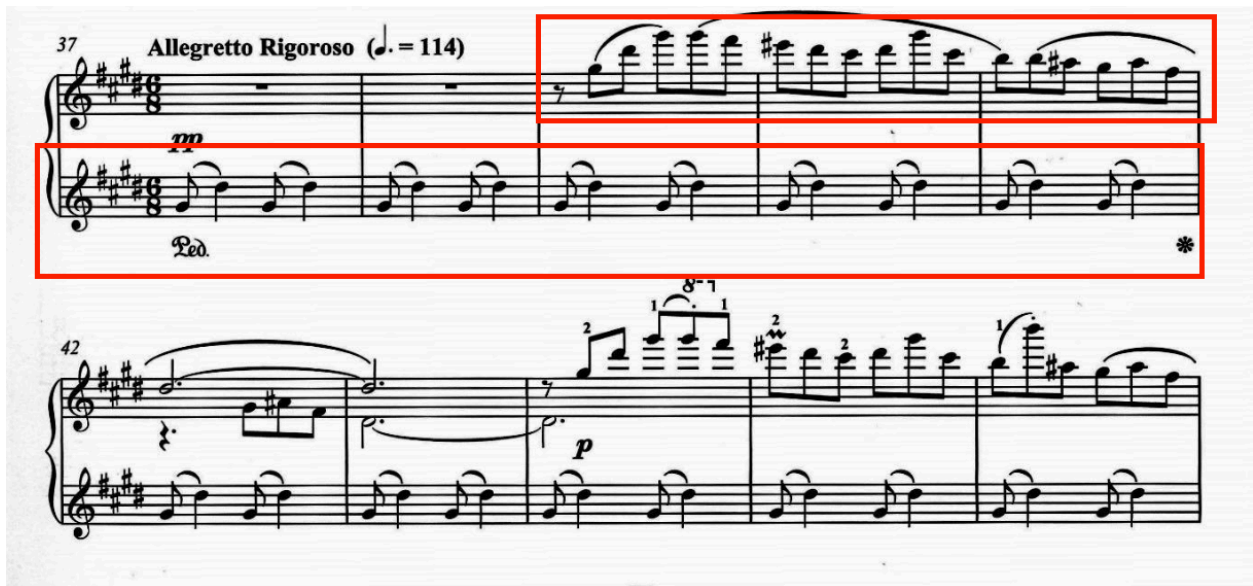
Music Excerpt 5.4: *Numa Ame*, mm.27-28

In this section, the composer introduces five groups of diminished arpeggio phrases, with both the right and left hands moving in parallel sixth intervals. This structural approach amplifies the dramatic effect, creating heightened tension and a bigger sonority compared to the earlier section. At m.36, the phrase resolves to a G# dominant chord. This harmonic shift serves as a pivotal moment, effectively bridging the transition to the second theme.

- The second theme of Yunnan Folk dance

The second theme, marked *Allegro*, illustrates a lively, dance-like character. This section is in Rondo form, and each variation is based on the mm.37-51 theme. The composer skillfully utilized alternative time signatures such as 3/8, 5/8, 2/4, 6/8, and 9/8, a rhythmic feature characteristic of Hani folk music and dance. The harmonic elements derived from Yunnan folk dance with instrumental motifs in each variation, creating a vibrant and energetic section that serves as the thematic core of the composition.

In measure 37, the theme starts with a repeated broken fifth interval, sustained in the lower register. It evokes the characteristic sound of traditional Yunnan string instruments called Lagu (拉祜).<sup>35</sup> Meanwhile, the high register in the right hand imitates the timbre of the traditional vertical flute, renowned for its bright and penetrating tone. The composer emphasizes a legato line, carefully indicating note grouping to achieve a light and lyrical sound.



Music Excerpts 5.5: *Numa Ame*, mm.37-46

In measure 54, the tempo shifts to *Rigoroso*, introducing a section marked by frequent time signature changes. Drawing inspiration from the traditional folk-dance rhythms of the Hani people in Yunnan, the composer alternates time signatures such as 3/8, 5/8, 2/4, and 6/8, further emphasizing rhythmic complexity by placing accents and contrasting articulations on specific beats. This composition technique heightens the sense of rhythmic variation and unpredictability, suggesting a lively and passionate dance. In the lower register, the texture becomes more animated,

<sup>35</sup>More information about Lagu in the Chapter IV

with staccato broken-chord patterns and alternating chords between different octaves, accented by Sforzando (Sfz), creating a drum-like percussion sound effect.

The image shows a musical score excerpt for 'Numa Ame', measures 52-62. The score is in 2/4 time and features a 'Rigorous' tempo marking. It includes dynamic markings such as *pp*, *sf*, *mf*, and *mp*. Red circles and rectangles highlight specific musical features: three circles in the first system and two in the second system, and two rectangles in the second system. The second system includes a 'Ped.' marking and an asterisk.

Music Excerpt 5.6: *Numa Ame*, mm.52-62

Beginning in measure 169, the tempo shifts abruptly, marked *Rubato Adagio*. Although this tempo marking recalls the opening of the first theme, the composer introduces an unexpected atmosphere by using polyharmony techniques to create a cold, dissonant, and mysterious sonority. The left hand adopts an ascending broken-chord pattern with a long, sustained pedal tone, providing a harmonic foundation for the lyrical melody from the higher register. This texture creates a delicate balance between the harmonic support and the melodic line. This harmonic idea enhances the sense of dreaming, effectively reflecting the imagery of Yunnan's misty weather from forests and mountains.

**Rubato adagio (♩ = 66)**

166 *rit.* *dim.* *pp* \*

170 (8)

Music Excerpt 5.7: *Numa Ame*, mm.166-173

In the second theme, the composer introduces three rapid chordal passages as a transitional phrase, employing the concept of controlled chance music. The composer indicated that these passages are not restricted to specific pitches and allow for some degree of interpretative freedom. The outer voice of each sixteenth-note chord forms pentatonic scales in both hands and those notes set up the harmonic foundation here, which can be played clearly. This musical passage evokes the sound of rapid rain in the mountains and forests, with crescendo dynamic markings.

91

*f*

Ped.

94

*ff*

*p*

\* 可以不按照具体音演奏。(Playing these notes may not be constrained by the specific notes.)

Music Excerpts 5.8: *Numa Ame*, mm.91-97

In measure 168, the tonal center modulates to E-flat, introducing a highly expressive section that demands careful control of sound and touch. The composer combines soft dynamic markings with Rubato Adagio marking. It uses minor second intervals as the most significant harmonic characters, creating a mysterious and ethereal atmosphere. Performers should aim to highlight the contrast between the bass and top voices, which are three octaves apart. This expanded spacing requires delicate and careful control to maintain the clarity of individual notes. The alternating sustained notes between F-flat and E-flat from the bass voice enhance the ambiguity of the harmony.

Music Excerpts 5.9: *Numa Ame*, mm.166-173

Starting from measure 193, the lively and energetic dance theme returns, marking a significant shift in texture and intensity. The composer expands the single-note material from the previous section, transforming it into a more robust, chordal texture, creating a thicker and more powerful sound. The final section's structure can be divided into two variations of the theme, separated by a brief transitional passage. In addition to the extension and adaptation of previous material, a key feature is the changing tempo. The composer indicates a gradual acceleration, building momentum, and emphasizes the sense of energy. At measure 230, the texture becomes even more powerful, with chordal material expanding over five octaves. The left-hand accents mimic the sound of traditional Chinese instruments like the drum and gong, which indicate a dramatic orchestral-like effect to refine this climactic section. This piano work concludes with a rapid chordal fragment marked with accents, driving forward without hesitation or any sustained fermatas.

Music Excerpts 5.10: *Numa Ame*, mm.243-246

## Chapter VI Conclusion

This document specifically focuses on two contemporary Chinese pieces: "The Willows Are New" and "Numa Ame." Although these composers represent different generations and have distinct educational backgrounds, both demonstrate a profound understanding and comprehensive management of musical elements infused with strong cultural influences. Most importantly, their approaches explore the sound possibilities of the piano, transforming this keyboard instrument to encompass a wide variety of sonorities.

Chou Wen-Chung, for instance, spent most of his education and career in the United States. From his piano solo work "The Willows Are New," it is hard to trace the sound or harmony structure in the same way as Western compositional work with multiple voices. In this work, the composer aims to imitate the sound of the Guqin on the keyboard but does not confine himself to its range. His musical approach emphasizes the space between notes and the fluidity of phrases, allowing for a more varied expression of sounds.

Chou Wen-Chung discussed his compositional conceptions in the program note of this piano work. He combined and drew inspirations from traditional Chinese art such as calligraphy

and ink painting. From my perspective, the image of a drop of ink dispersing in water provides a compelling visual to match the shape of the sound. This analogy highlights the spatial qualities of the sound. When observing the movement of ink in water, one notices how the density of color diminishes as it spreads and dissolves, creating an ever-expanding cloud of fluid motion. This process mirrors the way the sound unfolds in this piece: the dynamic shaping of tone and the dynamic notations evoke the same smooth, organic motion and various timber from the piano.



Figure 6.1: Sound spatial form in "The Willows are New"

#### A drop of Ink into the Water

Zhang Zhao is a native Chinese composer who started his career in China and never studied abroad. In his work, he also incorporates the sounds of various Chinese folk instruments into *Numa Ame* but involves more methods and perspectives, such as Western harmonical composition techniques. He creatively adapts diverse rhythmic ideas and textures to expand the range of sound qualities. The rapid passage in his piano work evokes the falling rain from the mountain area, while the drumbeats imply a celebratory mood. This approach broadens the possibilities of the piano, resulting in a more vivid sound effect.

The composer structured the musical material in *Numa Ame* through three interconnected dimensions: dynamics and articulation, melodic and rhythmic development, and harmony and tonal space. These elements create a sonority and structural depth that can be described as a "cube model," where the spatial quality of the sound takes on a multidimensional character. This interplay of compositional approaches enhances the piece's spatial and textural dimensions and deepens its emotional resonance. A particularly striking example is the gradual emotional connection between the first and second themes, demonstrating the composer's thoughtful consideration of cohesive ideas. This seamless progression reflects a deliberate and thoughtful design, ensuring that every musical material contributes to the overarching structure and expressiveness of this piano work.

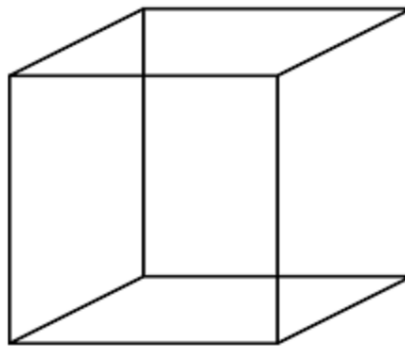


Figure 6.2: Sound spatial form in *Numa Ame*

#### A Cube Model

Both composers redefine the sound of the piano by integrating traditional Chinese culture and musical aesthetic ideas into their compositional techniques, especially the musical aesthetic conception of *Tian Ren He Yi* (天人合一). This conception is primarily reflected in the expression of the rhythm's natural flow, emphasizing the music's coherence and fluidity.

In the opening sections of both pieces, the selected tempo range aims to enhance the flowing and lyrical sound quality. Each composer approaches this goal from their methods and successfully matches with *Tian Ren He Yi's* (天人合一) aesthetic ideas. In *The Willows Are New*, the absence of a time signature in the opening measure allows for a close imitation of Guqin's timbre and performance perspective. This approach effectively blurs the boundary between the piano and the Guqin, fostering a deeper connection between the performer and the essence of the instrument's expressive range. The composer employs varying tempo markings in *Numa Ame* to maintain a smooth transition between sections. For instance, the use of *Rubato Adagio* and *Agitato* in the first section illustrates emotional shifts between parallel phrases, creating a dynamic interpretive framework. Additionally, ornamental notes in the upper register illustrate mimic bird sounds. This naturalistic ornamentation further reinforces the piece's connection to traditional Chinese aesthetic principles.

Through their innovative approaches, both composers successfully fuse cultural elements with modern piano writing, thereby expanding the expressive range of the instrument. Moreover, both works provide ample opportunity for researchers to explore and uncover culturally relevant background information. I hope that this lecture document offers a viable approach for pianists to understand and interpret contemporary Chinese music works and provides a way to draw attention to further research into more compositional works from Chou Wen-Chung and Zhang Zhao and even beyond them.

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