

CHAPTER TWO

CHEN YI'S CULTURAL AND MUSICAL CONTEXT

A native of Guangzhou, southern China, Chen Yi was born into a family of doctors in 1953. She began to learn the piano at the age of three and then the violin at four. She was sent to the countryside for two years (1968-1970) during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), and at the age of seventeen, she joined the Beijing Opera Troupe in Guangzhou, where she served as concertmaster. After the Cultural Revolution, she was among the first students admitted to the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing in 1978. Studying composition with Wu Zuqiang and Alexander Goehr, she earned a bachelor's degree in composition in 1983, then a master's degree in 1986. Chen Yi came to the United States for further study in 1986 and studied primarily with Professors Chou Wen-chung and Mario Davidovsky at Columbia University in New York City. She earned her Doctorate in Musical Arts in 1993 and served as composer-in-residence for the Women's Philharmonic, the vocal ensemble Chanticleer, and the Aptos Creative Arts program in San Francisco from 1993 to 1996. She joined the composition faculty of the Peabody Conservatory at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore in 1996, and has been the Cravens/Millsap/Missouri Distinguished Professor at the Conservatory of Music at the University of Missouri in Kansas City since 1998.

Perhaps the most internationally renowned female Asian composer of contemporary music today, Chen Yi has, in particular, become a prominent figure in

music circles of the United States and China. Chen's major works have been widely performed around the world by such orchestras as the National Symphony, the American Composers Orchestra, the Austrian Radio Symphony Orchestra, the BBC Philharmonic, the Hallé Orchestra, the NHK Symphony, the Singapore Symphony, and the China National Symphony. She was the recipient of several awards and fellowships, including the prestigious Ives Living Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters (AAAL), the ASCAP Concert Music Award, the Guggenheim Fellowship, the Goddard Lieberon Fellowship from the AAAL, the CalArts Alpert Award, the NYU Sorel Medal, and the UT Eddie Medora King Composition Prize. Chen Yi has also received commissioning grants from Meet the Composer/Reader's Digest, the Koussevitzky Music Foundation, the Fromm Music Foundation at Harvard University, the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations, the Mary Cary Trust, Carnegie Hall, and the San Francisco Art Commission, among others. Her works are published by Theodore Presser Company and can be heard on CDs issued under the CRI, New Albion Records, Teldec, Nimbus, Angel, Bis, Cala, Atma, and China Record Company labels.

Chen Yi's compositional approach was established before she came to the United States, influenced by her family, her early working experiences and the bi-musical training she received in China, and then developed through her study and work in the United States. A close investigation of her biographical accounts will reveal the reasons, motivations, and procedures for the establishment of her approach to composition. Beginning with compositional procedures similar to those of her Chinese predecessors, she subsequently incorporated Western post-tonal techniques into her works in a systematic way. For this reason, Chinese composers' approaches to the

cross-cultural fusion in relation to the social and political environments will be briefly considered here in an effort to establish Chen Yi's position within the history of "new" or "modern" Chinese music, as well as to provide a cultural context for the formation of her compositional style.

Chinese Composers' Approaches to the Fusion Process

In China, there was no academic musical training until the beginning of the twentieth century, when political and economic development brought about drastic cultural changes, which included a new school system based largely on Western educational methods. While feeling that the real position of China in musical development and education lagged behind Western countries, almost all the Chinese music composers and educators strived to create a "new" or "modern" music with a distinct Chinese character by assimilating new and advanced Western methods. Five generations of Chinese professional composers have undergone a long process of cognition and digestion of Western compositional approaches and techniques, re-evaluation of Chinese musical heritage, and integration of elements from both cultures in their compositions. This goal-directed undertaking has continued to the present, although the approaches to the fusion of Western and Chinese musical components were varied and even conflicting tremendously under different political environments.

The development of Chinese modern music can be divided into three periods according to the changes of composers' approaches to the fusion process, the sources of musical elements to be integrated, and the classes of audience. The first period extends

from the beginning of the twentieth century to the 1940s under the political environment of the preparation, establishment, and destruction of the Republic of China governed by the Nationalists (1911–1949). During this period, principles of Western music dominated the fusion process, Western and Chinese popular songs prevailing in the urban areas became musical sources, and urban inhabitants who came from the middle or upper classes and trained under Western educational systems comprised the audiences.

The fusion process became effective even from the initial stage of the modern musical development. Music was formally introduced into the curriculum in 1907; Western music in the form of the school song was brought back to China by Chinese students who studied in Japan, where Western music had been incorporated into the Japanese school system following the Meiji Restoration in 1868. As a genre, the school song was a setting of modern Chinese poetry, usually with political and educational content, to Western popular music, with the original melody retained. Such adaptations of Western music (especially choral music) were widely accepted and remained popular among the Chinese populace until 1918. Although aesthetically crude and rudimentary in nature, this practice represented the earliest integration of Western music into Chinese culture.¹

As discussed in the previous chapter, traditional Chinese music is collective in nature and no individual composer claims the origin of compositions. In “new” or “modern” Chinese music, however, the contributions of individual composers are clearly recorded. A group of Western-trained Chinese composers became involved in

¹ Liang Yongsheng, “Western influence on Chinese music in the early twentieth century,” (Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1994), pp. 31-65; and Han Kuo-Huang, “The Introduction of Western Music in Modern Times,” in *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 2002), Vol. 7, pp. 375-376.

the procedure of rediscovering the tradition when they experimented with fusing Chinese and Western elements in vocal compositions. Zhao (or Chao) Yuanren,² for example, focused his research on the reconciliation of Western and Chinese elements on the relationship between melodic contour and Chinese speech intonation. Huang Zi,³ on the other hand, following Mahler's method, tried to find equivalent texts from Chinese poems to compose art song in the style of German lied.⁴

These Western-trained Chinese composers regarded Western music as a subject of science and believed that its rules can be applied cross-culturally. They shared a view that a fundamental requirement for a Chinese composer was to master Western tonal harmony.⁵ Although the majority of these composers felt that they should use Chinese material in their compositions, Western music was considered superior to its Chinese counterpart. Thus, a genuine interest in studying traditional Chinese music in its own right was never developed among them, and their re-evaluation of the Chinese tradition never reached a deeper level.⁶

The founding of the Shanghai Conservatory in 1927 marked the starting-point of professional musical education and a new step forward in the modern musical development in China. The curriculum, which included the study of theory and

² Zhao Yuanren (1892-1982), a well-known linguist and composer, was sent to the United States by Tsinghua University in 1910 and earned his doctoral degrees in physics from Cornell University and in philosophy from Harvard University. At the same time, he studied music theory and composition. After returning to China in 1920, he taught at Tsinghua University. He moved to the United States in 1938 and taught at Hawaii, Yale, and Harvard University. See *A Dictionary of Chinese Music* (Miao Tianrui, Ji Lian Kang and Guo Naian, ed. Beijing: People's Music Press, 1984), pp.498-499.

³ Huang Zi (1904-1938) earned two Bachelor degrees, one in psychology at Oberlin University in 1926 and another in music at Yale University in 1929. When returning to China, he taught theory and composition at Shanghai Conservatory from 1930 to 1938. See *A Dictionary of Chinese Music* (1984), pp.177-178.

⁴ Peter Chang, "Chou Wen-chung and his music: a musical and biographical profile of cultural synthesis," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1995), pp. 42-43.

⁵ Yuan-Ren Chao. *Anthology of New Poetry and Songs*. (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1926), p. 10.

⁶ Peter Chang, p. 44.

composition, orchestral instruments, piano, voice, and traditional Chinese instruments, was closely modeled after the Western system of musical instruction. The faculty was made up of Chinese musicians trained in Germany or the United States, plus a group of European musicians. The leading composers of this period, including the group of composers mentioned above, and their students, such as Ding Shande⁷ and He Luting⁸, were regarded as the first and second generations of professional composers. They wrote music for a wider range of Western genres, including mixed chorus, solo and chamber music, and orchestral works. Their compositions illustrate efforts to adopt a mid-romantic harmonic language in harmonizing Chinese melodies, and to organize Chinese melody according to Western formal principles—particularly in their use of sectional structures. The piano solo *Mutong Duandi* (The Cowherd's Flute, 1934) written by He Luting, for example, won the first prize on a “Call for piano composition in Chinese style” held by Russian pianist and composer Alexander Tcherepin in 1934. In this piece, Chinese melody in pentatonic modes is successfully integrated with Western counterpoint techniques and ternary form.⁹ His compositional practice earned him a reputation in China as a fervent promoter of Western classical music, seeing it as

⁷ Ding Shande (1911-1995) studied with Huang Zi then Wolfgang Frankel at the Shanghai Conservatory. After studying with Noël Gallon, Aubin and Boulanger at the Paris Conservatoire, he returned to Shanghai in 1949 and taught at the Shanghai Conservatory. His piano miniatures in Western Romantic style are popular in the Chinese urban middle-class. His style was barely affected by the influx of contemporary Western music in the later years of his life. See Frank Kouwenhoven, “Ding Shande,” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed. (2001), Vol. 7, p. 360.

⁸ He Luting (1903-1999) began studying composition with Huang Zi in 1931. During the anti-Japanese and civil wars of the 1940s, he was active as a conductor and composer in the Communist mass song movement. He taught composition in Shanghai and from 1949 to 1984 directed the Shanghai Conservatory, with an interruption during the Cultural Revolution. A prominent Communist Party member, he was known for his numerous patriotic film scores and politically inspired songs and choral works. Much of his music consists of Western Romantic harmonization of Chinese folk and folk-inspired melodies. See Frank Kouwenhoven, “He Luting,” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed. (2001), Vol. 11, pp. 358-359.

⁹ Miao Tianrui, Ji Liankang and Guo Naian, ed. *A Dictionary of Chinese Music* (1984), pp.153-154.

a means of modernizing Chinese music.

The Chinese preference for fusing Chinese melody with Western harmony was due largely to their views on the success of the Russian nationalist composers, whose contributions for preserving national characteristics had won acclaim among Western musicians and audience. The Chinese composers' conviction about the compatibility of Chinese melody and Western techniques was coupled with the Western fascination with oriental modes and melody, as seen in the works of Rimsky-Korsakov, Mahler, Ravel, and Debussy. Thus, this view had become orthodox as the result of experiments, successes and failures of these two generations of Chinese composers.¹⁰

There is still another group represented by Liu Tian-Hua (1895–1932), a composer, music educator, and master of several traditional Chinese instruments. He advocated the transplantation of Western performance techniques to the Chinese instruments, such as using vibrato on the *erhu* (two-stringed fiddle), and established an ensemble for traditional Chinese instruments, modeled after the Western orchestra.

During this period, the debate on the formation of modern Chinese music was conducted between conservative and progressive Chinese musicians. Differing in educational background, the progressives, represented by Western-trained composers, considered that the conservatives' adamant refusal to adopt a Western scientific method in creating music merely made Chinese traditional music a living fossil incapable of development. On the other hand, the conservatives, represented by traditional music performers, saw the composition curriculum in conservatories as “blind” imitation of

¹⁰ Peter Chang, p.49.

the West that was undermining the Chinese tradition.¹¹ With the tension among various groups, only the Western-trained composers stood at the center, although their abilities and superficial understanding about traditional Chinese music prevented them from discovering the fundamental principles of this music.

The second period of modern Chinese musical development extends from the 1940s to the 1970s under the political environment of the preparation, establishment, and construction of the People's Republic of China, governed by the Communists to the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976. During this period, traditional Chinese folk materials became the basis for the composition, Western compositional techniques were cautiously selected to add to the potency of the Chinese materials in the synthesis, and the ordinary people throughout the country became the audiences. The Communists' policy on art was featured by filtering out the unsuitable elements from the tradition, which required a re-evaluation of the tradition. The criteria for this re-evaluation stressed that when the elements of folk arts were associated with the ordinary people, then they were desirable; anything else was politically undesirable. From 1938 to 1945, Communist musicians in Yan'an, the residency of headquarters of the Communist Party, carried out experimentation to investigate and integrate Chinese and Western materials for the new kind of revolutionary music.¹² The main active composers include Xian Xinghai (1905-1945),¹³ Lü Ji (b.1909), Ma Ke (1918-1976), Xiang Yu (1912-

¹¹ Mei-pa Chao, "The Trend of Modern Chinese Music," in *T'ien Hsia Monthly* 4 (3) March, 1937, pp. 280-1.

¹² Peter Chang, pp. 51-52.

¹³ The music career of Xian Xinghai (1905-1945) and his approach to composition had been regarded as a model for musicians by the Communist Party. Xian was born into a poor fisherman family and studied the violin with Paul Oberdoeffler and composition with Vincent D'Indy and Paul Dukas in Paris Conservatoire in the early 1930s. After returning to China in 1935, Xian joined the anti-Japanese movement through writing a large number of mass songs. While teaching composition at Lu Xun Institute of Arts in Yan'an,

1968), Qu Wei (b. 1917), Zhen Lücheng (1918-1976), and Li Huanzhi (b.1919). In addition to a large number of mass songs, the prominent large-scale works during this period are the productions of *Yellow River Cantata* (1939),¹⁴ which is better known in the West in its 1969 piano concerto rearrangement, and the opera *The White-haired Girl* (1945-1952),¹⁵ which is known nationwide by its ballet version performed during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).

During the Second World War in 1943, the nationalist leaders also sought to boost the morale of the army and the masses with Confucian ethics by establishing the Institute of National Rites and Music, which was responsible for researching, compiling, and implementing Confucian ritual music as representative of Chinese national music.¹⁶ Although from different ideological bases, these two approaches from the Communists and Nationalists in the course of politicizing music have one concept in common: Chinese musical materials were the dominant components for nationalistic Chinese composition.¹⁷

Another weak trend in China in the late 1940s was the introduction of twentieth-century techniques. In 1946, Tan Xiaolin (1911–1948), who studied with Paul Hindemith at Yale University, returned to his hometown Shanghai and served as composition professor for two years until his death.¹⁸ Tan taught and composed with

he studied Chinese folk music intensively and combined Western techniques and Chinese folk elements into his composition. His works, mainly vocal, reflected the spirit and feelings of Chinese ordinary people and therefore are accepted by them. See *A Dictionary of Chinese Music* (1984), p.424.

¹⁴ The text and music of this cantata were written by Guang Weiran and Xian Xinghai, respectively.

¹⁵ The libretto of *The White-haired Girl* was written by He Jingzhi and Ding Yi, the music was composed by Ma Ke, Zhang Lu, Qu Wei, Li Huanzhi, Xiang Tu, Chen Zi, and Liu zhi. See *A Dictionary of Chinese Music* (1984), pp.11-12.

¹⁶ John Levis, "Foundations of Chinese Musical Art," in *T'ien Hsia Monthly* IV (3) March 1937, p. 285.

¹⁷ Peter Chang, pp. 52-53.

¹⁸ Miao Tianrui, Ji Liankang and Guo Naian, ed. *A Dictionary of Chinese Music* (1984), p.384.

the techniques he learned from Hindemith, especially his system of tonality, in which the arrangement of chords according to their degree of tension becomes the guideline of harmonic undulation.¹⁹ One of his students, Luo Zhongrong (b. 1924), developed a special interest in the music and writings of Hindemith and translated his book *A Concentrated Course in Traditional Harmony* from English into Chinese (Shanghai Wenguang Express, 1950).²⁰ Sang Tong (b. 1923) was another student of Tan, and also studied with W. Fraenkel and J. Schloss, two former students of Schoenberg and Berg. He developed a passion for Western atonal music and a firm command of compositional techniques. Sang's *From Far Away* (1947) for piano and *Night Scenery* (1948) for violin and piano were the first and, for several decades, the only atonal works produced by a Chinese composer in China.²¹ The practice along this line was soon forbidden due to the replacement of the government and the restriction on the educational and artistic policies.

Shortly after the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, when the Communist Party replaced the Nationalists as the leader of the country, the Central Conservatory of Music was established in 1950. It was first located in Tianjin and moved to Beijing in 1958. Other conservatories around the country were founded thereafter. As a faithful follower of the Soviet Union, the new government systematically introduced "socialist realism"²² as an ideological doctrine that governed

¹⁹ Zhou Jinmin, "New Wave Music in China" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Maryland, Baltimore County, 1993), pp. 76-82.

²⁰ Frank Houwenhoven, "Luo Zhongrong," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan Publishers Limited, 2001), Vol. 15, p.316.

²¹ Frank Houwenhoven, "Sang Tong," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed. (2001), Vol. 22, p.245.

²² *Socialist realism* is an artistic doctrine that was conceived in the early 1920s in the Soviet Union. It was originally associated with literature, but soon found its way into other artistic disciplines. The application

cultural and artistic fields, while “formalism”—a pejorative term referring to music that employed modern techniques, or music written for its own sake rather than the sake of the people²³—was banned during the period from the 1950s to 1970s. Musical education operated under the Soviet model: students received strict training in the tradition of Chinese music and Western classical and romantic music; composers were encouraged to go to rural and remote areas to collect indigenous musical material. This kind of “fieldwork” (gathering original folk material), as a tradition handed down through centuries,²⁴ was institutionalized in Chinese conservatories. At the end of each school year, the composition students were required to go to the countryside or remote areas inhabited by the minority people and collect folk and original music material.

The leading composers of this period were regarded as the third generation. Some of them studied in the Soviet Union, such as Wu Zuqiang (b. 1927),²⁵ Du Mingxin (b. 1928),²⁶ and Zhu Jian'er (b. 1922).²⁷ They and composers of the second

of the concept to music developed as a way to promote Marxist philosophy through musical means and to reject any modern ideologies that may have been present. The opposing concept to socialist realism was *formalism*; compositions and composers not meeting the necessary standards were categorized under the term formalism. See Boris Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia: 1917-1981*, enlarged edition (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1983), pp. 110-114.

²³Kirsten Peterson, “Structural Threads in the Patchwork Quilt: Polystylistics and Motivic Unity in Selected Works by Alfred Schnittke” (Ph.D. dissertation, the University of Connecticut, 2000), p. 44.

²⁴Peter Chang, p. 54: “The Chinese have a long tradition of collecting musical material from the people by court officials. The ‘folk’ materials were refined to suit the taste of the court.”

²⁵Wu Zuqiang (b. 1927) studied at the Tchaikovsky Conservatory in Moscow from 1953 to 1958. After returning to China, he began to teach at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing and became the head there from 1982 to 1988. In his composition, he paid special attention to the combination of Western techniques with traditional Chinese instruments. For example, he arranged the traditional *erhu* piece for string ensembles, and combined Chinese instruments *pipa* and *erhu* with Western Orchestra. In addition, he wrote many critical articles and published a textbook *Musical Form and Analysis* (Beijing: The People’s Music Press, 1962). See Jonathan P. J. Stock, in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed. (2001), Vol. 27, p. 597.

²⁶Du Mingxin (b. 1928) started his piano lessons at the age of eleven with He Luting and studied at the Tchaikovsky Conservatory in Moscow from 1954 to 1958. He taught composition at the Central Conservatory of Music after returning to China. Known primarily as a composer of music for ballet, film and orchestra, Du’s music emphasizes the melody and colorful instrumentation, and his harmonic

generation explored every genre of Western music, especially large-scale orchestral works for Western instruments including concertos, symphonies, ballet music, and arrangements of traditional Chinese instrumental music. Examples include the symphonic tone painting *On the Soil of the Fatherland* (1957) by Wu Zuqiang, *Festival Overture* (1958) by Du Mingxin, symphonic poem *Monument to the People's Heroes* (1958) by Qu Wei, *The Long March Symphony* (1959-1962) by Ding Shande, the *First Symphony* (1958-1959) and *Second Symphony "Immortality through Raging Fire"* (1964) by Luo Zhongrong, and ballets *The Mermaid* (1959) and *The Red Detachment of Women* (1964), both of which were co-composed by Wu Zuqiang and Du Mingxin. In the late 1950s, further studies of traditional Chinese music and classical Western tonal harmony resulted in the publication of Li Yinghai's "*Han*" *Modes and Chinese Modal Harmony*,²⁸ which permits more suitable harmonizations of Chinese melodies through diverse chordal structures, and a harmonic language that combines functional progressions, planing, and modal relationships.²⁹ The third generation of composers directly influenced the practice of their students, known as the fourth generation.

language embraces many aspects of 19th- and 20-century styles. See Jonathan P.J. Stock, "Du Mingxin," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed. (2001), Vol. 7, pp. 695-696.

²⁷ Zhu Jian'er (b. 1922) studied at the Tchaikovsky Conservatory in Moscow (1955-1960). He worked for the Shanghai Opera House on his return, becoming composer-in-residence of the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra in 1975. Zhu is exceptional among Chinese composers of his generation for his remarkable capacity to adapt himself to the changing political climate. By the end of the Cultural Revolution he had lost faith in his political music and in himself, but in the 1980s he embarked on an astonishing second career as an orchestral composer. See Frank Kouwenhoven, "Zhu Jian'er," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed. (2001), Vol. 27, p. 810.

²⁸ Li Yinghai, *"Han" Modes and Chinese Modal Harmony* (Shanghai: Shanghai Literature and Art Press, 1959). Born in 1927, Li graduated from the National Conservatory of Nanjing in 1948. He taught at the Shanghai Conservatory and the Conservatory of China, where he was the Vice President from 1983 to 1987. He worked on nationalistic music for many years. In addition to the book mentioned above, he wrote 200 songs and arranged folksongs and traditional tunes for piano.

²⁹ Zhou Jinmin, "New Wave Music in China," pp. 182-190. Zhang Shi-gu, "Chinese and Western Influences upon Piano Music in China." (D.M.A. doc., University of Arizona, 1993). Jiang Jing, "The Influence of traditional Chinese Music on Professional Instrumental Composition." *Asian Music*, vol.22, no.2, (1991), pp. 83-96. Li Yinghai, *"Han" Modes and Chinese Modal Harmony* (1959).

Among the works in the “nationalistic” style written by the fourth generation of composers, the violin concerto *Liang Shanbo yu Zhu Yingtai* (*The Butterfly Lovers*, 1959-1960), composed by He Zhanhao³⁰ and Chen Gang,³¹ became the representative work of modern Chinese music known throughout the world.

The “nationalistic style” was the only officially sanctioned form of composition, and composers were forced to avoid contemporary Western music, which was viewed with suspicion by the communist authorities and even considered “non-music.” Composers who violated this restriction were subjected to severe punishments, such as prohibiting composing, losing their job, or being sent to exile, as happened to Sang Tong and Wang Lisan. Sang Tong was forced to modify his idiom considerably. His *Mongolian Folk Songs* (1953) are reminiscent of Bartók's piano pieces for children, while *Caprice* (1959) for piano displays a Prokofievian brutality. Sang tried to resist the growing pressure of politics on musical life in Shanghai, but eventually lost his job as a music teacher at the conservatory in 1955.³² Studying composition at the Shanghai Conservatory with Ding Shande, Sang Tong and Arzamanov in 1951, Wang Lisan (b.1933) was one of the audacious composers who provoked a sharp political response in the 1950s. By experimenting with broken

³⁰ He Zhanhao (b. 1933) worked in the orchestra of a traditional Chinese *yueju* opera troupe before he entered the Shanghai Conservatory to study composition with Ding Shande and the violin in 1957. He directed an experimental group called “the Chinese violin school” and taught composition after his graduation. He combined Western with Chinese instruments in many innovative ways and his music embraces a wide range of historical and traditional themes from both Chinese and Western sources. See Jonathan P.J. Stock, “He Zhanhao,” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed. (2001), Vol. 11, p. 478.

³¹ Chen Gang (b.1935) studied at the Shanghai Conservatory with Ding Shande, Sang Tong and musicians from the USSR from 1955 to 1960, continuing there as a teacher after his graduation. See Jonathan P.J. Stock, “Chen Gang,” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed. (2001), Vol. 5, p. 565.

³² Frank Houwenboven, “Sang Tong,” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed. (2001), Vol. 22, p. 245.

or suspended tonality along the lines of Debussy, or even with dissonant harmonies approaching the language of Bartók, he believed that this newly explored harmonic territory complemented well the floating nature of Chinese pentatonicism. Under severe political pressures, however, Wang was branded a rightist in 1957 and was exiled to the far north of China to work on farms in 1959.³³

During the period of the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), almost all the categories of music were banned and the music conservatories, like all other educational institutions, ceased operations. The composers, especially those leading composers of the second and third generations, underwent not only an attack on their compositional approaches but also physical punishments. For example, He Luting's views bought him into serious conflict with anti-Western populists and provoked violent attacks on him and his family. Sang Tong was tortured by Red Guards, resulting in partial deafness,³⁴ and Luo Zhongrong was harassed and imprisoned.³⁵ The professors and students of conservatories were sent to the factories and the countryside to serve as common laborers, and all their intellectual and creative pursuits had to be conducted completely informally, without government sanction and without benefit of any external resources or influences.

³³ In 1963, Wang became a teacher of composition at Harbin Normal University, where he resumed his career as a composer after the Cultural Revolution. See Frank Kouwenhoven, "Wang Lisan," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed. (2001), Vol. 27, pp. 80-81.

³⁴ By the 1980s, when it finally became possible for composers in China to pursue new directions in music, Sang Tong had lost his creative powers. He was elected Director of the Shanghai Conservatory (1984-1991) and became an influential writer on harmony and contemporary compositional theory. See Frank Kouwenhoven, "Song Tong," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed. (2001), Vol. 22, p. 245.

³⁵ Frank Houwenhoven, "Luo Zhongrong," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed. (2001), Vol. 15, p.316.

Instead of professional performance, an emphasis was placed on amateur music making. Rather than being performed by experts, the masses themselves took full part in their own cultural lives.³⁶ The only official musical activity for professional musicians was the performance of newly composed mass songs and a limited number of revolutionary Beijing operas and ballets selected and supervised by the government. In order to refine and develop the traditional art form of Beijing opera, a small number of composers were allowed to combine Western instruments with traditional accompanying instruments of Beijing opera for the first time. As a result, they produced a sound effect that greatly expanded the musical expression of the Beijing Opera. Along the same line, a new pattern of cross-cultural fusion—singing of the Beijing opera accompanied by the piano—emerged, as a version of the modern-setting Beijing opera *The Red Lantern* with piano accompaniment (1968) by pianist Yin Chengzong (b. 1941). In addition, young instrumentalists in Beijing opera troupes began to get acquainted with Western orchestration, and were eventually attracted to composition. Many of the fifth generation of professional composers were the direct product of the popularization of Western instruments and composition techniques.³⁷

Although the compositional means were confined to a relatively monotonous range under the political restriction, composers obtained opportunities to explore rich and varied Chinese musical traditions more seriously and systematically. The quality of the cross-cultural fusion has therefore improved tremendously. Whereas the typical pattern of the fusion still drew on the Western functional harmony and sectional form

³⁶ Jonathan P.J. Stock, “Western influenced styles: mass song and conservatory style,” from “China,” IV, 6 (i), in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed. (2001), Vol. 5, p. 694.

³⁷ Peter Chang, p.58.

was incorporated with Chinese folk melodies, in which cultural and artistic connotations had been carefully studied, the Western principles had been melded into Chinese music, becoming an organic and inseparable component.

The third period of the development of Chinese modern music started from the early 1980s when the educational system was reestablished in 1977 and the policy of an “open-door to the West” had been carried out in the late 1970s. A small number of composition students were allowed to enter the conservatories, where they were strictly trained, as before, in the traditions of both Chinese music and Western classical music. Foreign musicians and composers, such as Chou Wen-chung, Alexander Goehr, George Crumb, Toru Takemitsu, and Isang Yun, were invited to the conservatories and lectured about contemporary compositional techniques. Among these visiting professors, Chou Wen-chung offered new directions to Chinese composers by illustrating his personal approach to composition, in which he combined philosophical and aesthetic ideals of Chinese visual and literary arts with the Varèsean ideal of the sound in his music.³⁸

By broadening the scope of the fusion process, many of the students in this group began to incorporate post-tonal techniques with some aspects of the traditional arts and music that have not been explored, such as the mannerism of the Beijing opera, the dynamic flow of ink in calligraphy, the funeral chanting style of the peasants, the timbre of the ocarina, and the tradition of Chinese percussion ensembles. Their music has started to attract international attention. For example, Tan Dun (b. 1957)³⁹ drew inspiration from

³⁸ Peter Chang, p. 36.

³⁹ Playing the violin in the Beijing opera troupe for one and half years, Tan Dun was admitted to the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing in 1978 and studied with Zhao Xingdao and Li Yinghai. See Joanna C. Lee, “Tan Dun,” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed. (2001), Vol. 25, p.64.

nature, Chinese philosophy and his childhood memories and discovered a wide range of formerly suppressed twentieth-century music. His string quartet *Feng Ya Song* (1982) won an international prize in 1983. Ye Xiaogang (b. 1955)⁴⁰ attracted international attention with his *Xi jiang yue* ('The Moon Over the West River', 1984), a subdued, contemplative work for chamber orchestra. Qu Xiaosong (b. 1952)⁴¹ demonstrated a concern for nature and a respect for Chinese folklore and folk music. His representative work *Mong Dong* (1984) is a sonic manifestation of the indigenous art of the Wa people in Yunnan province. Blending an expressive human voice with instruments, this work reveals an affinity to Crumb's *Ancient Voices of Children* (1970).⁴² This group of composers was regarded as the fifth generation of Chinese professional composers, also known as "the new wave composers" or "the avant-garde of the 1980s."⁴³ Besides the three composers mentioned above, the leading composers of this generation also include Guo Wenjing (b. 1956),⁴⁴ Chen Yi (b. 1953), He Xuntian (b. 1953),⁴⁵ Peng Zhimin (b. 1955),⁴⁶ and Xu Shuya (b. 1959).⁴⁷

⁴⁰ Ye Xiaogang started to play the piano at three and worked in a factory for several years during the Cultural Revolution. He studied at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing (1978-83). See Zhang Weihua, "Qu Xiaosong," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed. (2001), Vol. 20, p.692.

⁴¹ Qu Xiaosong, a self-taught violinist and violist, played in a Beijing opera troupe in his hometown Guizhou before entering the Central Conservatory of Music in 1978. See Zhang Weihua, "Qu Xiaosong," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed. (2001), Vol. 20, p.692.

⁴² Zhang Weihua, "Qu Xiaosong," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed. (2001), Vol. 20, p.692. Also Zhou Jinmin, "New Wave Music in China;" pp. 115-117.

⁴³ Zhou Jinmin, "New Wave Music in China;" Zhang Que, "Akkulturationsphanomene in der gegenwertigen Musikkultur Chinas: Die musikalische Avantgarde der achtziger Jahre (The acculturation phenomenon in contemporary Chinese music: The avant-garde of the 1980s)" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Freie U., Berlin, 1991). "The new wave composers" and "the avant-garde of the 1980s" are not standard terms in Chinese musical history; both of them were borrowed from Western literature to describe this group of composers.

⁴⁴ Guo Wenjing began his music career as a violinist in a song and dance troupe in Chongqing for seven years before studying composition with Li Yinghai and Su Xia at the Central Conservatory of Music in 1978. In 1983, after his unauthorized marriage to a fellow student, he was forced to return to Chongqing, where he produced numerous scores for film and TV. In 1990 he returned to the Central Conservatory of Music and became a teacher of composition. His work *She Huo* (1991) and his chamber opera *Wolf Cub*

The preliminary and bold experimentations of these “new-wave” composers shocked the Chinese audiences greatly, since their music emphasized dissonant sonorities and unusual performance techniques, and intentionally avoided the idiomatic expression of melody. Their experiences along this line led to serious contention in the fields of culture and arts. The positive view considered that they broke a fixed pattern for reconciling the Chinese and Western musical elements that lasted since the beginning of the twentieth century, and opened multiple paths for the manner of the cross-cultural fusion. The opposite commentary considered that their experimental works merely imitated the newly learned techniques and ideas without speculating in depth about the appropriateness of the musical styles they integrated.

Some composers from previous generations, especially those who received instruction in Western contemporary techniques from Tian Xiaolin and other foreign musicians, supported the experimental works of the fifth generation composers. They also joined the exploration of fusing Chinese elements with post-tonal compositions; Luo Zhongrong and Yang Liqing (b.1942) are two prominent figures among them.

When Luo Zhongrong took up composition again in 1979, his affinities with Western

Village (1994), a free adaptation of Lu Xun’s well-known story *Diary of a Madman*, featured in many international festivals in Europe and Asia, thereby establishing his reputation as one of the foremost musical innovators in China. See Frank Kouwenhoven, “Guo Wenjing,” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed. (2001), Vol. 10, p.589.

⁴⁵ He Xuntian worked as a sailing laborer on the Yang-Tze River during the Cultural Revolution and entered the Sichuan Conservatory of Music in Chengdu in 1978. He became the chair of composition department at Sichuan Conservatory of Music in the early 1990s and began to teach composition at Shanghai Conservatory of Music in 1992. He is the winner of several international and national composition competitions. See Zhou Jinmin, “New Wave Music in China;” p. 298.

⁴⁶ Peng Zhimin entered the Wuhan Conservatory of Music in 1978 and was the winner of a national composition competition. He became the chair of composition department at Wuhan Conservatory of Music in the 1990s. See Zhou Jinmin, “New Wave Music in China;” p. 298.

⁴⁷ Xu Shuya learned to play the cello at fifteen and entered the Shanghai Conservatory in 1978. Concentrating on symphonic works, he is the winner of an international composition competition. In 1989, he went to France, studying at Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique in Paris. See Zhou Jinmin, “New Wave Music in China;” p. 298.

music shifted from Hindemith to Schoenberg. He wrote several song cycles and chamber works applying serial techniques, and frequently stressed the coincidental but striking relationship between Western rhythmic or timbral serialism and the structural principles of *shifan luogu*, a genre of Chinese percussion music. Although his musical style fluctuates between Debussian Romanticism and serialism with a distinct pentatonic flavor, he encourages bolder innovations in the younger generation. He is held to be the spiritual father of modern Chinese music by many young composers in Beijing and Shanghai.⁴⁸ Yang Liqing (b. 1942) was the first Chinese composer to be sent abroad for study after the Cultural Revolution in 1980. After his study in Germany his compositions veered stylistically between Romanticism and modernism, and he combined traditional Chinese instruments with colorfully scored Western orchestra in his large-scale works. Yang has received many grants and commissions from institutions worldwide and his orchestral pieces have been performed in Asia and Europe. As a key figure throughout China in promoting repertory and techniques of contemporary music, Yang has consistently supported and encouraged young Chinese composers and lectured internationally on Chinese contemporary music.⁴⁹

Although they brought a drastic impact on Chinese culture and arts, the composers of the fifth generation never dominated the Chinese musical scene since most of them went abroad for their further study in the middle of the 1980s. Residing in

⁴⁸ F. Kouwenhoven, "Luo Zhongrong," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed. (2001), Vol. 15, p.316.

⁴⁹ Yang Liqing studied composition at the conservatories of Shenyang and Shanghai, from where he gained his master degree. He took courses in composition and the piano at the *Hochschule für Musik* in Hanover and graduated with honors in 1983. He became a teacher at the Shanghai Conservatory on his return to China in 1983, becoming a professor and Chair of the Department of Composition and Conducting in 1991 and rising to vice-president in 1996. See Joyce Lindorff, "Yang Liqing," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed. (2001), Vol. 27, p.638.

the United States, Australia, and Europe, they continued to develop more sophisticated ways of integrating elements of traditional Chinese music with those of contemporary Western techniques. Composers such as Tan Dun,⁵⁰ Sheng Zongliang (Bright Sheng),⁵¹ Zhou Long,⁵² Chen Xiaoyong,⁵³ Chen Qigang,⁵⁴ Su Cong,⁵⁵ Ye Xiaogang,⁵⁶ Yu Julian

⁵⁰ Tan Dun came to the United States for his further study in 1986 and earned the doctorate from Columbia University in 1993. Among his numerous honors are the Glenn Gould International Protégé Award, the Grawemeyer Award and commissions from organizations worldwide. Describing himself as a composer ‘swinging and swimming freely among different cultures,’ Tan has drawn inspiration from nature, Chinese philosophy, and his childhood memories, a combination that lends his work qualities of timelessness, spirituality and mysticism. See Joanna C. Lee, “Tan Dun,” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed. (2001), Vol. 25, p.64 -65.

⁵¹ Sheng Zongliang (Bright Sheng, b. 1955) studied the piano at the age of four, and worked in a folk music and dance troupe in Qinghai province for seven years before entering the Shanghai Conservatory in 1978. After moving to New York, he studied at Queens College, CUNY (MA 1984), and Columbia University (DMA 1993). He joined the composition department at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor in 1995. His many honors include Guggenheim (1990), Naumberg (1990), and A Kennedy Center award (1995). See Weihua Zhang, “Sheng, Bright” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed. (2001), Vol. 23, p.252.

⁵² Zhou Long (b. 1953) studied composition at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing (1978-1983) and came to the United States in 1985 for his further study. He completed the doctorate in 1993 at Columbia University. In 1989, he became the director of *Music from China* (New York). Among his honors are awards and fellowships from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, the Guggenheim and Koussevitzky foundations, the International Composition Competition (d’Avray, France, 1991) and the BBC Masterprize Competition (1998). His music mediates Chinese musical traditions and free atonal composition. In addition to combining Chinese and Western instruments in some ensemble works, he has experimented with electronic techniques and written new music for traditional Chinese ‘silk and bamboo’ ensemble. A number of chamber works shows the influence of Buddhist thought. He married Chen Yi in 1983. See Joanna C. Lee, “Zhou Long,” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed. (2001), Vol. 27, p. 809.

⁵³ Chen Xiaoyong (b. 1955) studied composition with Su Xia at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing. His *Piano Quintet* (1984) led Ligeti to invite him to Hamburg, where Ligeti taught him for several years at the Musikhochschule and supported him financially. Chen’s *String Quartet No. 1* (1986-7) was awarded a first prize in Donaueschingen in 1987. He remained in Hamburg as an independent composer after 1989, and participated in founding the Gesellschaft für Neue Musik Hamburg (1992) and a computer music studio. See Frank Kouwenhoven, “Chen Xiaoyong,” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* 2nd ed. (2001), Vol. 5, pp. 566-567.

⁵⁴ Chen Qigang (b. 1955) was among the first students of the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing in 1978. He came to Paris in 1984 and studied with Malec, Jolas, Castèrède, and most influentially, Olivier Messiaen, who became a staunch supporter of his music. He obtained the doctorate in musicology at the Sorbonne in 1989 and remained in Paris to work independently as a composer. See Frank Kouwenhoven, “Chen Qigang,” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* 2nd ed. (2001), Vol. 5, p. 566.

⁵⁵ Su Cong (b. 1957), son of Su Xia, studied with Du Mingxin at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing before he went to the Free University in Berlin as a doctoral student of ethnomusicology in 1982. He then remained in Germany as a composer of film music. Among his many international prizes is an Oscar for his score for Bertolucci’s *The Last Emperor* (1988). Visit to Donaueschingen and Darmstadt brought Su into contact with Stockhausen and Henze. In his music, Su combines elements of Asian traditional music with western avant-garde and Romantic music. See Frank Kouwenhoven, “Su Cong,” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* 2nd ed. (2001), Vol. 24, p. 652.

(Jingjun),⁵⁷ and Chen Yi, have gradually emerged, attracting attention from the Western world as well as their motherland and receiving widespread critical acclaim.

Confronting more and more compositional techniques, the choices of proper ones for distinct compositional goals become crucial for Chinese composers, both in China and abroad. The audiences for their compositions are different in cultural background, and the immediate goals are differentiated between modernizing the existing Chinese contemporary music in China and introducing Chinese musical culture into the Western world. The historical and cultural requirements for Chinese composers, however, stay the same: to pursue a distinct Chinese music that reflects not only the contemporary compositional language, but also a thorough understanding of Chinese cultural heritage.

Family Influence and Early Working Experiences

Chen Yi's parents were lovers of Western classical music and raised their three children to love music and to be trained as professional musicians. For her parents' musical ability and the routine musical activity of her family, Chen Yi recalled:

⁵⁶ Ye Xiaogang came to the United States for his further study in 1987 and earned a Master's degree from the Eastman School of Music in 1991. He was awarded the Howard Hanson prize in 1990 for his piece *The Ruin of the Himalaya* (1989). In 1994, after working as a freelance composer in Pittsburgh, he joined the composition department at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing. His honors include the Grand Prize of the First Orchestral Composition Competition, Taiwan (1991), the Masterpiece Award from the China Cultural Promotion Society (1993), and a Meet the Composer Award (1996). See Frank Houwenhoven, "Ye Xiaogang," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* 2nd ed. (2001), Vol. 27, pp. 659-660.

⁵⁷ Yu Julian (b. 1957) studied at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing and joined the staff there (1977-80). He studied with Joji Yasa at the Tokyo College of Music (1980-82) and moved to Australia in 1985. His awards include the Irino Prize (1989), two Paul Lowin Orchestral Prizes (1991, 1994), and the Vienna Modern Masters Recording Award (1992). Yu's music is fastidiously crafted, displaying a rigorous control of complex texture and orchestration. Central to his technique is a principle derived from traditional Chinese improvisation involving building up layers of elaboration. See Peter McCallum, "Yu Julian," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* 2nd ed. (2001), Vol. 27, pp. 682-683.

“Although my parents were medical doctors, my mother played the piano at a professional level, and my father played the violin with great passion and sensitivity, at an intermediate level, and sang many European folk songs and songs from Hollywood movies. They collected numerous records of classical music, ranging from solo instrumental and vocal pieces to orchestral works and operas, and the whole family listened to these records every evening.”⁵⁸

Living in a metropolitan center in the south of China, Chen Yi’s parents often took their children to local weekly symphonic concerts and other performances, appreciating famous soloists’ recitals, ballets of France, England, and the Soviet Union, and the song and dance shows of Congo, Japan, and Romania.

Chen Yi’s older sister Chen Min⁵⁹ was a child prodigy and had performed piano on stage and on radio since she was three. Chen Yi grew up listening to her sister’s practice every morning. Chen Yi started playing piano at the age of three by having a weekly one-hour private lesson. She also began to study the violin intensively at age four, having two and, in some years, three one-hour private lessons a week. Over about twenty years, Chen Yi played through all of the standard violin repertoire in classical music, including concertos of Mozart, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Brahms, Tchaikovsky, Wieniawski, Sibelius, and Prokofiev, concert pieces of Sarasate and Saint-Saëns, 24 Capricci of Paganini, and six unaccompanied suites of J. S. Bach. Chen Yi described her feeling when she was practicing: “I got drunk by practicing and performing all of these

⁵⁸ John de Clef Pineiro, “An Interview with Chen Yi,” July 26, 2001. From www.newmusicon.org/v9n4/v94chen_yi.htm.

⁵⁹ Chen Min (b.1951) began to play the piano at three and studied at the Affiliated Middle School of the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing from 1962 to 1966. She worked as a pianist in two army song and dance troupes in Beijing from 1972 to 2001 and now is a pianist of China Philharmonic Orchestra. The biographical information of Chen Min is provided by Chen Yi.

works, and just enjoyed the beauty and the spirit behind the sound and notes.”⁶⁰ In order to understand Western music in its cultural context, she read all the available biographical books about classical composers as well as European novels and stories from which the librettos of operas were produced. Through listening and playing these masterpieces of Western music, she was impressed with the logic of motivic development in Bach’s *Chaconne*, good melodic writing and effective instrumental groupings in Tchaikovsky’s piano concerto and opera *Eugene Onegin*, and structural techniques and instrumentalized melodic writing in Brahms’s Violin concerto.⁶¹

The idea for Chen Yi to become a composer was a wish of her father, and the approach—to treat composition as a carrier of Chinese culture—was suggested by Chen Yi’s first theory teacher. Chen Yi remembered:

“One day, when I was a kid, as we listened to the recordings of Heifetz and Kreisler who played their own compositions, my father told me that it would be great if one day I could play my own works like them. And when I was a teenager, my father invited Mr. Zheng Zhong to teach me music theory and Chinese folk songs. This important mentor told me that, since I was born and growing up in China, I could understand Chinese culture better, and then should be able to carry on this culture through the music I write and share it with more people. Mr. Zheng’s words impressed me deeply and influenced my whole life. Later on, I started to do what he suggested, and I have continued to work along this line till now.”⁶²

During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), Chen Yi’s parents, like all the intellectuals in China, were subjected to cruel political persecution. Chen Yi’s family was forced to separate for several years. Her mother was kept as a prisoner at the hospital, her father went to the countryside, her sister was sent to a remote farm in the

⁶⁰ Pineiro, “An Interview with Chen Yi,” July 26, 2001.

⁶¹ A Phone Interview with Chen Yi on December 9, 2001 transcribed by Xin Guo.

⁶² Pineiro, “An Interview with Chen Yi,” July 26, 2001.

North, and her younger brother Chen Yun⁶³ was taken to the home of their violin teacher Mr. Zheng Rihua, brother of Mr. Zheng Zhong. Mr. Zheng Rihua became the closest friend of Chen Yi's family since he not only took care of the daily life of Chen Yun, but also voluntarily offered him free daily violin lessons.

From 1968 to 1970, Chen Yi was sent to the suburbs of Guangzhou to do heavy labor, which was a kind of political punishment for the children of intellectuals. It was, however, an important period for Chen Yi as she established her approach to life and composition. Through working with simple and honest peasants, she learned to overcome hardship under the political pressure, to share her feelings and thinking with them, and to live optimistically. In her spare time, she played the violin for poor country kids, peasants, and soldiers, although only the revolutionary songs were allowed to be played. She added double stops and fast passages that she had learned from Paganini when she played the popular tunes of those revolutionary songs. It was the first time for Chen Yi to synthesize Western techniques into Chinese music, and from this time, she recognized the cultural differences between Western and Chinese music and started to think how to create her own music. She explains: "In the countryside, I found that when I translated my own as well as peasants' languages into music, it was not the same as what I was practicing everyday! For this reason, I believed that I really needed a deeper and more extensive study in order to find a way to express my feeling through a real fusion of Chinese and Western music. The resulting music should be a natural

⁶³ Chen Yun (b. 1955) started to play the violin at four and was a violinist in Beijing Opera Troupe of Guangzhou from 1970 to 1978. He studied at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing from 1978 to 1982. He worked as concertmaster at Singapore Symphony from 1989 to 1995 and at Macao Symphony from 1995 till now. He has served as co-Concertmaster at the China Philharmonic Orchestra in Beijing since 2000. The biographical information of Chen Yun is provided by Chen Yi.

integration of both cultures, but not an artificial or superficial combination.”⁶⁴

This deeper and extensive study was soon executed when Chen Yi joined the Beijing Opera Troupe in Guangzhou and worked as concertmaster in the orchestra from 1970 to 1978. During this period, Chen Yi had an opportunity to come into contact with Beijing opera, to practice selected Western repertoire as technical training, and to orchestrate and compose music for this orchestra, which was a combination of Western and Chinese instruments. By arranging operatic arias, she was aware that the melody is actually an exaggerated language and is imbued with its unique cultural connotation. Understanding and mastering the syntax of Chinese language is the key to creating a good melody. Through transcribing or realizing the music for traditional Chinese instruments into Western notation, Chen Yi familiarized herself with the range, techniques, timbres and expressive effects of each of those Chinese instruments. While orchestrating the interludes and music for the scenes of acrobatic fighting in Beijing opera, she taught herself Western music theory and employed Western structural techniques to organize musical materials. By dealing with this non-standard, mixed orchestra, she developed a timbral sensitivity to the instrumental groupings, from which the equilibrium of timbral blend or special sound effects can be produced through varied combinations of Western and Chinese instruments.⁶⁵

The environment created by her parents made Chen Yi a music lover, and the preliminary ability she acquired from her early musical education in Western music prepared her to be a professional musician. Although her regular education was discontinued for about twelve years due to the political upheaval, the tribulation and

⁶⁴ Pineiro, “An Interview with Chen Yi,” July 26, 2001.

⁶⁵ A Phone Interview with Chen Yi transcribed by Xin Guo (December 2001).

hardship she underwent actually facilitated and promoted her desire to become a composer. She had cast away impractical illusions about her future career through getting close to ordinary Chinese people in spirit, and had a mixed orchestra to acquire proficiency in orchestration and examine constantly the feasibility of her musical thinking and creativity, which would have been difficult to obtain if she were a regular music student in the conservatory. The early decisive working experiences in the countryside and in the Beijing Opera Troupe, therefore, settled a foundation for Chen Yi's compositional style with cross-cultural fusion in approaches and techniques.

Musical Education and Working Experiences in the United States

After the Cultural Revolution ended in 1976 and the educational systems resumed in 1977, Chen Yi was one of the first-group composition students to be admitted into the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing in 1978. She was also accepted as a violin major at that time, but eventually she decided to take composition as her major because it had been her dream as well as her father's wish and her early theory teacher's desire.

During her five years of undergraduate study, she received strict training in both Western and Chinese musical systems. The curriculum of the Western music still followed the model set before the Cultural Revolution, including the study of functional harmony, counterpoint and fugue-writing, musical form and analysis, and orchestration, plus ear-training and sight singing and a heavy-loaded assignment for piano literature. Although this training was confined within the tonal composition of Western

common-practice period and no subject in this field was untouched to Chen Yi, her skill in part-writing was further regularized, her understanding on the nature of Western musical culture was deepened, and her compositional thinking was improved. Chen Yi's treatment of linear motion in her orchestration, for example, was enlightened by the concepts of the invertible counterpoint and double canon in the style of Bach.⁶⁶ In a global scale of her composition, she is accustomed to expressing a main idea by a lengthy melodic line with designed conjunct and disjunct as well as ascending and descending motion, and this melodic contour can be thickened by parallel motion of a group of instruments. In a small scale, she creates multiple linear motions that follow the principles of the invertible counterpoint. This manner of dealing with multiple linear motions has been emphasized and developed in her later works, thereby becoming a prominent feature of her compositional style.

The study of Chinese music, however, really opened Chen Yi's mind since she had not had a chance to get into this vital artistic treasure before. The curriculum of this part includes the study of folk songs, musical storytelling, local theater, and traditional instrumental music. The composition students were required to memorize folk songs and arias of the local theater in local dialect, to compose melodies in various local styles, and to survey playing techniques like bowing, plucking, and blowing for traditional instruments.⁶⁷ By memorizing a large number of Chinese folk melodies within a rather short period, she accumulated a great deal of perceptual knowledge, from which she later induced several principles as the grammatical and syntactical representatives of Chinese musical language and applied them to her compositions. The

⁶⁶ A Phone Interview with Chen Yi transcribed by Xin Guo (December 2001).

⁶⁷ Pineiro, "Interview with Chen Yi," July 26, 2001.

melodies of folk songs and local theater arias have in this way enriched Chen Yi's musical vocabulary and have always been a source for her creative inspiration. She was also deeply impressed with the unique structural principles of traditional Chinese instrumental music, especially for the use of number sequences in the ensemble of percussion instruments. These structural principles combined with those of Western music comprise Chen Yi's essential formal approach in her composition. An example is her early work, the Viola Concerto *Xian Shi* (1983), in which the numerical addition and subtraction are applied to the groupings of beats as a basic structural means.⁶⁸

Chen Yi studied composition with professor Wu Zuqiang during her undergraduate and graduate periods. Wu's rigorous thought on motivic development, keen insight in music analysis, emphasis on the correspondence between technical means and the natural unfolding of human emotions, and the enthusiasm for exploring and carrying forward Chinese cultural heritage influenced Chen Yi profoundly. Chen Yi's approach to the cross-cultural fusion was also strengthened when Wu encouraged her to find her own way to integrate Chinese musical culture and Western techniques. Wu strongly recommended her to treat yearly fieldwork seriously since it was a good opportunity to learn more about Chinese ordinary people and to learn and understand more Chinese culture in its original form.⁶⁹ Through these eight years of professional training, Chen Yi further formalized her compositional procedures: always plan the formal structure first, and then write down all the main musical ideas that match what she wants to express, allocate instruments and organize the materials, and adjust the

⁶⁸ Zhou Jinmin, "New Wave Music in China," pp. 224-228.

⁶⁹ A Phone Interview with Chen Yi transcribed by Xin Guo (December 2001).

details in the progress of actual composition.⁷⁰

After the introduction of Western contemporary music in the early 1980's and the lesson on post-tonal techniques taken with the first foreign visitor Alexander Goehr, a British composer and professor of Cambridge University, Chen Yi broadened her compositional thought that was once confined within the tertian based tonality and began to speculate on her own manner of fusing Chinese culture with Western contemporary techniques. While pursuing her MA degree from 1983 to 1986, Chen Yi analyzed the entire set of Bartók's string quartets in detail under the instruction of professor Wu Zuqiang, and studied the available music scores of contemporary composers.⁷¹ She admired especially Bartók's manner of integrating folk elements with contemporary techniques, and came to understand the superficiality if a folk tune is simply incorporated into composition without exploring its unique syntax in the cultural context. Meanwhile, she appreciated Berg's approach to twelve-tone tonality in his piano and violin concerto, and felt that the lyricism and the emotional power transmitted from the cello concerto of Witold Lutoslawski perfectly matched what she wanted to express.⁷² She then realized that musical works could be distinguished by their grammatical and syntactical characteristics derived from their own culture, while

⁷⁰ Pineiro, "An Interview with Chen Yi," July 26, 2001.

⁷¹ Since contemporary music was banned for three decades, no music scores or recordings were imported from foreign countries into China until Chou Wen-chung's visit in 1977. Chou brought scores of Edgard Varèse, Robert Lewis, George Crumb, Pril Smiley, Mel Powell, Ralph Shepey, and Chou himself and gave them as gifts to the library of the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing. In 1980, British composer Alexander Goehr gave scores of Debussy, Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Webern, Carter, Messiaen, Boulez, and Goehr himself to the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing when he visited China. Thereafter, Zhong Zilin, professor of the Central Conservatory of Music, brought back scores and recordings of Webern, Ives, Schoenberg, Bartók, Berg, Witold Lutoslawski, Arthur Honegger, Krzysztof Penderecki, György Ligeti, Milton Babbitt, and Luciano Berio after his visit to the United States in the early 1980s (see Jinmin Zhou, "New Wave Music in China," pp. 99-102). All these scores comprise the sources for Chen Yi's study at that time.

⁷² A Phone Interview with Chen Yi transcribed by Xin Guo (December 2001).

the underlying principle of making the music acceptable was to follow the psychological responses that were common in human nature despite cultural differences and varied expressive means. To express human emotions by the idioms of Chinese musical language, therefore, became the goal of Chen Yi's composition. From this point of view, she found the compatibilities between the *singing-speaking* of Cantonese opera and *Sprechstimme* in Schoenberg's *Survivor from Warsaw* (1947), and discovered the similarities in the treatment of rhythm and meter as the basis of form between the music of Stravinsky and Messiaen and those of traditional Chinese percussion ensembles. She was very interested in the music of Stravinsky for his irregular pulse or accent distribution, which results in a kind of psychological expectation and thus creates a momentum in music.⁷³ All these discoveries were absorbed into her practice and her compositional principles of the cross-cultural fusion had then been firmly established.

As a result of this compositional approach, Chen Yi won several awards and earned a national fame during the period of her study. Among her awarded works, *String Quartet* (1982) won the first prize in the National Composition Competition of String Quartet in 1982 and *Duo Ye* for piano solo (1984) won the first prize in the Fourth National Composition Competition in 1985. As an awarded work, *Duo Ye* reflects all influences Chen Yi received from her musical education in China, such as the pursuit of folk flavor, the emphasis on the expression of emotion, the late-Romanticist single-movement cyclic form and developing process on thematic ideas, the pan-tonal harmonic language, the ostinato movement and multi-leveled writing, and

⁷³ Pineiro, "An Interview with Chen Yi," July 26, 2001.

the metric-rhythmical structure based on a numerical sequence.⁷⁴ This work became one of her most frequently performed works and was also arranged and transcribed into several instrumental forms, such as *Duo Ye* for chamber orchestra (1985), *Duo Ye No. 2* for full orchestra (1987), and *Duo Ye* for pipa solo (1995). When she received her master's degree in 1986, she offered an evening concert of her orchestral works, including *Sprout* for string orchestra, which was a polished version selected from the assignments of the course of polyphony and fugue-writing, *Duo Ye* for chamber orchestra, viola concerto *Xian Shi*, and *Symphony No. 1* for full orchestra. This event, held in the Beijing Concert Hall and performed by the Central Philharmonic Orchestra,⁷⁵ was jointly sponsored by the Association of Chinese Musicians, the Central Conservatory of Music, and the Central People's Broadcasting Station in Beijing, and received an enthusiastic acclaim and positive commentary.⁷⁶

After coming to the United States in 1986 and studying at Columbia University from 1986 to 1993, Chen Yi learned more sophisticated contemporary techniques, mainly in dealing with dissonance, and then further broadened her views on melodic writing and sonic design. It was very natural for her to adopt the free-atonal language because it enabled her easier to notate peasants' improvisational singing, to translate people's speaking into music, and to exaggerate reciting tunes in the style of Beijing opera. By learning the twelve-tone techniques, she has been able to handle new pitch relationships with dissonant intervals and noises, thereby extending the scope of her

⁷⁴ Tang Jianping, "Tradition is Alive: a Study of the Chamber Music Compositions *Duo Ye* and *Sparkle* by Chen Yi" (*Journal of Music In China*, Vol. 1, Oct. 1999), p. 139.

⁷⁵ Resembling the performance in Carnegie Hall in New York, the performance in Beijing Concert Hall usually symbolizes the standard for both performers and composers at the highest level in art.

⁷⁶ Pineiro, "An Interview with Chen Yi," July 26, 2001.

expressive means in pitch structure. She considers that her approach to pitch structure is a fusion of tonality and atonality as well as consonance and dissonance. The result of this fusion sounds to her like speaking in Chinese, but is written in idioms of Western music.⁷⁷

Touching upon the music making via electronic and computer technology, the tenet of the sound generation—the contour of a waveform being changed in amplitude, pitch, or timbral characteristics over time—aroused Chen Yi’s thought on dealing with orchestral sonorities as flowing trends of sound. She was also influenced by Chou Wen-chung’s thought on the principles of music structure in relation to those of other arts in China, especially for the calligraphy, in which “the controlled flow of ink creates a continuum of motion and tension in a spatial equilibrium through the interaction of movement and energy, the modulation of line and texture.”⁷⁸ Similar to the overall layout in calligraphy, Chou considered that in his music, “line, mass, and their interaction, together with such elements as articulation, duration, intensity, and timbre, were organized into an integrated body of sound that ebbs and flows—in the manner of a tonal brushwork in space—with ever-changing motion, tension, texture, and sonority.”⁷⁹ The affinities between Chou’s thought on the movement and energy of sound and the tenet on the sound generation inspired Chen Yi to create tension or momentum in her composition through the movement of flowing sound trends that were produced by the orchestra. The main concern of the compositional process under this approach is therefore shifted from

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Chou Wen-chung, “Towards a Re-Merger in Music,” *Contemporary Composers on Contemporary Music*, Expanded Edition, Ed. Elliott Schwartz and Barney Childs with Jim Fox (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), p. 311.

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 310-311.

handling individual pitch relationships in great detail to bringing all the acoustic means into play, in which the distribution of timbral groups and directions of sound movement as melodic contours are pre-designed and strictly controlled.⁸⁰

The excitement generated by complex rhythmic organizations always attracted Chen Yi because she considered that these elements could help her to create more dramatic effects in her music. The rhythmic structures in the minimalist music inspired her to treat such rhythmic structures as extensions of ostinato in her *Sparkle* for octet (1992).⁸¹ In this work, an organic blending of Western and Chinese cultures is exemplified by the perpetual rhythmic motion, the continuously flowing melodic line, which was combined by the fragments of a Chinese tune and Western twelve-tone techniques, and the creation of a climax associated Western sectional formal principles and underlying phrase structures of a Chinese folk tune.

Chen Yi's open-minded study, goal-directed approach to music creation, and plentiful compositional experiences accelerated her progress in composition. A portion of her works written during her study period has been performed frequently as her representative works, such as *Woodwind Quintet* (1987), *As in a Dream* for soprano, violin and cello (1987), *Near Distance* (1988), *The Points* for pipa solo (1991), and *Sparkle* for octet (1992), among others. She started to receive commissions from professional orchestras before her graduation, such as the *Piano Concerto* (1992), which was commissioned by the Brooklyn Philharmonic Orchestra, New York in the season of 1991-92 and was premiered in October 1994 at the Next Wave festival presented by the Brooklyn Academy of Music.

⁸⁰ A Phone Interview with Chen Yi transcribed by Xin Guo (December 2001).

⁸¹ Ibid.

In addition to the education she received from Columbia University, Chen Yi has assimilated many useful elements into her composition from her living and working environments in New York City, San Francisco, Baltimore, and Kansas City. Living in these metropolitan cities with substantial exchanges in culture and arts, Chen Yi had opportunities to attend concerts and performances from the United States and other countries in the world, thereby enriching her knowledge of different cultures and inspiring her thought on music creation. Her orchestral work *Ge Xu* (Antiphony, 1994), for example, was a direct result of her attending an African-American dance concert. She was very excited by the drumming and the energetic dancing, and then she returned home to compose with the passion and excitement of that concert lingering in her head. She even wrote a special cadenza for a whole percussion group in this work.⁸²

While working as a composer-in-residence and then as a professor, she has always been ardent in disseminating Chinese culture through her music activities, offering lectures on Chinese music for the students of universities and middle schools as well as arranging Chinese folksongs for American performers, such as *A Set of Chinese Folksongs* (1994) performed by the male choir Chanticleer. On the other hand, she has been apt to learn more from preparations of new courses, and from sharing and exchanging her thoughts and feelings with her audiences and students. The book *Debussy in Proportion* by Roy Howat which she read for teaching the course “Debussy’s Orchestral Works” at the Peabody Conservatory, for example, helped to improve her thought on the design of formal structure through the ‘golden mean’ proportion, resulting in her mixed quartet *Qi* (1997).

⁸² Pineiro, “Interview with Chen Yi,” July 26, 2001.

Unlike her Chinese predecessors, whose music educations were often interrupted by social transformations and their approaches to composition were affected by political instabilities, Chen Yi was able to concentrate on her music study without interruption and developed her compositional ideal without political restrictions. She approached composition from a multi-cultural perspective by studying the music and performance practices of various cultures and by attempting to subsume structural procedures from different styles of music into her own works. Carrying forward the tradition of her Chinese predecessors in composition with the cross-cultural fusion, she increasingly committed to the use of music to express human emotion and experience and the emphasis on sympathetic responses from her audiences. She believes that although musical grammar may differ from culture to culture, the emotion it conveys can be understood and accepted by audiences of any cultural background.

Analytical Procedures

Since coming to the United States in 1986, Chen Yi has focused on four aspects of musical structure: pitch, rhythm and proportion as determinants of form, timbre, and textural process that governs the placement and duration of events in time. She has developed a personal style that successfully melds elements of Chinese traditional music with those of Western post-tonal composition. The analyses of Chen Yi's nine instrumental works in Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6 will demonstrate these developmental processes in detail.

Basically following the chronological order, the selected compositions are divided into four categories with different emphasis on the aspects of musical structure.

In the first category, *Woodwind Quintet* (1987) and *Near Distance for flute clarinet, violin, cello, piano and percussion* (1988) concentrate on Chen Yi's exploration of pitch structure; in the second category, *Sparkle for octet* and *Piano Concerto* both composed in 1992, and *Qi for flute, cello, percussion, and piano* (1997), reveal her employment of a Chinese folk tune *Baban* as a model of formal structure as well as the source of pitch material. The third category includes *Ge Xu (Antiphony) for chamber orchestra* (1994) and *Cello and String Quartet* (1998), demonstrating her exploration of the potential of Western instruments to translate the sound and expressive idiom of Chinese instruments and her sensitivity to the physical energy and color of the sound through her skillful orchestration. In the last category, *Symphony No. 2* (1993) and *Momentum* (1998) illustrate Chen Yi's ability to govern the entire range of time spans from the smallest level (moment to moment) to the largest (encompassing the entire composition). In this case, the compositional focuses are not restricted to pitch, but related to tempo, dynamics, register, texture, instrumentation, formal succession of events, and degrees of performance freedom.

The explanation of the analytical concepts or systems for particular aspects will open each of these chapters. The analysis of each work includes a brief statement of Chen Yi's own intention and pre-compositional scheme, and an identification of pitch constructions and their development, formal structure, instrumental distributions and timbral combinations, and textural arrangement. A summary identifies the specific technical innovations and explains how disparate structural elements are interconnected within the piece.