

DENG, WENYIN, D.M.A. Chinese-Western Hybrid Music: An Introduction and Exploration through the Lens of *Tibet Tone Poem* by Sicong Ma and *The Stream Flows* by Bright Sheng. (2019)  
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This document analyzed and compared two Chinese-Western hybrid violin works through musical and theoretical analysis, as well as to present the historical background of the two Chinese composers and the influence of this on their composition. Both composers (Sicong Ma and Bright Sheng) were born in China and received their compositional training in the West. My presentation and analysis of the Chinese and Western musical influences will give basic insight into these particular Chinese-Western hybrid violin works.

Sicong Ma (1912-1987) was a prominent musician in China. He was a violinist and composer and considered “the King of Violinists” in China. Ma studied violin and piano in Paris from 1923 to 1928, but most of his compositions were completed after he returned to China in 1929 and was fully immersed in the culture of Chinese traditional music. The knowledge and experience he brought with him upon his return to China from France left an impact on all his endeavors, both as a composer and a teacher. Ma fled to America in 1968 after the Cultural Revolution. *Tibet Tone Poem* was composed in 1941, and is one of his most renowned pieces.

Bright Sheng (1955-) is one of the foremost Chinese-American composers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He studied composition and learned Chinese classical and traditional music at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music from 1978-1982. When he moved to the United States in 1982, he absorbed different elements and materials from the Western style of

music, and his subsequent compositions have been deeply impacted by both Chinese and Western influences. The Stream Flows, composed in 1990, is a piece for solo violin which is based on a Chinese folk song from Southern China.

This document will examine many aspects of the Western and Chinese musical education and experience of each composer, illustrating how they are integral to these works. Also, it will present an analysis of the harmonic structures and melodic materials, as well as the rhythms used in each composition, in order to show the influences from both schools.

CHINESE-WESTERN HYBRID MUSIC: AN INTRODUCTION AND  
EXPLORATION THROUGH THE LENS OF *TIBET TONE POEM*

BY SICONG MA AND *THE STREAM FLOWS*

BY BRIGHT SHENG

by

Wenyin Deng

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APPROVAL PAGE

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

As composers and performers began to travel around the world with more ease in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the musical styles from their homelands traveled with them. Chinese composers have over two thousand years of a rich musical culture to draw from—as they traveled west, they exposed Western society to Chinese folk tunes and instruments. Western musical traditions also had an impact on the Chinese composers, presenting other options for texture, compositional form, and harmonic language. Efforts at combining both the Chinese and Western elements led composers to create a new, hybrid compositional style.

#### **Hybrid Compositional Style**

Contemporary composers frequently combine musical materials from different styles or genres in their compositions—hybrid compositions have become a mainstream compositional style that prominent composers employ. The hybrid compositional style typically combines influence and motivation from multiple cultures and musical backgrounds.

There are many types of hybrid compositional styles—composers have combined elements of music from around the world to create a vast repertoire of new music. “Non-Westerners have become increasingly active in musical cross-breeding, particularly in

recent decades.”<sup>1</sup> One example is the use of western compositional technique, form, or notation to create music that is also influenced by other cultures. The type of hybrid compositional style here is one that draws from Chinese traditional and classical music, as well as Western European and American elements.

### **Chinese Hybrid Compositional Style**

The Chinese Hybrid Compositional Style music which will be examined here is Western music composition influenced by traditional Chinese music. “Since the early 1980s, we have discovered a China that is open and saturated with Western music.”<sup>2</sup> China has opened its doors to the world, and many talented Chinese musicians and composers have made their mark in the Western music world.

China’s very first contact with Western music can be traced back to 1600, during the Ming Dynasty. A visiting Italian Jesuit played the spinet in China and gave them the first taste of the Western music. An Italian composer was sent by the Pope to work with the Chinese emperor in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (the name and the exact time couldn’t be found in the record of Chinese history), and he performed several European instruments. He even used them as an accompaniment to the Chinese songs that he sang. The Chinese emperor was very interested in the shape and sound of the Western instruments, and started to have many regular performances involving Western instruments afterward.

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<sup>1</sup> Donal Henahan, “Music View; When East meets West in classical composition.” *New York Times*, September 22, 1985.

<sup>2</sup> Bruno Deschênes, “Where East meets West: contemporary Chinese music.” *La Scena Musicale* 9, no.5 (February 9, 2004).

In early 20<sup>th</sup> century Shanghai, Russian musicians and Jewish musicians started to teach the Chinese from the middle class. In 1919, the Qing Dynasty ended, and the new government of the Chinese Republic began to introduce European-style musical compositions. The European-style musical compositions that had been introduced during that time mostly were classical compositions such as Bach, Mozart, Strauss, and others. The generation of Chinese composers during World War I and World War II were the first to learn Western compositional techniques from Europe, and these pioneers brought Western compositional techniques back to China. The Chinese hybrid compositions that resulted started to catch the attention of the Chinese music world. Sicong Ma and Xinghai Xian were among the composers of that era.

In current times, Chinese hybrid compositional style has become mainstream in Chinese music. Many Chinese composers or Chinese-born American composers have earned great recognition through their Hybrid Style compositions: Chou Wen-chung, Chen-Yi, Zhou Long, Tan Dun, Bright Sheng, and many more.

This document will examine two violin pieces by two composers in different generations. Sicong Ma's *Tibet Tone Poem* (1941) was one of his most famous works and the impact of the Western style in his works was revolutionary to the Chinese musicians of his time. The second piece is Bright Sheng's *The Stream Flows* (1990) for solo violin. Bright Sheng, part of a newer generation, expanded the Chinese-Western mixture of composition to a new level, incorporating Chinese musical elements into the modern Western musical structure. Analyzing the musical and harmonic structures, as well as the

melodic materials and rhythms in each piece will provide insight into the hybrid Chinese music and the influence of Western music and culture.

These two pieces consist of folk tunes and melodies that are taken from the Chinese culture. For Chinese musicians exposed to these styles throughout their life, mastering these pieces is quite easy, like speaking their mother tongue. The author will also provide some perspective and understanding of this music based on the author's perception of the Chinese culture for each piece.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **RELEVANT BACKGROUND FROM CHINESE MUSIC AND IMPRESSIONISM**

In Chinese instrumental music, imitating the sound of Chinese folk singing plays an important role in instrumental composition and performance. Before getting to know the two violin pieces, a basic understanding of the Chinese culture, language and some elements of Chinese music are necessary. Additionally, the main character of French impressionism will be introduced because of its significant impact on the 20<sup>th</sup> century Chinese composers and their works.

The official language in China is Mandarin, and each vowel has four different tones: Low tone, rising tone, falling tone, and high tone. In general, each tone of the word represents a different meaning. In other words, the Chinese language relies on pitch to determine the meaning of a word.

#### **Pentatonic Scales**

Traditional Chinese music uses pentatonic scales. There are five basic Chinese pentatonic scales. Every scale has a Chinese name based on the five basic notes that are used for pentatonic scales. The five notes are Gong (宫), Shang (商), Jue (角), Zi (徵), and Yu (羽) (see Figure 1). Every note can be considered as the tonic of a scale and there are five scales. The name of each scale is the same as the tonic note (Figure 2).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> “Chinese Pentatonic,” the brain, accessed February, 28, 2019, <http://webbrain.com/attach?brain=FE9A3947-848E-CA05-DFC5-E32D9FD16A6D&attach=93&type=1>

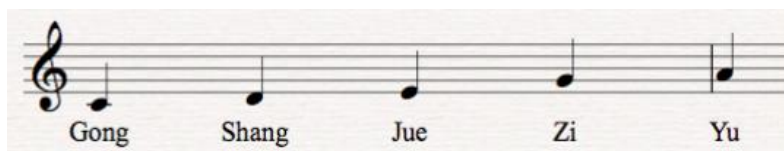


Figure 1. The Five Notes of the Pentatonic Scale.

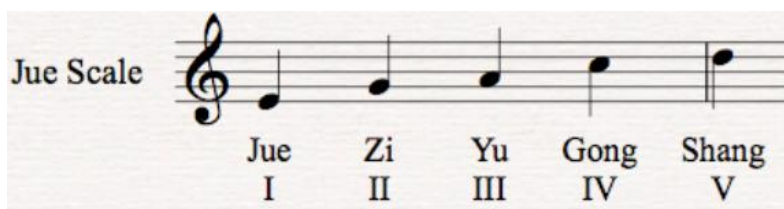
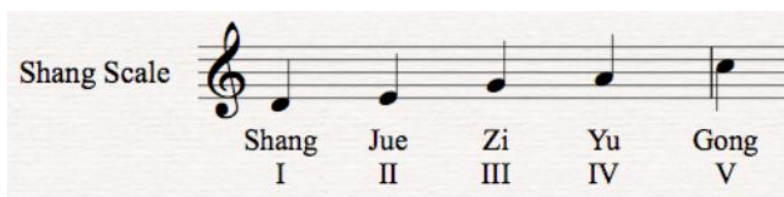


Figure 2. Five Scales.



## **Tibet**

China includes 56 Chinese nations or Chinese ethnicities. The major nation in China is the Han nation, and the rest of the nations are called ethnic minorities. Tibet is one of the ethnic minorities in China and is the highest region on Earth. One of the violin pieces that will be examined here draws materials from Tibetan music, so basic knowledge of Tibetan music and the people there will be helpful.

Tibetan people live in the high mountains and their primary livelihood is subsistence agriculture and herding animals. Improvised singing and dancing are their entertainment while herding animals. Singing is one of the most important communication methods they have while grazing. They are natural singers with no vocal training, and the songs they sing are mostly solo improvisations.

## **The Cultural Revolution**

The Cultural Revolution was a sociopolitical movement in China from 1966 until 1976. It was unleashed by Mao Zedong, the Chairman of the People's Republic of China.

Its stated goal was to preserve Chinese Communism by purging remnants of capitalist and traditional elements from Chinese society, and to re-impose Mao Zedong Thought (Maoism) as the dominant ideology within the Party. . . . The movement paralyzed China politically and negatively affected both the economy and society of the country to a significant degree.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> "Communist China," Lumen Learning, Accessed February 20, 2019.  
<https://courses.lumenlearning.com/boundless-worldhistory/chapter/communist-china/>

## French Impressionism

Impressionism was an important style of composition in France from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century into the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Works written in the school of French Impressionism feature a specific focus on timbre and texture by using parallel chords, whole tone scales, vagueness of tonality, and extended harmonies.

The most prominent feature in musical impressionism is the use of "color", or in musical terms, timbre, which can be achieved through orchestration, harmonic usage, texture, etc. Other elements of music impressionism also involve new chord combinations, ambiguous tonality, extended harmonies, use of modes and exotic scales, parallel motion . . . new timbres are explored via extremes of register, as well as by unique and "colorful" approaches to harmony and melody. Indeed, it is in the realm of harmony that the Impressionist "sound" is most readily identified: via such techniques as parallel triads, whole-tone scales, blurring of tonal identity, extended or chromatic chords (9ths, 11ths, 13ths), etc.<sup>5</sup>

French Impressionism had a significant impact on the two composers and their works analyzed in this document, and awareness of the basic concepts of French Impressionism will be helpful in understanding the analysis of the two violin pieces.

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<sup>5</sup> Nolan Gasser, "Impressionism," Classical Archives, accessed March 10, 2019, <https://www.classicalarchives.com/period/8.html>

### **CHAPTER III**

#### **HISTORY OF CHINESE COMPOSER SICONG MA**

Sicong Ma was born on May 7, 1912, in Guangdong, in the south of China. He was a violinist and Chinese classical music composer who was considered “The King of Violinists” in China. He started playing the piano when he was seven and learned harmonica and yueqin (a Chinese string instrument) when he was nine. At the age of eleven, he was fond of the violin his brother brought back from France. In 1923, he traveled to France with his brother to begin studying violin, and then began studying piano in 1926. Two years later, he was the first Chinese person accepted by the Paris Conservatory. In 1931, he studied composition with JanKo Binenbaum in France. Binenbaum was a Bulgarian-French composer who composed symphonic and chamber music in an impressionistic vein, colored with Balkan rhythms. During his composition studies in France, Ma was heavily influenced by the works of his teacher Binenbaum, as well as impressionistic and neoclassical composers like Debussy and Stravinsky.

After he returned to China in 1932, he began composing professionally and became a conductor and soloist of the Zhonghua Symphony Orchestra, the first orchestra founded in China with all Chinese musicians in Chongqing during World War II (1940). The sponsor of this orchestra was the son of Sun Yat-sen, the former President of the Republic of China (1912-1949)<sup>6</sup> who was also known as the founding father of the

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<sup>6</sup> “Republic of China (1912 -1949),” An Encyclopedia on Chinese History, Literature and Arts, ChinaKnowledge, accessed February 22, 2019, <http://www.chinaknowledge.de/History/Rep/rep.html>

Republic of China. After the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, Premier Zhou Enlai invited Ma to share his musical knowledge and thoughts with the new China, so he became the first president of the new Central Conservatory of Music at Tianjin in December 1949. Over his ten years of working in the Central Conservatory of Music, he contributed his musical philosophy to this new conservatory. He was the first person to introduce the Western music world to the music students and musicians in China.<sup>7</sup>

The Cultural Revolution in China broke out in 1966, and Ma's students turned on him as "the agent of the bourgeois opposition." He was tortured mentally and physically for a long time until his daughter found a way to help him escape to Hong Kong in 1967. Ma and his family fled from Hong Kong to the United States, where he remained until his death in 1987.

The range of Ma's compositions was broad and included concertos, violin works, symphonic works, choral works, chamber music, piano works, opera and ballet, and songs. Learning Chinese instruments in his childhood and a lifelong study of Chinese music gave Ma his musical inspiration while his studies in France gave him knowledge of Western compositional technique. Debussy's use of Western compositional techniques to imitate the sound of Eastern music might have sparked Ma's interest, encouraging him to use Western compositional techniques to compose works based on his most familiar Chinese music materials. His violin pieces *Nostalgia* (1937), *Pastoral Song* (1944) and

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<sup>7</sup> "Ma Sicong," Baidu, accessed March, 10, 2019, <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E9%A9%AC%E6%80%9D%E8%81%AA/77996?fr=aladdin>

*Tibet Tone Poem* (1941) were considered favorite instrumental pieces of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in China.

**CHAPTER IV**  
**ANALYSIS OF *TIBET TONE POEM***

In 1940, Sicong Ma went to Chongqing where the Central Film Studio was producing a documentary named *An Exploration of Tibet*. The documentary investigated the scenery of Tibet and the manners and customs of Tibetan people. Ma was asked to write the incidental music for this documentary. He first composed *Lamasery* which means the temple for the Lamas, based on the music themes of the documentary. After that, he started to collect more musical materials from the documentary and wrote the other two pieces, *Sword Dance* and *Legend Telling*. In 1941, he gathered these three pieces together as a suite. He titled it the *Tibet Tone Poem* and put the *Legend Telling* at the beginning and the *Sword Dance* at the end.

***Legend Telling***

**Musical Structure**

The first piece of the *Tibet Tone Poem* includes an introduction based on a motif, and variations with two themes (Figure 3).

**Andante maestoso** 马思聪 作曲

Violin  Motif

Figure 3. Sicong Ma, *Legend Telling* from *Tibet Tone Poem*, mm. 5 – 7.

The opening of the piano part is simple but supportive, with very soft dynamics. After the motif is presented, the violin part has a very fast passage marked “Recit.” by Ma. Recitative refers to “a type of vocal writing, normally for a single voice, with the intent of mimicking dramatic speech in song. In practice, its nature has varied widely by era, nationality, origin and context.”<sup>8</sup> Sicong Ma used the high register of the violin to imitate the improvised singing of the Tibetan people when grazing the yaks and goats on the mountains (Figure 4).

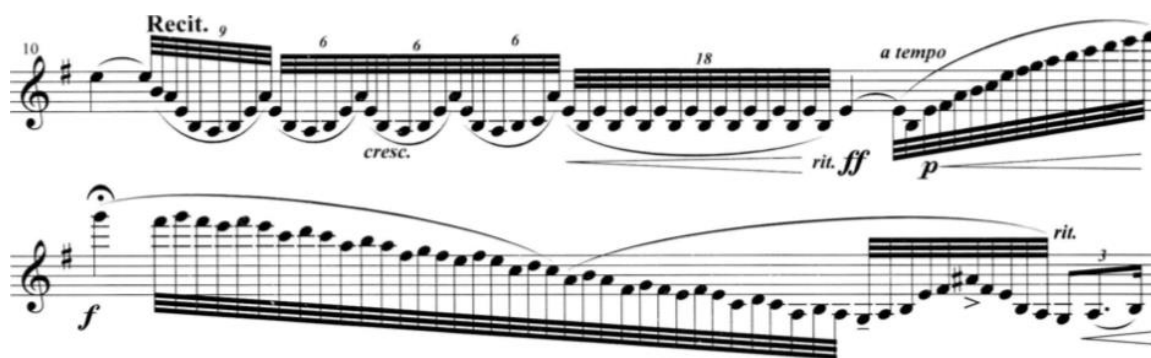


Figure 4. Sicong Ma, *Legend Telling* from *Tibet Tone Poem*, m. 10.

Two summers ago (2017), this author travelled to Tibet and observed the music and the people’s life there. The author had the chance to listen to the local Tibetan people singing their original songs. Their singing is very natural and primitive, full of improvisation. They often sing high pitches with a fast vibrato and turns in order to transmit the voice through mountains.

<sup>8</sup> Dale E. Monson, Jack Westrup, and Julian Budden, “Recitative,” Oxford Music Online, accessed February 7, 2019, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000023019>

Ma used the fast-repeating notes from low pitch to high pitch and then from high pitch to low pitch to imitate the Tibetan people's singing—he knew, from his own training as a violinist, that the timbre of the violin could represent the human voice.

The motif in the introduction comes from the first theme of this piece and Ma explored this motif with variations using double stops. Through the introduction, we can see that Ma, as both a violinist and a composer, was trying to present and imitate the typical Tibetan improvised singing while displaying the virtuosic capabilities of the violin (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Sicomg Ma, *Legend Telling* from *Tibet Tone Poem*, mm. 13 – 18.

The whole introduction is grand and free, like a Tibetan folk artist telling a story full of mystery. This introduction is not only the beginning of this piece but also an “introduction” to the whole suite.

After the introduction, the beautiful themes appear. They are based on the materials of the Tibetan folk tune which Ma collected in the filmed documentary. The first theme, which represents the beautiful and straightforward Tibetan people, is lyrical and melodic (Figure 6).



Allegro moderato

38 *p*

43 First Theme

Figure 6. Sicong Ma, *Legend Telling* from *Tibet Tone Poem*, mm. 38 – 45.

The second theme is a dance-like melody featuring staccato 16<sup>th</sup> notes. The development section is presented after the second theme, and this development is an extension of the second theme. Ma showed the virtuosity of the violin once more by using double stops. At this point in the music, he wrote “vigoroso” which means to play it vigorously and energetically. Ma used the strong tone of double stops on the violin to illustrate the group dancing and singing that the Tibetan people usually do around the fire at night (Figure 7).

58 *mf*

1. 2. *più allegro*

62 *f*

Figure 7. Sicong Ma, *Legend Telling* from *Tibet Tone Poem*, mm. 61 – 66.

After the development, the first theme comes back an octave higher and the second theme is compressed. Ma composed this piece using the traditional ABA’ musical form, combining the Western compositional technique *with* the Chinese musical material.

## Harmonic Structure

The beginning of the introduction draws attention to the harmonies used. The melody of the violin part is pentatonic, as traditional Chinese music is typically based on pentatonic scales. In the opening, the left hand of the piano part creates a drum roll or humming sound by using tremolo fifths in the bass. The humming fifth in the very low register created a pure, empty, and mysterious atmosphere to support the pentatonic melody in the violin part (Figure 8).

The image shows the first five measures of the piece. The Violino part is in a pentatonic scale. The Piano part's left hand plays a series of tremolo fifths in the bass, labeled 'Fifth' in red. The right hand plays a pentatonic melody. The score includes dynamics like 'p' and 'f', and a composer credit '马思聪 作曲'.

Figure 8. Sicong Ma, *Legend Telling from Tibet Tone Poem*, mm. 1 – 5.

Ma used many fifths for the double stops in the violin part to emphasize the mysterious tone color of the melody (Figure 9).

The image shows measures 32-36 of the piece. The Violino part plays a melody with many double stops (fifths) and is marked 'p', 'ff', and 'p calmo'. The Piano part plays a bass line with double stops and is marked 'f', 'p', and 'cresc.'. The score includes dynamics like 'p', 'ff', 'p calmo', 'f', and 'cresc.', and a measure number '18'.

Figure 9. Sicong Ma, *Legend Telling from Tibet Tone Poem*, mm. 32 – 36.

Interestingly, in the piano part, Ma used the parallel fifth which was against common practice in Western harmony of the period. Even more, he used an A-flat seventh chord in the piano part against E minor which is an unusual chord for the context (Figure 10). Looking deeper into the chord progressions here, the music presents a huge surprise in the piano part. Figure 9 shows that he started with a C major chord and then moved to a D<sup>7</sup> chord, then C major, B<sup>b</sup> major, A major, C minor, and E<sup>b</sup> major. Looking at these chords, they seem unrelated with no obvious harmonic direction. Analyzing this part, the influence of impressionism on Ma's works is clear (Figure 11).

Impressionism, in music, a style initiated by French composer Claude Debussy at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The term, which is somewhat vague in reference to music, was introduced by analogy with contemporaneous French painting; ... Impressionism can be seen as a reaction against the rhetoric of Romanticism, disrupting the forward motion of standard harmonic progressions.<sup>9</sup>

Figure 10. Sicong Ma, *Legend Telling from Tibet Tone Poem*, mm. 20 – 22.

<sup>9</sup> "Impressionism," Encyclopaedia Britannica, Accessed February 9, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/art/Impressionism-music>

Musical score for "Legend Telling from Tibet Tone Poem" by Sicong Ma, measures 23–33. The score is in 2/4 time and features a piano accompaniment with various dynamics and articulations. The key signature changes from B-flat major to C minor and back to E-flat major. Red text labels indicate specific chords and techniques.

Measures 23–24: *mf* (mezzo-forte) dynamic. The bass line features a **Parallel fifth** interval. The right hand has a *JJ* (jitter) articulation. The key signature is B-flat major. A **C major** chord is indicated at the end of measure 24.

Measures 25–28: *grandioso* tempo marking. The bass line features a **D 7** chord. The right hand has a *ff* (fortissimo) dynamic and a *p cresc.* (piano crescendo) marking. The key signature changes to C major. A **C major** chord is indicated at the end of measure 26, and a **Bb major** chord is indicated at the end of measure 28.

Measures 29–30: *ff* (fortissimo) dynamic. The right hand has a *cresc.* (crescendo) marking. The key signature changes to A major. A **Bb major** chord is indicated at the end of measure 29, and an **A major** chord is indicated at the end of measure 30.

Measures 31–33: *ff* (fortissimo) dynamic. The right hand has a *p* (piano) dynamic and a *p calmo* (piano calm) marking. The key signature changes to C minor. A **C minor** chord is indicated at the end of measure 31, and an **Eb major** chord is indicated at the end of measure 33.

Figure 11. Sicong Ma, *Legend Telling from Tibet Tone Poem*, mm. 23 – 33.

## *Lamasery*

### Musical Structure

Ma's tempo marking of this piece "Andante maestoso, Quasi una Marcia funebre" indicated the musical color of this piece should be "almost like a funeral march." The musical form of this piece is ABA'. The main melody of the A section comes after the piano's humming background setting. The melody grows more elaborate as the development continues (Figure 12).



Figure 12. Sicong Ma, *Lamasery* from *Tibet Tone Poem*, mm. 6 – 12.

In the B section, Ma used a faster tempo (*poco più mosso*) to express dramatic grief instead of the static pain he showed in the A section. He used the eighth-note rest and the short motif to create the breathless motion (Figure 13). Towards the end of this section, the long passage of sixteenth notes builds the intensity of the melody and leads the whole piece to the climax (Figure 14).



Figure 13. Sicong Ma, *Lamasery* from *Tibet Tone Poem*, mm. 43 – 49.

Figure 14. Sicong Ma, *Lamasery* from *Tibet Tone Poem*, mm. 64 – 72.

The rhythmic intensity and high register along with forward motion (*accelerando*, *poco più mosso*) create the musical peak of this piece. The notes push the music to the highest moment, and then the music moves into the recapitulation (Figure 15).

Figure 15. Sicong Ma, *Lamasery* from *Tibet Tone Poem*, mm. 86 – 95.

### Harmonic Structure

According to Ma's words,

the melody of the *Lamasery* contains the Tibetan folk tone with a great character. I was struggling with how to harmonize this piece for a very long time, and finally, I decided to use some diminished seventh chords and a few dissonant

chords to support the melody. In the piano part, I used the repeated rhythmic notes to create the drum sound which represented the Chinese woodblock, and the bass line kept the empty perfect fourth to create the gong sound. I think this is the saddest piece I have ever composed.<sup>10</sup> (Figure 16)

**Andante maestoso, Quasi una Marcia funebre**

The image shows a musical score for a piece titled "Andante maestoso, Quasi una Marcia funebre". It is written for Violino and Piano. The Piano part is divided into two staves. The right hand of the piano features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, with a red label "Chinese Wood Block" above it. The left hand of the piano features sustained notes E-flat and B-flat, with a red box around them and a red label "Fourth" below. The score includes dynamic markings "pp" and "marcato il bassa".

Figure 16. Fourths and Repeated Rhythmic Notes from *Lamasery* mm. 1 – 4.

The figure here shows what Ma described when he discussed imitating the Chinese wood block with repetitive, rhythmic notes in the right hand of the piano. The left hand has the sustained notes E<sup>b</sup> - B<sup>b</sup>, outlining a perfect fourth, to create the humming gong effect.

The harmonies in *Lamasery* are quite interesting. The repeated perfect fourth (E<sup>b</sup> - B<sup>b</sup>) in the bass part and the rhythmic figure in the upper part (also B<sup>b</sup>) introduce the first statement of the funeral march. The harmonies and texture of the funeral march he composed reflect his training in traditional Western compositional techniques. A similar example is *Chopin's Piano Sonata No.2, Op.35 in B<sup>b</sup> minor*. The third movement of this piece is called "Funeral March" (Figure 17).

<sup>10</sup> Maochun Liang, "Ma Sicong's Violin Suite <<Tibet Tone Poem>>," accessed February 11, 2019, <https://www.ixueshu.com/document/f6aa7086705941d4318947a18e7f9386.html>

Figure 17. Frederic Chopin, Marche funèbre from Piano Sonata No.2, Op. 35 in B<sup>b</sup> minor, mm. 1 – 5.<sup>11</sup>

At the beginning of this piano passage, the upper part uses the repeated note B<sup>b</sup> (Ma coincidentally used B<sup>b</sup> as well) and the same rhythmic patterns. The lower part keeps two chords alternating (B<sup>b</sup> and G<sup>b</sup>), which ring like funeral bells. Let us compare this to the beginning of Ma's *Lamasery* (Figure 18).

Figure 18. Sicong Ma, *Lamasery* from *Tibet Tone Poem*, mm.1 – 8.

<sup>11</sup> Frederic Chopin, *Chopin's Piano Sonata No.2, Op.35 in B<sup>b</sup> minor*, ed. G. Henle Verlag (Munich, 2016).



Ma also used the rhythmic patterns as a brief introduction, and the bass line repeats a V - I motion by using E<sup>b</sup> and B<sup>b</sup> (perfect 4th) long tones. In the alto voice of the piano part, Ma alternates two chords: B<sup>b</sup> major chord and a missing- third (A) French sixth chord, with the A appearing later in the violin part. The notes between the two chords (B<sup>b</sup> – C<sup>b</sup>, D – E<sup>b</sup>) shape the half step motion which is similar to the alto part in Chopin's piece, F – G<sup>b</sup> half step motion. This motion creates a very intense musical texture, as Ma described it, by using the sound of gong and Chinese wood block.

According to Ma's own words, he used diminished chords and dissonant chords to support the melody in order to create the sad, empty texture of this piece. In this musical context, the French sixth chord that occurs here is very dissonant. A French sixth chord contains notes within the same whole tone scale, and the sonority is very common to 19<sup>th</sup> century French music, especially in the impressionistic style.<sup>12</sup> Figure 18 shows the dissonant chord and the diminished seventh chord that he used for harmonizing the melody (Figure 19).

Figure 19. Sicong Ma, *Lamasery* from *Tibet Tone Poem*, mm. 53 – 56.

<sup>12</sup> “Augmented Sixth Chord,” Wikipedia, accessed February 11, 2019, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augmented\\_sixth\\_chord](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augmented_sixth_chord)

Another influence from Impressionism that appears in this piece is the vagueness of the tonality. The violin melody sings around the perfect fifth E<sup>b</sup> to B<sup>b</sup>. Ma obscured the tonality by alternating between A and A<sup>b</sup> in the passing tones. The way that Ma alternated A and A<sup>b</sup> is what Ma had described as “the great character” (Figure 20).

Violin

Andante maestoso, Quasi una Marcia funebre

5

p

Fifth

Fifth

Fifth

Figure 20. Sicong Ma, *Lamasery* from *Tibet Tone Poem*, mm. 6 – 12.

In the recapitulation (A'), Ma used a softer dynamic than the opening (*pp*) and placed the melody an octave higher. In the accompaniment, he kept the same rhythm and notes and added counterpoint in the right hand of the piano. The rich texture of the accompaniment supports the top violin melody which creates the atmosphere of people walking slowly and mourning the end of life for the funeral (Figure 21).

The image shows a musical score for the piece 'Lamasery' from 'Tibet Tone Poem' by Sicong Ma, covering measures 86 to 93. The score is written in G minor and 3/4 time. It consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The piano part features a steady eighth-note bass line. A section of the piano accompaniment is labeled 'Counterpoint' in red. The dynamics range from *pp* (pianissimo) to *p* (piano). The tempo is marked 'Tempo I'. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and a triplet.

Figure 21. Sicong Ma, *Lamasery* from *Tibet Tone Poem*, mm. 86 – 93.

### *Sword Dance*

This is the last piece from the *Tibet Tone Poem*. Similar to a common movement order in Western music, Ma composed the entire suite in a fast – slow – fast format. The inspiration for this piece came from a book that introduces Tibet and the sword dance of Tibetan people. “The sword dancers sang the songs between the sword play. They were singing: ‘My sword! My love! In winter, I put my sword in the mountain. In summer, I put it under the sea. My sword shall stab the enemy...’”<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Maochun Liang, “Ma Sicong’s <<Tibet Tone Poem>>,” Accessed February 11, 2019, <https://www.ixueshu.com/document/f6aa7086705941d4318947a18e7f9386.html>

## Musical Structure

The meter of this piece is 6/8, and the tempo marking is presto, giving it some characteristics similar to a gigue. The gigue is a Baroque folk dance, often appearing at the end of a suite. It was imported to France in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and was written in a fast tempo (6/4, 3/8 or 6/8) “with irregular phrases and an imitative, contrapuntal texture in which the opening motif of the second strain was often an inversion of the first strain’s opening”<sup>14</sup> (Figure 22).

**Presto**

Violin

6

*f*

*p*

12

18

*f*

24

*ff* *f* *p* *f* *p*

30

*f* *p* *mf* *f*

**First Subject**

<sup>14</sup> Meredith Ellis Little, “Gigue,” Oxford Music Online, Accessed February 11, 2019, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.libproxy.uncg.edu/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000011123>



Figure 22. Sicong Ma, *Sword Dance* from *Tibet Tone Poem*, mm. 11 – 34, mm. 78 – 91.

It will be easy to identify the gigue-like style from the example here with its fast tempo marking (*presto*) and the meter marking (6/8). The second subject inverts the opening of the first subject, which forms the contrapuntal texture. The first subject is in A minor and the second subject is not in the relative major key as usual, but in D major. The reason for the second subject in D major is that Ma already set the second subject as the contrapuntal theme of the first subject which needs to be the same notes but inverted. Ma did invert the first subject but added an extra note F# in the second subject to complete the pentatonic style (F# to B, the fifth). The second subject is also more lyric and smoother than the opening. More interestingly, the whole exposition was based on four notes: A, B, D, and E. Ma clearly tried to combine the Baroque style and the classical sonata form into this one piece. The mixed musical textures that Ma uses here enrich the musical color and character of this piece. The influence from impressionism in this piece is very typical—consider the score for Debussy’s song: *Noël des enfants qui n’ont plus de maisons* in comparison to Ma’s *Sword Dance* (Figure 23).



Debussy's *Noël des enfants qui n'ont plus de maisons*

Presto

Ma's *Sword Dance*

Figure 23. Claude Debussy, *Noël des enfants qui n'ont plus de maisons*, mm. 1 – 2<sup>15</sup>; Sicong Ma, *Sword Dance* from *Tibet Tone Poem*, mm. 1 – 4.

From the examples here, we see the obvious similarity between the two. The piano parts have the same rhythmic patterns and texture, disregarding the notes and the key. Ma imitated Debussy's compositional style, which is not surprising as he had a great interest in Debussy's music.

The repeated short motif in the bassline also shows the influence of impressionistic music (Figure 24).

<sup>15</sup> Claude Debussy, *Noël des enfants qui n'ont plus de maisons*, ed. A. Durand & Fils, (Paris, 1916).

**Presto**

The image shows a musical score for the first four measures of 'Lamasery' from 'Tibet Tone Poem' by Sicong Ma. The score is in 6/8 time and marked 'Presto'. It consists of two staves: Violino (Violin) and Piano. The Violino part is mostly silent, indicated by rests. The Piano part is marked 'ff' (fortissimo) and features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. A specific motif, consisting of a quarter note followed by two eighth notes, is repeated in the bass line and is highlighted with red boxes. A red label 'Repeated short motif' points to these boxes.

Figure 24. Sicong Ma, *Lamasery* from *Tibet Tone Poem*, mm. 1 – 4.

Maurice Ravel's orchestra piece, *Rapsodie Espagnole*, is another example representing the influence of impressionistic music on Ma. The fourth movement of the *Rapsodie Espagnole* has an extended passage in which strings, flute, and celesta alternate the same short motif to create a very rich musical texture and character. The same music texture is also found in Ma's *Sword Dance*, where he uses a short, repeated motif in a similar way (Figure 25).

The image shows a page of a musical score for Ravel's *Rapsodie Espagnole: IV - Feria*. The score is arranged in a standard orchestral format with the following parts from top to bottom: Célésta, 1<sup>er</sup> Violon Solo, 1<sup>ers</sup> Violons, 2<sup>ds</sup> Violons, 1<sup>er</sup> Alt. Solo, Alt., 1<sup>er</sup> Violoncelle Solo, Violoncelles, and C.B. (Cymbale/Batterie). The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 3/4. The score includes various performance instructions such as *ppp*, *mp*, *p*, *pp*, *mf*, *arco*, *pizz.*, *Sourdine*, *gliss.*, *Div. à 4*, and *4 Alt. Soli arco gliss.*. A red box highlights a specific melodic motif in the Célésta part, which is also mirrored in the 1<sup>er</sup> Violon Solo and 1<sup>er</sup> Violoncelle Solo parts. This motif is labeled "Short motif" in red text. Above the Célésta staff, the instruction "Un peu plus animé" is written in red. The Célésta part begins with *ppp* and *mp* dynamics. The 1<sup>er</sup> Violon Solo part starts with *p* and *pizz.* dynamics. The 1<sup>er</sup> Violoncelle Solo part also starts with *p* and *pizz.* dynamics. The C.B. part starts with *mf* and *pp* dynamics. The 2<sup>ds</sup> Violons part includes *Div. gliss.* and *Unis gliss.* markings. The Alt. part includes *Sourdine* and *4 Alt. Soli arco gliss.* markings. The 1<sup>ers</sup> Violons part includes *Div. à 4* markings. The 2<sup>ds</sup> Violons part includes *pp* and *ppp* markings. The Alt. part includes *pp* and *Sourdines* markings. The Violoncelles part includes *pp* markings. The C.B. part includes *pp* markings.

Ravel's *Rapsodie Espagnole: IV - Feria*



**Short motif**

#### Ma's Sword Dance

Figure 25. Maurice Ravel, *Feria* from *Rapsodie Espagnole*, rehearsal 17<sup>16</sup>; Sicong Ma, *Lamasery* from *Tibet Tone Poem*, mm. 29 – 50.

### Harmonic Structure

The theme of this piece is based on a Tibetan folk tune and contains only four notes: A, B, D, and E. The interval from A to E is a fifth, and this is a common interval in Chinese music. The open fourth, fifth and octaves that he used, both in the violin and piano parts, show the influence of both Chinese music and Western/Impressionistic

<sup>16</sup> Maurice Ravel, *Rapsodie Espagnole*, ed. A. Durand & Fils, (Paris, 1908).

music. Ma was strongly influenced by Debussy's *Violin Sonata*, in which Debussy used fourths and fifths to imitate the sound of Eastern music. That was the inspiration for Ma to use open fourths and fifths over the Western traditions to harmonize his music (Figure 26).

Figure 26. Claude Debussy, 1<sup>st</sup> Movement from Violin Sonata in G minor, mm. 1 – 14.<sup>17</sup>

### Conclusion

Understanding Tibetan musical culture is helpful if one is to perform this piece since the whole suite is based on Tibetan folk tunes. Ma imitated the improvised singing in the introduction of the *Legend Telling*. In typical Western music, violinists must have very precise and clear tone in the fast passages, but the introduction of this piece should sound like free, improvisatory singing. The clear notes here are important, but the effect

<sup>17</sup> Claude Debussy, *Violin Sonata in G minor*, ed. A. Durand & Cie. (Paris, 1917).

of the sound should be the main focus. The melody of this piece should feel light and joyful. Leaving a little space between notes while keeping the direction and flow of the melody will give the proper character, more like the Tibetan folk tunes.

*Lamasery's* interpretation is not as the same as *Legend Telling*. This piece portrays the atmosphere of a Tibetan funeral in the monastery. The performer must aim for a plain yet grieving style. The texture of the piece cannot be too heavy and the player's vibrato in the theme needs to be limited. The same-finger slide between the notes usually happens over the interval of a third, which is a very typical style element in Chinese music. The development section contrasts with the opening. This section imitates mourners weeping and crying, so an intense vibrato and forward motion in the melody help create this atmosphere.

The interpretation of the beginning of the *Sword Dance* should emphasize the weak beat note and the tied notes that cross the bar lines. The Tibetan female dancers usually focus on foot movement, and they typically use the weak beat to stomp. The Tibetan people think that stomping the feet on the weak beat in the dance shows their power and strength to defeat the enemy. In the singing part of the middle section, Ma specifically wrote slides between notes that are widely spaced intervals. This imitates the shouting of the swordsmen against the enemy. To perform this slide, the performer needs to emphasize the highest note to create the proper effect.

Ma was one of the first Chinese composers in that era to explore using Western musical traditions to bring Chinese musical ideas into a more international style. *Tibet Tone Poem* was the first instrumental music that was based on Tibetan folk tunes. Tibetan

music sources were limited during that time, but Ma used his passion and courage to boldly apply the Western musical techniques that he had been trained in to the Tibetan folk tunes. *Tibet Tone Poem* became one of his most significant and important works, and it remains one of the precious treasures in Chinese music today.

## CHAPTER V

### HISTORY OF CHINESE-AMERICAN COMPOSER BRIGHT SHENG

Bright Sheng is a Chinese-American composer, pianist, music teacher, and conductor. He was born in 1955 in Shanghai, China. He began studying the piano with his mother at the age of four. When the Chinese Cultural Revolution started, the Red Guards (a group of militant youth involved in a paramilitary-style social movement) took away his home piano, and he was sent to Qinghai Province, which used to be a part of Tibet.<sup>18</sup> Like Sicong Ma, Bright Sheng was also affected by the Cultural Revolution. Fortunately, Bright Sheng was only exiled and not tormented like Ma, because he was a child at that time. He was away from his family and stayed in Qinghai for seven years. During that time, he started to perform on the piano as well as percussion, and also had the opportunity to study and collect examples of folk music. That is why Tibetan folk music is a strong inspiration in Bright Sheng's music now—he began to compose his music during that time in Qinghai.

In 1976, the Cultural Revolution ended, and Bright Sheng came back to Shanghai and was accepted into the Shanghai Conservatory of Music in 1978. While there, he studied both Chinese classical and traditional music and earned a Bachelor of Arts in composition in 1982. In the same year, Bright Sheng moved to the United States and reunited with his family. He continued his music studies and had to re-learn different

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<sup>18</sup> Bright Sheng. "Biography." Bright Sheng. Accessed November 8, 2018. <http://www.brightsheng.com/bio.html>

elements and materials of the Western style of music. He got his Master's degree in Composition at Queens College in New York, and his Doctoral degree in Composition at Columbia University. While in school, he had many important mentors and teachers, including George Perle, Carl Schacter, Hugo Weisgall, and Chou Wen-chung. His most famous mentor was Leonard Bernstein—Sheng worked as his assistant until Bernstein's death in 1990.<sup>19</sup>

In 1995, he became a faculty member at the University of Michigan. He has earned many honors and awards for his music and compositions, including the Kennedy Center Award (1995), and the ASCAP Concert Music Award (2002).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Bright Sheng. "Biography." Bright Sheng. Accessed November 8, 2018.  
<http://www.brightsheng.com/bio.html>

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER VI

### ANALYSIS OF *THE STREAM FLOWS*

#### *The Stream Flows* for Solo Violin

*The Stream Flows* is a work for unaccompanied violin. The name of this piece is directly translated from the title of a Chinese folk song. The piece has two parts, and it is about ten minutes long. From the composer's note: *This piece was commissioned by the Foundation for Chinese Performing Arts, for Nai-Yuan Hu, who gave the premiere performance in 1990 at the Jordan Hall of the New England Conservatory. This work is dedicated to one of his teachers, Hugo Weisgall*<sup>21</sup> (Figure 27).



Figure 27. Bright Sheng, Part I from *The Stream Flows* for Solo Violin.<sup>22</sup>

The first part of *The Stream Flows* is based on a famous Chinese folk song from the southern part of China. The score with both Western music notation and the Chinese musical notation (numbered system) for this original song is shown in Figure 28. Chinese

<sup>21</sup> Bright Sheng. "The Stream Flows." Bright Sheng. Accessed November 8, 2018 <http://www.brightsheng.com/programnotes/Streamflows.html>

<sup>22</sup> Bright Sheng, *The Stream Flows* (for Solo Violin). Copyright © 1988 by G. Schirmer, Inc. (ASCAP). International Copyright Secured, All Rights Reserved, Reprinted by Permission.

musical notation *Jianpu* is a musical system that uses numbers to notate music. It is very common in Asia, especially in Taiwan, Japan and China. It uses the movable *do* system with the scale degrees 1–7. Table 1 shows how the numbers represent the notes.

**小河淌水**

云南民歌

稍慢

1=D 6 — — — 6 1 2 3 3 2 1 6 3 2 2 1 6 —

哎! 月亮出来亮汪汪, 照半坡

6 1 6 5 3 2 5 6 . 6 5 3 2 6 — — —

想起我的阿哥, 在深山

6 2 2 6 3 2 1 6 3 2 2 1 6 — 2 — — 6

哥象月亮天上走, 天上走! 哥啊

3 2 1 6 3 2 1 6 6 1 6 5 3 2 5 6 . 6 5 3 2

哥啊, 哥啊, 山下小河淌水, 清悠悠

6 — — — 3 3 2 2 6 — — —

哎, 阿哥!

Figure 28. The Original Song of *The Stream Flows*.



Table 1

## Chinese Musical Notation

Note	C	D	E	F	G	A	B
Solfege	<i>do</i>	<i>re</i>	<i>mi</i>	<i>fa</i>	<i>sol</i>	<i>la</i>	<i>ti</i>
Number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Following is the English translation of this song from Bright Sheng's notes.<sup>23</sup>

### The Stream Flows

The rising moon shines brightly,  
It reminds me of my love in the mountains.  
Like the moon, you walk in the sky, As the crystal stream flows down the mountain.  
A clear breeze blows up the hill,  
My love, do you hear I am calling you?

The original words in Chinese indicate that “my love” refers to the male and the song was originally sung by female singers. By reading through the words, you can tell it is a love song from a woman to a man. Bright Sheng said, “The freshness and the richness of the tune deeply touched me when I first heard it. Since then I have used it as basic material in several of my works. Here I hope that the resemblance of the timbre and the tone quality of a female folk singer is evoked by the solo violin.”<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Bright Sheng. “The Stream Flows.” Bright Sheng. Accessed November 8, 2018. <http://www.brightsheng.com/programnotes/Streamflows.html>

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

Many famous traditional folk singers sing this song in China. This song is also transcribed for the Chinese instrument Er Hu because the timbre of this instrument is very similar to the female voice.

## Part I

### Musical Structure

The first part of this piece has a very clear ABA form. The tempo markings indicate the various sections of the form. He marked the tempo of the exposition at 54 for the quarter note, and the tempo of the development at 60. In the recapitulation, which he marked as Tempo I, the quarter note again equals 54 (Figure 29).

Exposition:

*to Hugo Weisgall*  
**THE STREAM FLOWS**  
I

Bright Sheng  
(1990)

The musical score for the Exposition section is written on a single staff in treble clef. It begins with a tempo marking of  $\text{♩} = 54$  and the dynamic marking *mf cantabile*. The piece starts in 4/4 time, then changes to 2/4, then to 3/8, and finally to 3/4. The melody features a mix of eighth and quarter notes, with some triplet markings. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

Development:

The musical score for the Development section consists of two staves in treble clef. The first staff begins with a tempo marking of  $\text{♩} = 60 \text{ ord.}$  and the dynamic marking *ff*. The time signature changes from 3/8 to 4/4. The second staff continues the piece with a dynamic marking of *più ff* and a time signature of 4/4. The music is characterized by rapid sixteenth-note passages and triplet markings throughout.

Recapitulation:

Figure 29. Bright Sheng, Part I from *The Stream Flows* for Solo Violin.<sup>25</sup>

### Theme and Variation

The piece starts with the theme of the song (Figure 30). As the theme progresses, he leaves the original key towards the end of the theme. He started to treat the music very chromatically, even from the first statement of the theme.

Figure 30. Bright Sheng, Part I from *The Stream Flows* for Solo Violin, mm. 1 – 7.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Bright Sheng, *The Stream Flows*.

<sup>26</sup> Bright Sheng, *The Stream Flows*.

He used the basic material of the original theme, and created modulations around that. The development is a variation of the theme. One can also view all of the small chromatic modulations as small-scale variations, because none of them is exactly the same.

Upon comparing his theme to the original, traditional Chinese tune, one sees that Sheng chose to move the theme a half-step higher or lower. In correspondence with Bright Sheng to inquire about the reason for moving the theme chromatically, he said, “I don’t treat Chinese Melody as a tune, but rather a modal segment, and this gives me the freedom to move them around harmonically at my will.”<sup>27</sup>

### Harmonic Structure

Two of the basic harmonic elements in this piece are the numerous thirds and open fifths, which create a pentatonic tonality (Figure 31). Pentatonic tonality is the way traditional Chinese music is harmonized.

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The top staff is in 4/4 time, marked *mf cantabile* and  $\text{♩} = 54$ . It contains several measures with red boxes highlighting intervals. The bottom staff is in 3/4 time, marked *(mf)*. It also contains several measures with red boxes highlighting intervals. The word "Thirds" is written in red below the top staff. Trill markings (3) are present throughout the score.

<sup>27</sup> Wenyin Deng, email to Bright Sheng, November 5, 2018.

The image shows a musical score for Solo Violin, measures 1-9 and 27-30. The score is in 2/4 time and features a melodic line with triplets and a bass line with chords. The melodic line is marked "poco sul tasto" and "accel al". The bass line is marked "ff" and "cresc.". Red boxes highlight specific intervals in the melodic line, labeled "Fifths".

Figure 31. Bright Sheng, Part I from *The Stream Flows* for Solo Violin, mm. 1 – 9, mm. 27 – 30.<sup>28</sup>

“Pentatonic modes are fundamental in the pitch organization of many Southeast Asian musics, but are also fundamental throughout East Asia and many other parts of the world.”<sup>29</sup>

In the beginning of this piece, Sheng presented the thematic materials three times: measures 2 – 7 in *Yu* mode on A, measures 8 – 13 in *Yu* mode on G<sup>#</sup> and measures 14 – 25 in *Yu* mode on A, ending on C<sup>#</sup> (Figure 32). Bright Sheng used a Chinese theoretical technique *lidiao* (离调) which means leaving the “tune” or a change of keys. “*Lidiao* can create a psychological and dramatic effect on the listener, such as a sudden twist and change of modal direction while keeping the melody itself flowing.”<sup>30</sup> The half step higher and half step lower intervals in the thematic materials that Sheng applied here accomplished the use of the *lidiao* technique.

<sup>28</sup> Bright Sheng, *The Stream Flows*.

<sup>29</sup> Christopher Adler, “Cross-cultural hybridity in music composition: Southeast Asia in three works from America,” Unpublished, 1998, accessed November 6, 2018, <http://www.christopheradler.com/hybridity98.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> Peter Chang, “Bright Sheng’s music: An expression of cross-cultural experience – illustrated through the motivic, contrapuntal and Tonal Treatment of the Chinese Folk Song *The Stream Flows*,” *Contemporary Music Review* 26, Issue 5-6 (2007): 619-633.

mm. 2 – 7

Musical score for measures 2–7. The tempo is marked  $\text{♩} = 54$ . The dynamics are *mf cantabile*. The score features a melodic line with various rhythmic values and triplet markings. The key signature has one flat (B-flat).

mm. 8 – 13

Musical score for measures 8–13. The dynamics are *mf* and *f*. The score continues the melodic development with triplet markings and dynamic changes.

mm. 14 – 25

Musical score for measures 14–25. The dynamics include *pp dolce*, *(sub.)*, *f*, and *mf*. The score features a variety of rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth notes, with dynamic markings and articulation marks.

Figure 32. Bright Sheng, Part I from *The Stream Flows* for Solo Violin, mm. 2 – 25.<sup>31</sup><sup>31</sup> Bright Sheng, *The Stream Flows*.

## Mixed Meters

Sheng used mixed meters in both parts of this piece. The changing meters seem to expand or compress the theme, much like he took chromatic liberty with the tonal center of the parts of the theme. Also, he gave the performer enough freedom to interpret the phrasing without the limitation of square meters. Mixed meters are one of the most obvious Western musical techniques Sheng applied in this work. This composition technique is not part of traditional Chinese folk music. Traditional Chinese folk songs have very steady straightforward beat patterns. Sheng used mixed meters for creativity (Figure 33).



Figure 33. Bright Sheng, Part I from *The Stream Flows* for Solo Violin, mm. 1 – 9.<sup>32</sup>

## Grace Notes and Glissandi

Notating the glissandi and grace notes is another sign of Western music notation in this piece. In traditional Chinese music, slides between notes and glissando are very common. It is considered one of the traditional Chinese music styles (Figure 34).

<sup>32</sup> Bright Sheng, *The Stream Flows*.



Figure 34. Bright Sheng, Part I from *The Stream Flows* for Solo Violin, mm. 1 – 9.<sup>33</sup>

When asked to explain the difference between the grace notes with glissandi and the glissandi with notes, he said, “Grace notes and glissandos come from the Chinese language.”<sup>34</sup>

## Part II

### Country Dance and Three-note Motif

Part II is a fast country dance based on a three-note motive.<sup>35</sup> This part is very different from Part I. In correspondence about the relationship between the second part and the folk song, he revealed that he actually left this question for the listeners to figure out! (Figure 35). Analysis shows that the three-note motive is actually from a fragment of the theme — the three notes are G#, B, C#, which came from the theme, but now occur in a different key.

<sup>33</sup> Bright Sheng, *The Stream Flows*.

<sup>34</sup> Wenyin Deng, email to Bright Sheng, November 7, 2018.

<sup>35</sup> Sheng Bright. “The Stream Flows.” Bright Sheng. Accessed November 8, 2018.



4

II

$\text{♩} = 104-108$

pizz. *ff* +

arco frog *ff*

(arco)

on the string

pizz. arco *ff* *sim.*

pizz. arco

*pp sub.*

*molto*

Figure 35. Bright Sheng, Part II from *The Stream Flows* for Solo Violin, mm. 1 – 40.<sup>36</sup>

### Rhythmic Patterns

In Part II, Bright Sheng played around with the rhythm. He began with an extended and spacious rhythmic pattern, then made the pattern more compact by using two 16<sup>th</sup> notes and one 8<sup>th</sup> note versus four 16<sup>th</sup> notes. The second part is fast and very

<sup>36</sup> Bright Sheng, *The Stream Flows*.

percussive, which likely represents the Chinese percussion instrument that Chinese people used for traditional country dance in Southern China.

The melody in the second part is still based on the three-note motive and is very repetitive, which resembles the performance style of Jing Hu (Traditional Chinese Instrument similar to Er Hu) in Chinese opera. Jing Hu is a two-stringed instrument that is often used to accompany Chinese opera (Figure 36). A Jing Hu player often performs with repetitive three or four-note motives in a fast tempo.



Figure 36. Jing Hu.

### **Influenced by Bartok**

The music of Bela Bartok has a significant influence on Bright Sheng's compositions. Coincidentally, folk melody is one of the most important musical elements

in both Bright Sheng's and Bartok's music. The similar rhythmic texture between Bartok's piano piece *Mikrokomos* – 146. *Ostinato* and Part II of *The Stream Flows* is an example that shows Bartok's influence on Sheng (Figure 37).

The image displays the beginning of Bartok's Piano Piece *Mikrokomos* – 146. *Ostinato*, measures 1 through 16. The score is written for piano in 2/4 time, marked *Vivacissimo* with a tempo of 176-188. The piece features a prominent ostinato bass line in the left hand, characterized by a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The right hand begins with a melodic line in the first system, marked *f p* and *Ped.* The second system shows the right hand with dynamics *p*, *sf*, and *mf*, and includes a '\*' marking. The third system continues the right hand melody with dynamics *sf* and *sf*.

Figure 37. Beginning of Bartok's Piano Piece *Mikrokomos* – 146. *Ostinato*, mm. 1 – 16.<sup>37</sup>

### Conclusion

To interpret this piece well, the performer should listen to someone speaking the Chinese language and pay attention to the intonation of syllables mentioned earlier (four basic sounds, including a rising pitch and falling pitch). The majority of the slides are half-step grace notes—Bright Sheng wanted them to mimic the spoken Chinese language.

<sup>37</sup> Bela Bartok, *Mikrokomos*, Progressive Piano Pieces, ed. Boosey & Hawkes, (London, 1940).

Part I is based on a famous southern Chinese folk tune, so listening to the original Chinese song can help the performer imitate the female voice and inflections. The slide from the grace note needs to be paced slowly to imitate the Chinese singing style. Another type of slide is that between two regular (not grace) notes which should also imitate the tones and inflections of the Chinese language.

Part II of this piece has both left hand and right hand pizzicato. This pizzicato needs to be heavy and dry to imitate the Chinese percussion instruments such as the Pipa. The 16<sup>th</sup> notes in Part II should be played on the string. This style of playing imitates the Chinese instrument Jing Hu, which is often used in Chinese opera.

Bright Sheng was greatly influenced by traditional Chinese music culture, but he is also influenced by Western music styles. This solo violin piece strongly represents his hybrid compositional style. Sheng believes that a deep engagement with the fundamental modality of folk music can gracefully lead one to an employment of that folk music in a highly modernistic manner, while still being true to its folk roots.<sup>38</sup> As he continued his composition, he found ways to incorporate traditional Chinese methods of music with modern music from Western influences. Bright Sheng's hybrid compositional style has combined the Chinese culture of his origin with the Western culture to he now inhabits.

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<sup>38</sup> Peter Chang, "Bright Sheng's music: An expression of cross-cultural experience – illustrated through the motivic, contrapuntal and Tonal Treatment of the Chinese Folk Song *The Stream Flows*," *Contemporary Music Review* 26, Issue 5-6 (2007): 619-633.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

Sicong Ma was in the first generation of Chinese composers that began exploring Western musical composition methods using Chinese musical materials. He was also one of the first who studied Western composition overseas. Contemporary Chinese-American composers like Bright Sheng (and many more) are experiencing acceptance of their music and winning awards in the West. Central to both Sicong Ma's and Bright Sheng's work is their shared inspiration, music from their homeland.

The first generation of Chinese composers, including Sicong Ma, contributed not only Western-influenced works inspired by Chinese music, but also served as pioneers, opening the eyes of Chinese musicians to Western music. Furthermore, Ma was one of the first of his generation to use this hybrid compositional style in his works. Since it was an early exploration of Western compositional techniques, Ma focused more on imitating the Western compositional style.

A concept shared by these Western-trained Chinese composers was that the mastery of Western harmony of the common-practice period was a fundamental requirement for a composer. They regarded the nature of Western music as scientific, and as a subject of science, its rules can be applied cross culturally. . . . Chao's idea represented the prevalent practice among Western-trained Chinese composers use the Western music as the backbone and add Chinese elements.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Peter Chang, *Chou Wen-Chung: The life and work of a contemporary Chinese-born American composer* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2006), 180–184.

As a member of one of the younger generations of Chinese-American composers, Bright Sheng found his own way to apply Chinese musical material to a more modern hybrid style. “His personal musical development has progressed from the naïve idea of subjugating Chinese material to pre-determined Western harmonic and instrumental treatment to a more sophisticated conceptual union.”<sup>40</sup> His works broke from the older generation’s habit of imitating the Western compositional style, mixing these two cultures’ materials in a new union.

The reversal of emphasis on Western music as the backbone of a composition is evident in the Communist art policy, which encouraged composers to create works for the masses by using traditional Chinese folk materials as the basis for composition and selecting foreign materials such as composition techniques for adding potency of Chinese material in the synthesis . . . the backbone for nationalistic Chinese compositions was in Chinese material.<sup>41</sup>

The introduction of the Chinese musical influences and the analysis of these two pieces give a basic insight into these Chinese-Western hybrid works for violin. Sicong Ma played a very important initial role in the first generation of Chinese composers who explored Western Music; Bright Sheng served as an important bridge, combining the Western and Eastern musical materials into his modern hybrid compositions. Hopefully, the analysis and explanation of these works will bring more Chinese violin works to the standard violin repertoire into the Western world, and encourage musicians in the Western world to be more interested in exploring new Chinese compositions for violin.

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<sup>40</sup> Peter Chang, “Bright Sheng’s Music: An Expression of Cross-cultural Experience – Illustrated through the Motivic, Contrapuntal and Tonal Treatment of the Chinese Folk Song *The Stream Flows*,” *Contemporary Music Review* 26, no. 5-6 (2007): 619–633.

<sup>41</sup> Peter Chang, *Chou Wen-Chung: The Life and Work of a Contemporary Chinese-born American Composer* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2006), 184–187.

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## APPENDIX A

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