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The piano started to become an important instrument in China at the beginning of the 20th century. Chinese piano music started to flourish immensely since then. Chinese composers developed their own musical styles for the piano by mixing Western compositional techniques and forms with Chinese elements and approaches. Ningwu Du (1967--), one of the most distinguished Chinese composers and pianists of the new generation, has had a significant impact on the recent evolution of Chinese piano music. Although Ningwu Du is well-known in his native nation, he is relatively obscure outside of China. The set of *24 Piano Preludes* is one of Ningwu Du's most representative and remarkable compositions in Chinese style. The *24 Piano Preludes* are based on traditional Chinese music and poetic culture and incorporate Western musical forms, harmonic language, and compositional techniques. Ningwu Du composed the *24 Piano Preludes* utilizing 24 major and minor keys, and each prelude is accompanied by a poem written by the composer himself. This dissertation will focus on how Ningwu Du integrates his own compositional technique with poetry and the prelude genre.

The first chapter introduces Ningwu Du and his *24 Piano Preludes*, while the second chapter discusses the historical background of preludes and Chinese piano and outlines the Composer's career journey. Chapter Three summarizes the Chinese cultural and social background that Ningwu Du inherited. The fourth chapter provides musical elements of Ningwu Du's *24 Piano Preludes*; the fifth chapter includes a comprehensive analysis of each prelude in

this set, while the final chapter brings everything together by restating the objective of this dissertation. Ningwu Du's distinctive approach to composition sets him apart from other Chinese composers. It is the author's hope that this dissertation will allow for greater understanding and hopefully, worldwide promotion of these works.

A STUDY OF NINGWU DU'S 24 PIANO PRELUDES

by

Baiyun Zhou

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Need for the Study

Many Chinese audiences have, for many decades, thought Western classical music to be a very challenging genre to listen to. It appeared to be too far away, well beyond their ability to comprehend it. Toccata and Fugue in D Minor by Bach is an excellent example. The Chinese audience understands why this work is deemed to be of such high quality, but they are unable to reach the point where they can state that it is a masterpiece that moves them on a personal level. In contrast to their difficulty in appreciating Western classical music, they are huge fans of traditional Chinese music since they are familiar with the tunes from when they were young. The rest of the world has a hard time understanding and appreciating Chinese folk music for the same reason that some Chinese listeners struggle to understand Western classical music. What sort of music might be listened to by people worldwide, including the Chinese? Is it conceivable to produce a piece of work that combines Western classical music traditions and Chinese folk songs, that will one day be regarded as a classic? At the beginning of the 20th century, the Chinese people were widely exposed to the art of playing the piano. At that time, the introduction of Western academic concepts into China resulted in the creation of Chinese piano pieces by composers such as Zhao Yuanren (1892-1982) and Xiao Youmei (1884-1940). However, the majority of these works were produced in an attempt to imitate Western composing approaches. Since 1978, when China began opening and reforming its economy, there have been major gains in access to health, education, and other services. As a result of the

ongoing transformation and advancement of the times, the artistic culture of the people grew more expansive, and China saw the emergence of a significant number of talented composers.¹ Ningwu Du is one of the composers who has been striving for the nationalization of Chinese piano music, attempting to compose truly magnificent music that incorporates Chinese national culture but using a Western instrument. In the *24 Piano Preludes*, each prelude has a title and a short poem written by the composer himself. It is brimming with cultural significance in the realm of music, fusing literary allusions with the unfathomable splendor of China's natural scenery. This piece is filled with dreamlike states of mind and passionate sentiments throughout.² They draw from the best Western compositional techniques in terms of genre, style, harmony, and texture, but also combine the poetry of Chinese culture with the elements of traditional Chinese music. These new masterpieces are “Western” in their presentation yet “Eastern” in their essence. The Chinese musical tradition is removed from its isolation and presented to the international scene by fusing it with contemporary Western styles.³

The prelude is a time-honored musical style that was popularized during the Renaissance period and has persisted throughout the evolution of piano music. There is a large amount of written material about Western piano preludes, and there are only a few studies about Chinese piano preludes. One of the primary reasons for this is the small number of Chinese piano

¹ Jingbei Li, “The Preludes in Chinese Style: Three Selected Piano Preludes from Ding Shan-De, Chen Ming-Zhi and Zhang Shuai to Exemplify the Varieties of Chinese Piano Preludes” (DMA dissertation, Ohio State University, 2019).

² Du, Ningwu. *24 Piano Preludes* (Beijing: People’s Music Publishing House, 2015).

³ Shu Li, “A Study of the Piano Works of Chu Wanghua, with an Emphasis on Six Preludes.” (DMA dissertation, University of Kansas, 2016)

preludes produced, with the majority of the works written as piano preludes being single-movement pieces. Only Ningwu Du's *24 Piano Preludes* and Liao Shengjing's *Chinese Festive Customs Preludes* were composed in 24 major and minor keys. These two sets are both remarkable creations and innovations. There are only a few studies of Chinese piano preludes in the literature, and even fewer studies of Chinese piano preludes in English. It is intended that this study of Ningwu Du's *24 Piano Preludes* would inspire pianists to include this work in their recitals and contribute to the research of contemporary Chinese piano music.

Literature Review

There is a limited quantity of written material devoted to the research of Chinese piano preludes, which includes Jingbei Li's dissertation "The Preludes in Chinese Style: Three Selected Piano Preludes from Ding Shan-de, Chen Ming-Zhi, and Zhang Shuai to Exemplify the Varieties of Chinese Piano Preludes," Shu Li 's dissertation "A Study of the Piano Works of Chu Wanghua, with An Emphasis on Six Preludes," and Zhang Mengzhe's journal article "Preludes and fugues for piano in the polyphonic works of Chinese composers."

There is also a relatively limited amount of published material devoted to Ningwu Du's piano compositions. Even less published material is available for researchers interested in Ningwu Du's *24 piano preludes*; the whole body of research comprises just two sources, one being a dissertation and the other an article, both written in Chinese. The *24 piano preludes* composed by Ningwu Du are dissected methodically by Yongjian Ding in his dissertation "On the Musical Exploration of Ningwu Du's *24 Piano Preludes*." However, his analysis of this work

focuses primarily on aspects like harmonic language, structure, and performance; a more in-depth investigation of the cultural meaning of Chinese music is missing from his work.⁴ Xie Dan analyzes the music from the point of view of its style, harmony, and performance in the article “A Study of Ningwu Du's The Divine Dragon Is Dancing.”⁵

Organization of the Text

Chapter Two takes a cursory look at the history of piano music in China, the history of preludes in the West and in China, as well as the life and work of Ningwu Du, focusing mainly on his solo piano works. The third chapter offers a concise comparison of Western and Chinese musical aesthetics, as well as the Chinese aesthetic presented in Ningwu Du's *24 piano preludes*. In Chapter Four, some information is provided on titles, keys, and the dynamic range of Ningwu Du's *24 Piano Preludes*, as well as traditional Chinese scales and modes. Each prelude from this set is discussed in detail in Chapter Five. The musical analysis concentrates on examining the structure, harmony, language, and texture, as well as analysis of the poetic connotations of the related prelude. The analyses in Chapter Four combine the *24 piano preludes* written by Ningwu Du with Chinese musical culture. They can provide the reader and the performer with a reference for interpreting the entire set from the perspective of a cultural tradition, which will involve suggestions relating to poems, musical understanding, and performance. Furthermore, interpretive tips for the performer are offered in this chapter. The final chapter contains a

⁴ Jianyong Ding, "On the Musical Exploration of Ningwu Du's 24 Piano Preludes". (Diss., Inner Mongolia Normal University, 2017).

⁵ Dan Xie, "A Study of Ningwu Du's the Divine Dragon Is Dancing." *Modern Music*, no. 7 (2019), 24-25.

synopsis of the whole treatise. The ultimate goals of this study are to increase awareness of this valuable addition to the piano repertoire and explore the ever-evolving combination of Western art forms with Chinese esthetics and cultural traditions.

CHAPTER II: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION OF THE RELATED BACKGROUND OF
NINGWU DU'S 24 PIANO PRELUDES

The History of Chinese Piano Music Development

There are two main views on what caused the introduction of the piano into China. The first opinion is put forward by scholars Wang Peiyuan and Qian Renkang: they point out that the book *Guo Kan Zhuan* (郭侃传)⁶ mentions that in the seventh year of the Yuan dynasty (year 1270), the great General Guo Kan accompanied the emperor's brother Xu Lie on a mission to West Asia and brought back a keyboard instrument, the 72-stringed lute, from the Xirong. According to Wang and Qian, this instrument was the forerunner of the piano and served as its prototype. This viewpoint is shared by Xiao Youmei, an additional respected authority.⁷ Wei Tingge, director of the research department of the Chinese Academy of Literature and Art, is divided on this issue. His claim that a precursor to the piano was brought to China in the 13th century is not backed up by any evidence, and it is abundantly evident that the "seventy-two-stringed lute" was not a precursor to the piano or any other historical keyboard instrument. In Europe, the clavichord was popular between the 14th and 18th centuries, while the harpsichord was at its height of popularity between the 16th and 18th centuries. These two keyboard instruments initially arose in the 14th century. The procedure of keyboard instruments being transferred from Europe to West Asia and China took many years. Therefore, it is improbable

⁶ Ke, Shaomin, *Xin Yuan Shi: [257 Juan]: Fu Kao Zheng [58 Juan]* (Taipei: Yi Wen Yin Shu Guan, 1970.)

⁷ Wangpei Yuan and Qianren Kang, *Inquiry into When the Piano Came into China. Music for the Masses, Vol. 4.* (Music for the Masses Publishing House, 1981.)

that a harpsichord or a clavichord would have been present in Baghdad in Western Asia earlier than the year 1257, and Wei Tingge's interpretation is the more credible one.⁸

Wang Rou suggests the possible period that the western keyboard was first brought to China.

during the Ming dynasty (1573-1619), an Italian Christian priest, Matteo Ricci, came to China as a missionary. There was a Western keyboard instrument amongst his presents to the Emperor Zhu Yu Jun. When Matteo Ricci gave the instrument to the Emperor, he also played and sang in the Chinese palace.⁹

After Ricci introduced the instrument to China, other Western clerics, such as Francesco Sambiasi in 1610 and Johann Adam Schall von Bell in 1630, also brought Western keyboard instruments into the country. These instruments can only be harpsichords or clavichords since the modern piano was not invented until 1711 by the Italian Bartolomeo Cristofori.¹⁰

After the *Treaty of Nanking* was signed in August of 1842, British merchants developed a significant interest in the Chinese market. One extremely well-known company transported a substantial number of pianos to China during this time.¹¹ However, it was not until the early 20th century that the modern piano became accepted and widely used in China. After 1905, with the establishment of missionary schools, the usage of the modern piano for accompanying singing developed in schools. Some schools have introduced music courses, which would provide an

⁸ Wei Tingge, *When Early Form Piano and Piano Came into Our Country, Music of the People, Vol. Third.* (Peking: People Music Publishing House, 1986.)

⁹ Rou Wang, "Dissemination of Western Music in China," *Yinyue Yanjiu/Music Research*, no.2 (Summer, 1982) pp.91-93.

¹⁰ Falu Yin, "Matteo Ricci and the Dissemination of European Religion and Music to the East." *Music Research* (1982.)

¹¹ Wen Lan Fan, *Modern History of China, Vol. I.* (Peking: People's Literature Publishing House, 1953.)

excellent opportunity for the Chinese public to become acquainted with Western keyboard instruments.¹²

In China, New Music emerged in the 20th century. According to Liu Ching-chih (1935-) in the book *A Critical History of New Music in China*, New Music refers to “the works which result when a composer applies the composition techniques, styles, forms and musical language of eighteenth- and 19th century Europe to Chinese musical source material. We call such works China's New Music in order to distinguish them from traditional Chinese music.”¹³ Chinese musicians began exploring piano music during this time.

Formal, high-quality music schools were needed to promote music education. Cai Yuanpei and Xiao Youmei founded China's first music school in Shanghai in 1927. Xiao Youmei, the Conservatory's then-director, recruited the initial teachers. E. Levitin, Z. Pribitkova, B. Lazareff, Alexander Tcherepnin, and Boris Zakharoff from the St. Petersburg Conservatory; S. Aksakoff from the Moscow Conservatory; Ada Bronstein, a German pianist; Alfred Wittenburg, a renowned violinist; Zhou Shu'an, Wang Ruixian, Xiao Youmei, and Huang Zi from China.

The most popular instruments were the piano, violin, and cello. Western music history and theory were also considered foundational. Due to cultural differences and limited resources, relatively few compositions for the piano were written by Chinese composers. Most of the works

¹² En Pei Lin, *Development of Piano in China*. (Hobart: University of Tasmania, 1989.)

¹³ Jingzhi Liu and Caroline Mason, *A Critical History of New Music in China*, Chinese University Press, 2010, 9-10.

are for instruments such as violin or voice with piano accompaniments with a few solo imitations of Western works. Members of the first generation of Chinese musicians to study composition in the West also wrote these pieces. In 1914, Zhao Yuanren (1892–1982) produced the first solo piano work by a Chinese composer while he was a Cornell University student. It's titled "Peace March" (和平进行曲) and it shows his opposition to war and love of peace during the First World War. The style of "Peace March" is Western. This is shown by the piece's conventional three-part structure, functional harmony, and typical cadences.¹⁴

Xiao Youmei was another significant composer, the first Chinese musician to acquire a Western doctorate in music. Xiao established the National Conservatory of Music. He also published the first Chinese books covering Western music history and Chinese music history, as well as an article noting the connections of Chopin's "Funeral March" and Nocturnes to Beethoven. Xiao also composed the well-known "New Neon Dance" (新霓裳羽衣舞), which is a piano composition that uses Chinese ethnic elements.¹⁵

1934 was a key year for Chinese piano music. Alexander Tcherepnin, a Rimsky-Korsakov pupil and honorary professor at the National Conservatory of Music, initiated the idea for a Chinese-Western piano composition competition. Many students submitted entries and He Luting's "Mu Tong Duan Di" (牧童短笛) won the first prize. This competition helped promote

¹⁴ Jingbei Li, "The Preludes in Chinese Style: Three Selected Piano Preludes from Ding Shan-De, Chen Ming-Zhi and Zhang Shuai to Exemplify the Varieties of Chinese Piano Preludes" (DMA dissertation, Ohio State University, 2019).

¹⁵ Le Kang, "The Development of Chinese Piano Music." *Asian Culture and History*, (2009), doi:10.5539/ach.v1n2p18.

Chinese piano music both in China and abroad. Since then composers in China have paid more attention to what makes a "Chinese style" and have experimented with making music in a way that is characteristic of the country.¹⁶

Despite the Second Sino-Japanese War's impact on the development of piano music in China, the country's educators and musicians still pursued the art. The number of piano compositions decreased during the following period (1937-1949). Jingbei Li observed, "Only twenty-three works exist for piano from this period."¹⁷ Chinese composers started exploring the various styles of Western music, such as concertos, character pieces, variations, and preludes.

Alexander Tcherepnin's composition competitions impacted composers at this time, almost all of whom combined Chinese and Western music styles. Composer Jiang Wenye (1910-1983), when he returned from Japan, had been offered a professorship by Beiking Normal University (now Beijing Normal University). His compositions embody Chinese culture and music. Soon after moving to Beijing, he created the *Beijing Wanhua* Collection (北京万华集), a set of ten pieces that are named after Beijing's landscapes.¹⁸

After the war period (the Second Sino-Japanese War and the following four-year war of liberation) ended in 1949, The People's Republic of China was established. This provided a conducive environment for the development of piano music in the country. The central

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Jingbei Li, "The Preludes in Chinese Style: Three Selected Piano Preludes from Ding Shan-De, Chen Ming-Zhi and Zhang Shuai to Exemplify the Varieties of Chinese Piano Preludes" (DMA dissertation, Ohio State University, 2019).

¹⁸ Ling Qi. "On the Ethnic Factors in the Piano Works of Jiang Wenye." *2016 International Conference on Economy, Management and Education Technology*, Atlantis Press (2016), pp. 672-676.

government's support and social stability also contributed to the establishment of various professional music schools. Two institutions, which were known as the Shanghai and Central Conservatory of Music, were instrumental in the establishment of the piano discipline in the country's regional music schools. The increasing number of music programs in China has contributed to the country's growing interest in piano music. During this time, the field of piano pedagogy was still in its early stages in the country. Most of the country's music schools adopted the Western practices of music institutions. The curriculum of the country's music schools was also upgraded, and it now covers a broader range of topics. However, there were still some issues with the use of the instructional materials, such as the lack of Chinese language materials and the difficulty level of the textbooks during this period affected the teaching of piano music in the country. Many composers in the country released Chinese-language books designed to teach students how to play the piano. This resulted in over 300 new piano compositions from 1949 to 1966 (before the Culture Revolution).¹⁹

During this period, the compositions of Chinese piano music are on a modest scale, and the music expressed the upbeat and joyous emotions of the Chinese people. Jingbei Li noted that “Based on the policy of ‘an immediate revival of traditional Chinese music with particular emphasis on regional folk forms,’ the majority of composers responded to this call by exploring regional folk material as well as music elements from China’s national minority in their

¹⁹ Jingbei Li, “The Preludes in Chinese Style: Three Selected Piano Preludes from Ding Shan-De, Chen Ming-Zhi and Zhang Shuai to Exemplify the Varieties of Chinese Piano Preludes” (DMA dissertation, Ohio State University, 2019).

composition.”²⁰ Works representative of this period included *First Xinjinag Dance* (第一新疆舞曲) by Ding Shande, *Pictures of the Basho* (巴蜀之画) by Huang Huwei, *Yunnan Folk Songs* (云南民歌) by Wang Jianzhong, and *Grain Fluttering* (谷粒飞舞) by Sun Yiqiang.

The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) was a difficult time for China. Its negative repercussions were felt across the country. The country's music industry suffered the same level of ruin as the rest of society. Due to the situation at that time, the growth of the piano industry in the country stopped. All schools in the country were temporarily placed on a state of suspension. During this period, there was a significant decrease in the theoretical research of anything having to do with the piano. Most of the works written for the piano during this period were arrangements of previously published pieces. Various transcriptions can be classified into three categories: adaptations of Chinese instrumental pieces, folk songs, and revolutionary operas.²¹

With the official end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, the popularity of piano music in China increased. In addition to teaching Western musical theory, instrumental music lessons were also brought back into the curriculum of music schools. During this period, composers in the country explored a variety of styles and genres. Until the 1980s, most music released was composed for small and medium-scale works. After that, various works on a larger scale, such as piano concertos, came into being. During this period, there was a rise in the number of compositions being written for the piano. The various musical ideas presented during this period

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Le Kang, "The Development of Chinese Piano Music." *Asian Culture and History*, (2009), doi:10.5539/ach.v1n2p18.

were influenced by the different generations of composers. Some composers tended to explore the possibilities of traditional Western harmony. For composer Shengjing Liao's piece, *Chinese Festive Customs Preludes*, he used two heptatonic scales to create a new scale. This method allowed him to create a total of 20 new scales. Other composers who adhered to traditional Western harmonies also acquired a wealth of resources and benefits from this creative scale system.²² As a result of China's exposure to Western culture, its musicians have opened a new chapter in the history of modern music by drawing inspiration from and making references to Western music. In the dissertation "A Study of the Piano Works of Chu Wanghua, with an Emphasis on Six Preludes", Shu Li mentioned that "In the 1980s, many young Chinese composers started to write music in modernist compositional languages such as atonalism, serialism, and neo-classism."²³

After the 1980s, the development of Chinese piano music continued to be rapid, not only in terms of the composition process, but also in terms of the research that was carried out on the subject. Many academics and musicians produced extensive research projects on Chinese piano literature. Through the various resources that were collected, such as books, journals, and recordings, researchers were able to analyze the multiple works that were made by Chinese composers. Some of the most notable published works were *The Formation and Development of Chinese Piano Culture* (中国文化之形成与发展) by Bian Meng and the journal *The Piano Art*

²² Guohong Chen, "On the Piano-Performing of Liao Sheng Jing's '24 Piano Preludes'". (Diss., Northeast Normal University, Changchun, 2007).

²³ Shu Li, "A Study of the Piano Works of Chu Wanghua, with an Emphasis on Six Preludes." (DMA dissertation, University of Kansas, 2016), 13.

(since 1996). Following the end of the Chinese Civil War in 1949, several talented Chinese pianists such as Fu Cong, Li Mingqiang, Liu Shikun, Yin Chengzong, Lang Lang, Li Yundi, Wang Yujia, took first place in international competitions, elevating the status of Chinese classical pianists.²⁴

At the beginning of the 19th century, Chinese musicians had no experience with Western instruments, including the piano. Traditional Chinese instruments do not share their harmonic system, tonality, temperament, or approach to the keyboard. These aspects of its sound and playability are also distinct from traditional Chinese instruments. As a result, this Western instrument and Chinese traditional music culture must adapt to their respective limitations. Over the last century, Chinese composers have turned to Western sources for instruction to acquire a comprehensive understanding of this instrument. These sources have covered topics such as the instrument's history, pedagogy, technical approaches to the instrument, performance practices, and more. At the same time, musicians from China have been working to incorporate their national musical language and culture into the instrument's repertoire. They have unquestionably attained success as a consequence of this action.

²⁴ Jie Jin, "The exchange of music," in *Chinese Music*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 134-148.

The Development of Preludes in the West and China

Preludes in the West

According to Cambridge Dictionary, the noun “prelude” means “something that comes before a more important event or action that introduces or prepares for it.”²⁵ The prelude in music was originally an improvised piece of music performed on an instrument before a church service, or a longer and more complex work. Sometimes the prelude was used to refer to the rapid, improvised playing of scales and fragments of broken chords on the keyboard by church organists to move their fingers for warming up fingers and checking the intonation before the start of a chant.²⁶

This early prelude was often played before a suite, fugue, or other work that followed, as a prelude in contrast to the composition that followed. By the first half of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Baroque composers had inherited and refined this early prelude. For instance, the Danish/German organist Dieterich Buxtehude wanted to add a free prelude in the toccata method to the organ fugue. The German organist Handel loved to add a free improvisational prelude to the keyboard suite. J. S. Bach is credited with composing the most significant collection of preludes and fugues for the keyboard. This collection is divided into two sets totaling 24 preludes and fugues written in all keys, major and minor, to demonstrate the capabilities of the newly developed equal-tempered clavier. Bach is credited with the invention

²⁵ Cambridge Dictionary, “Prelude,” *CambridgeWords*, accessed August 24, 2022, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/prelude>.

²⁶ David Ledbetter and Howard Ferguson, “Prelude,” *Oxford Music Online*, (2001), <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.43302>.

of the prelude as a separate musical form, as well as the fact that he compiled all of the preludes from both volumes of the *Well-Tempered Clavier* into a single work. Therefore, it would appear that while one definition of “prelude” specifies that it is a piece of music meant to be performed as an introduction to another composition, preludes can also be played as stand-alone pieces. The classical piano sonata was developed to its highest degree by Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven in the 18th century. However, they neglected the prelude as a free improvisatory genre, instead following the Baroque structure of the prelude as an introduction.²⁷ Frederic Chopin (1810-1849) is almost universally acknowledged as the composer who revived the prelude genre in the 19th century. In the tradition of the single-thematic free form of the Bach preludes, he produced *24 piano preludes*, Op.28, a set of 24 individual piano preludes in different keys in a cycle of fifths. His preludes were detached from the fugue and the suite so that they might become independent piano character pieces. Since Chopin's *24 piano preludes* were first published, the piano prelude has seen substantial development as a unique genre of piano music. It emerged as one of the primary genres of small-scale piano composition in the 19th century. The most well-known of them are the preludes by French composer Debussy, as well as those by the Russian composers Scriabin and Rachmaninov.²⁸ Unlike Bach's and Chopin's preludes, there is not a fixed pattern of tonal centers Debussy adheres to in his preludes. In Claude Debussy's *Preludes*,

²⁷ Shu Li, “A Study of the Piano Works of Chu Wanghua, with an Emphasis on Six Preludes.” (DMA dissertation, University of Kansas, 2016).

²⁸ Marilyn Anne Meier, “*Chopin 24 Preludes, Opus 28*” (Diss., University of Wollongong, Wollongong, 1993).

the composer included a title that was either lyrical or descriptive at the end of each prelude.²⁹

Scriabin was a prolific composer who wrote more than 90 preludes. His preludes are brief, and to the point; they are more concerned with the fleeting emotions of spiritual life. On the other hand, Rachmaninov created 24 piano preludes in a Russian national style by fusing the Romantic form with the traditional Russian musical style. Not only did Shostakovich write 32 piano preludes, but he also developed a work called *24 Piano Preludes and Fugue*, which was modeled on Bach's work. There are several other well-known preludes, such as Gershwin's 3 Preludes, Messiaen's 8 Preludes.

Preludes in China

The Prelude, a Western musical genre, is frequently be found in the works of Chinese composers written for the piano. The Chinese composers and pianists began experimenting and investigating it as early as the 1930s and 1940s. Examples include Deng Erjing's *Preludes* and Ding Shande's *3 Preludes* (1948). These compositions have been successful both in terms of creating creative breakthroughs in the style of Chinese folk music as well as borrowing from Western music. The first one of Ding Shande's *3 preludes* is written in the melody of a traditional folk song from northern Shaanxi called "Xiao Lu" (小路). The accompaniment for this piece consists of two dissonant chords, which are meant to convey the author's anxiety regarding the state of his home country. These small works have proven to be successful in the

²⁹ Mary Nan Hudgins, "A Descriptive Analysis of the Preludes (Book 1) of Claude Debussy" (Diss. Unt Theses & Dissertations, 1956).

transmission and development of traditional Chinese folk music, as well as the incorporation of elements of Western music.³⁰

During the 1950s and 1960s, preludes for piano continued to be quite popular. The majority of preludes written during this period were given thematic titles. For instance, Chu Wang Hua's *6 preludes* are referred to by the following names: "Bamboo in the Wind," "Sound of Valley," "On the Banks of the River," "Berceuse," "Elegie," and "Memorial," are based on Chinese traditional folk tunes and instrumental music and incorporate Western musical style, harmonic language, and compositional technique.³¹ Other excellent pieces include a piano prelude "The Little River" (小河) composed by Zhu Gongyi, as well as preludes "Tell You" (告诉你) and "Flowing Water" (流水) composed by Zhu Jianer. Like all examples of the genre, they can be performed as individual pieces on their own, independent of the set to which they belong. Some preludes are also composed with fugues, as they are in Chen Mingzhi's *2 Preludes and Fugues*, which were influenced by the music of J.S. Bach. Preludes were considered less critical during the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s; during this period, there were very few works published in this genre that became highly respected.

After 1980, a significant number of preludes began to appear. These preludes made use of a variety of different harmonic languages, including traditional Chinese harmony, neo-classical

³⁰ Jingbei Li, "The Preludes in Chinese Style: Three Selected Piano Preludes from Ding Shan-De, Chen Mingzhi and Zhang Shuai to Exemplify the Varieties of Chinese Piano Preludes" (DMA dissertation, Ohio State University, 2019).

³¹ Shu Li, "A Study of the Piano Works of Chu Wanghua, with an Emphasis on Six Preludes." (DMA dissertation, University of Kansas, 2016).

forms, atonal approaches, and twelve-tone technique. Following the composition of the *3 Preludes* in 1948, Ding Shande wrote two additional famous sets of preludes: *The 4 Preludes and Fugue for Piano Op. 29* in 1988 and the *6 Preludes Op. 34* in 1989. Liao Shengjing's *Chinese Festive Customs Preludes* are based on 24 Chinese festive customs, following the Debussy tradition of naming each of his 24 preludes.³² The collection *3 Piano Preludes* by Zhang Shuai fuses jazz with traditional Chinese musical genres.³³

Looking back at the entire development of the prelude in China, Chinese composers have adapted and utilized preludes since the beginning of the 20th century. Initially, the preludes of earlier western masters could be heard in these compositions as a reflection of their influence. Later, Chinese composers gradually found their unique style in original musical concepts, national style, cultural idioms, and an innovative harmonic language created by combining European and Chinese scales. The majority of preludes written by Chinese composers are single-movement pieces or small collections, while very few are written as a set of 24 preludes. Only Ningwu Du's *24 Piano Preludes* and Liao Shengjing's *Chinese Festive Customs Preludes*, are created as sets in the 24 major and minor keys. Those two sets of preludes are quite extraordinary in terms of their creation and inventiveness.³⁴ Chinese preludes are considered an important part

³² Guohong Chen, "On the Piano-Performing of Liao Sheng Jing's '24 Piano Preludes'". (Diss., Northeast Normal University, Chuangchun, 2007).

³³ Jingbei Li, "The Preludes in Chinese Style: Three Selected Piano Preludes from Ding Shan-De, Chen Ming-Zhi and Zhang Shuai to Exemplify the Varieties of Chinese Piano Preludes" (DMA dissertation, Ohio State University, 2019).

³⁴ Jianyong Ding, "On the Musical Exploration of Ningwu Du's 24 Piano Preludes". (Diss., Inner Mongolia Normal University, Inner Mongolia, 2017)..

of Chinese piano music. The study of the *24 Piano Preludes* by Ningwu Du provides an excellent opportunity to understanding, learning, and playing Chinese music.

Ningwu Du and His *24 Piano Preludes*

Biography of Ningwu Du

Ningwu Du (1967-), a native of Nanhai, Guangdong province, is one of the most talented musicians of his generation, a highly accomplished pianist and composer. Both of his parents were students in the first class of the Beijing Central Conservatory of Music and were also composers. He was guided into music by his parents from an early age. His early piano teachers included Zhang Kongfan, Huang Ya and Li Qi, and he also studied composition with his father Qian Du. Later, he studied piano with Professor Xiao You and graduated from the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. At the age of 16, he won fifth place at the Second Tokyo International Music Competition, where he was enthusiastically received by audiences and critics alike, his playing being described as "sincere and natural, with emotional depth and youthful energy."³⁵ Among his many prizes, the most significant was the first prize at the prestigious 3rd Sydney International Piano Competition in Australia in 1985. Ningwu Du was one of 32 pianists selected from hundreds of international applicants. Although at the age of 18, he was the youngest of the competitors, he was the undisputed winner with a clear lead in the competition. Harold C. Schonberg, one of the competition's judges and one of the leading American critics,

³⁵ Ningwu Du, *24 Piano Preludes*. People's Music Publishing House, 2015, 5-6

subsequently wrote in the New York Times magazine: "Du has a most remarkable talent."³⁶

Ningwu Du studied piano at The Juilliard School in New York under the renowned pianists Russell Sherman and Oxana Yablonskaya. His concert performances have included recitals, chamber concerts, and concertos with orchestras throughout China, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, Australia, Holland, England, Germany, France, Canada, and the United States. As a chamber musician, Ningwu Du also has extensive experience in chamber music, having performed or recorded with violinists Lin Zhaoliang, Qian Zhou, Chai Liang, and Gu Wenlei, and cellists Wang Jian. Besides this, Ningwu Du and his wife Helen Sim won first place in the Grieg International Piano Competition in Norway (2004) for piano duo and four hands, and the Special Prize for Grieg's works.

Compositions of Ningwu Du

At the age of fourteen, Ningwu Du published his piano work "Youxi" (游戏) in the magazine *Music Composition* (音乐创作); at the age of fifteen, he composed "Two-Part Invention," which was included in *Chinese Works for Piano in Polyphony* (中国复调钢琴作品). His later piano works include "Thinking of Loved Ones" (想亲人), *24 Piano Preludes*, "Lullaby", three sonatas, and a set of variation. In addition, he has written some chamber music and transcript numerous Chinese traditional instrumental works for piano. Among them, the *Sonata in B minor* for Cello and Piano was performed at the premiere in Japan by Ningwu Du

³⁶ "Ning-wu Du – Pianist," Cerdanyamusic, Accessed July 13, 2022, <https://www.puigcerdamusic.com/ning-wu-du>.

and cellist Wang Jian. The *24 Piano Preludes* was published by the People's Music Publishing House in 2016 to critical acclaim. It has been described by Zhou Guangren (1928-2022), a renowned Chinese piano educator, as "this is the grandest piano solo set among our Chinese piano works of the past one hundred years".³⁷

Ningwu Du's *24 Piano Preludes* and the Context

At the age of fourteen, Ningwu Du wrote a prelude entitled "The River Boundless" (江水悠悠). In 1988, when he was a student at Juilliard, he performed it in his Piano Literature class. David Dubal, the professor at the time, said to him: "I like this piece of yours and suggest that you write a set of *24 piano preludes* in all 24 major and minor keys like Chopin did."³⁸ Three months later, Du completed the set of *24 Piano Preludes*, and "The River Boundless" became the second prelude in the set and was renamed "Boundless Sentiments" (情思悠悠).³⁹

Ningwu Du has provided more information for audiences and performers to understand his set of *24 Piano Preludes*. As he wrote this set, a vague thread of a story emerged in his mind. This story has a protagonist who loves life, art, Chinese Culture, and Chinese mythological characters (dragons and the Monkey King). He also has a loved one. Later, the protagonist has to say goodbye to his loved one because he has to engage in a war to defend his country. However, after experiencing various hardships in wartime, he eventually, unfortunately, dies at an early age. With this storyline, the *24 Piano Preludes* can be understood and divided into three main

³⁷ Ningwu Du, "Foreword," *24 Piano Preludes*. (Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 2015).

³⁸ Ningwu Du, "Preface," *24 Piano Preludes*. (Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 2015).

³⁹ Ibid.

parts: the first part is from No.1 to No.9. In this section, Du uses the music to give the audience and the performer a detailed picture of the peaceful and romantic life of the protagonist before he goes off to war. The second section is from No.10 to No.18. This part begins to show some of the things the protagonist sees, hears, and feels about his difficult life while he is participating in the war. The third part is from No.19 to No.24, in which the protagonist has to deal with his physical suffering and growing weakness, his reflections and emotions about his life before he dies, and the state of his soul just after his death.⁴⁰

The reason for Ningwu Du's imagery is inspired by his grandparents. Du's grandfather Kim Seong-sook was a campaigner for the Korean Independence Movement,⁴¹ and Du's grandmother Du Junhui was a women's campaigner for progress in China. They came together because they shared the same ideals and goals in life. With the end of the WWII in 1945, Kim Seong-sook returned to Korea. The situation in both countries (China and Korea), however, remained unstable at that time, Kim Seong-sook and Du Junhui could not be together and did not have the opportunity to see each other again. Ningwu Du didn't have the chance to meet with his grandfather Kim Seong-sook but grew up knowing his grandparent's story. The noble spirit and qualities of Ningwu Du's grandparents became the inspiration for Ningwu Du's work.

Each one of the *24 Piano Preludes* by Ningwu Du has a title and a short poem written by the composer to accompany the prelude. Full of ethereal moods and romantic emotions, this

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ During the late 19th century and the early 20th century, the Korean Independence Movement was a military and diplomatic campaign that tried to obtain independence for Korea from the authority of Japan.

work combines a variety of features from both Chinese and Western cultures, drawing on classical Western compositional techniques in terms of genre, harmony, form, and texture, while at the same time displaying characteristics of traditional Chinese musical thinking - the thematic melodies are mostly based on the traditional Chinese pentatonic scale, and the modes and harmony pay more attention to colors rather than functionality.

CHAPTER III: FEATURES OF CHINESE AESTHETICS AND NINGWU DU'S REMARKS
ON CHINESE AESTHETICS ELEMENTS

A Brief Introduction to Chinese Musical Aesthetics

As a field of study, aesthetics concerns the production, perception, and appreciation of art or music. Zeittl stated that aesthetics is drawn from visual perceptions and that it is based on the judgment of the beauty of an object.⁴² Tractinsky and Lavie expanded this definition where they state that aesthetics is also “concerned with the importance of beauty.”⁴³ It is the process where a viewer or a listener identifies and interprets events that occur in his or her environment. In art, aesthetics is the effectivity of a piece in communication. It makes one unconsciously choose to get involved in a message based on the focus of the creation.⁴⁴ It is manifested through its perceived link to the external objects. In music, aesthetics lies in the composition, instrumentation, performance, and value.⁴⁵ As a part of the culture, music aesthetics vary from one social group to the other. In China, music is considered an art with a calming influence. More emphasis is given to fluency and space in performance. The music is greatly influenced by renowned thinkers, such as Confucius. Of all known the music systems worldwide, the music of China has thrived as long or longer than any other, for thousands of years.⁴⁶ The music in China

⁴² Herbert Zettl, *Sight, Sound, Motion: Applied Media Aesthetics* (Wadsworth: Wadsworth Publishing, 2013).

⁴³ T. Lavie and N. Tractinsky, "Assessing Dimensions of Perceived Visual Aesthetics of Web Sites." *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies* 60, no. 3 (2004), 269-298.

⁴⁴ Ralf Thorsten Hoffmann and Kirstin E. M. Krauss. "A critical evaluation of literature on visual aesthetics for the web," *SAICSIT'04*, (October 2004): 205-209, <https://dl.acm.org/doi/10.5555/1035053.1035077>

⁴⁵ Eduard Hanslick and Gustav Cohen, *The Beautiful in Music: A Contribution to the Revisal of Musical Aesthetics* (Leopold Classic Library, 2017).

⁴⁶ Documents and artifacts from the Zhou Dynasty provide evidence of a well-developed musical culture in China that stretches back to the beginning of Chinese civilization (1122 B.C.E. - 256 B.C.E.).

displays linear thinking, where showing the tunes is the main priority. The “harmony” is drawn from long-term practices. The harmonious beauty is an important feature where the composition has exquisite balance, texture, and symmetry. The music is artistically conceived in pursuit of a virtual feeling. Chinese music is composed of single melodies, where there is no tonal harmony system like Western music do. The Chinese pentatonic modes and scales are discussed in detail in Chapter four. The traditional instruments used by Chinese musicians also vary from their counterparts in Western sounds. The Chinese instruments were first used in the Xia Yu period, 2020-1600 BCE. They included wind instruments (the flute, sheng, suona, xiao, pipe, bawu, and lushing), plucked string instruments (pipa, guqin, and guzheng), and percussion instruments (clapper drum, waist drum, wood block, small gong, big gong, yunluo, cymbal, and the hand bell, and yangqin).

Chinese music is closely connected to ancient Chinese civilizations. Music aesthetics is drawn on originality, conformity to the early teachings, harmony, and the use of instruments. These features showcase the unique musical aesthetic of Chinese culture.

A Brief History of Chinese Musical Aesthetics

Traditional music in China has a long and illustrious history, dating back to at least 9,000 years, making it one of the oldest musical traditions in the world. One might gain a glimpse of the essence of music during a specific era or time by studying the aesthetic idea of music during that century or period. The three phases of Chinese musical history are Upper Antiquity (from about 9,000 years ago to the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States period), Middle

Antiquity (from the Qin Dynasty to the Five Dynasties), and Modern Antiquity (from the Song Dynasty to the Qing Dynasty).⁴⁷ In the Upper Antiquity period, the relevant literary records were essentially mythology. This was during a period when music in China was primarily being transmitted by oral tradition.⁴⁸ As recorded in Lü's collected essays of history (Ancient Music)⁴⁹, the ancient people used music as a medium to communicate with the gods. In this sense, music existed as a spiritual power; in addition, in ancient times, music evolved directly from the process of labor productivity, emotional expression, and enjoyment.⁵⁰ During the Western and Eastern Zhou eras, music developed into a tool for rituals. This situation began to break down slowly during the Spring and Autumn era. During this period, two basic concepts are worth mentioning: (1) The concept of musical aesthetics within Confucianism, was primarily proposed by Confucius. He believed listening to music may improve one's state of mind.⁵¹ (2) Laozi, the founder of pre-Qin Taoism, is credited with developing the Taoist concept of musical aesthetics. He stood in opposition to the lavish pleasures enjoyed by the rulers of his time. Additionally, he advocated for having "less desirable." To keep one's heart clean and one's thoughts clear and tranquil while simultaneously having few desires is what it means to have "less desire."⁵²

⁴⁷ Xiangpeng Huang, *On the Relationship of Inheritance in Ancient Chinese Music*. (Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 1990).

⁴⁸ Teng Luo, "On the Development of Contemporary Musical Aesthetics in China." *Music Space*, no.10 (2015): 103-104.

⁴⁹ Buwei Lv and Yuan Shu, *Mister Lv's Spring and Autumn Annals*. (Tuanjie Press, 2020).

⁵⁰ Jiaying Tian, "A Brief Account of the Development of Chinese Musical Aesthetic Thought." *Divineland*, no. 29 (2018): 20-21.

⁵¹ Jiaying Tian, "A Brief Account of the Development of Chinese Musical Aesthetic Thought." *Divineland*, no. 29 (2018): 20-21.

⁵² Siying Tian, "On the Aesthetic Ideology of Music in Laozi." *Northern Music*, no. 7 (2014): 181.

During the Middle Antiquity period, ancient Chinese society entered a period of feudalism, but rulers continued to use music to educate the populace. The official musical philosophy of the time was *Li Yue Xing Zheng* (礼乐刑政) referring to rituals, music, penalties, and a variety of decrees.⁵³ The Treatise *Sheng Wu Ai Yue Lun* (声无哀乐论, translation: On the absence of Sentiments in Music), written by Ji Kang (223-262 AD), is a significant document that exemplifies the aesthetics of music in this era.⁵⁴ The major aesthetic point of view in this book is that music is an objective sound that has no link to human emotion. The preeminent Confucian aesthetic of music took a hit due to this, at least to some extent.⁵⁵

During the Modern Antiquity period, the social structure continued to be that of a feudal society; however, the center of music moved away from the court and toward folklore, and Chinese folk music emerged as the dominant style of musical expression. This occurrence prompted a further quest for and discovery of the essence of music. Wang Zhuo's *Bi Ji Man Zhi* (碧鸡漫志)⁵⁶, which was written during the Southern Song Dynasty, and Xu Qingshan's *Xi Shan Qin Kuang* (溪山琴况, translation: The Art of the Zither from Valed-Mountain Studio), which was written during the Ming Dynasty, are two of the most well-known works on musical aesthetics that date back to this period. Wang Zhuo presents in the first chapter of the *Bi Ji Man*

⁵³ Caijun Zhong, *Confucianism from an East Asian Perspective: A Traditional Interpretation* (Nanjing: Academia Sinica, 2013).

⁵⁴ Zhongde Cai and Kang Ji, *Annotation Translation and Research on "Yue Ji" and "on Sound without Sorrow and Music"* (Hangzhou and Shanghai: China Academy of Art Press, 1997).

⁵⁵ Jiaying Tian, "A Brief Account of the Development of Chinese Musical Aesthetic Thought." *Divineland*, no. 29 (2018), 20-21.

⁵⁶ *Bi Ji Man Zhi* is a study of the aesthetics of ancient music, poetry, and theatre. The book is presented in a total of five separate volumes

Zhi the musical aesthetic concepts of “primary emotion, fairness, and nature.”⁵⁷ In the book *Xi Shan Qing Kuang*, Xu Qingshang explains 24 specific circumstances to play the zither, in which “harmony” is the first of the 24 aesthetic categories.⁵⁸ Not only did his aesthetic concept develop the musical aesthetics of Taoism and Ji Kang, but it also incorporated the ancient Chinese heritage of musical aesthetics with the idea that "harmony" (和谐). The concept of "harmony" inherited from ancient Chinese culture is one of the important features in Ningwu Du's *24 Piano Preludes*. This will be discussed in detail in the “Ningwu Du's Remarks on Chinese Aesthetics” section.

Chinese musical aesthetics were originally merged with Western musical aesthetic conceptions during the Contemporary period and growth has been repeatedly halted. Xiao Youmei brought it to China in the 1920s. Some of the more representative aesthetic thinkers of this period were Huang Zi (1904-1983) and Qing Zhu (1893-1959).⁵⁹ Huang Zi is of the opinion that music is tied to social life and possesses substance.⁶⁰ Although Huang Zi had training in the

⁵⁷ “Primary emotion” is that all genuinely beautiful music and art arise from an internal shift of feeling in the “heart” that is impacted by things found in the outside world. “Fairness” includes a focus on the promotion of music that is delicate and elegant. “Nature” refers to the unadorned emotions of the subject in the creative activity of music, as well as the naturalness of joy, anger, sadness, and happiness. these concepts were quite forward-thinking approaches to the aesthetics of music throughout his era.

⁵⁸ he 和 "harmony", jing 静 "quiet", qing 清 "pure", yuan 远 "far-reaching", gu 古 "antique", dan 澹 "tranquil", tian 恬 "peaceful", and yi 逸 "at ease"; twelve tone colours and finger skills: ya 雅 "elegant", li 丽 "with beauty", liang 亮 "lucid", cai 采 "plucking", jie 洁 "pure", run 润 "smooth", yuan 圆 "tactful", jian 坚 "solid", hong 宏 "broad", xi 细 "with detail", liu 溜 "gliding" and jian 健 "vigorous"; and four methods of "treatment": qing 轻 "light", zhong 重 "heavy", chi 迟 "retarding", su 速 "hasting".

⁵⁹ Teng Luo, "On the Development of Contemporary Musical Aesthetics in China." *Music Space*, no. 10 (2015): 103-104.

⁶⁰ Changchun Feng, "An Exploration of the Basic Views of Huang Zi's Musical Aesthetic Thought and Its Essence." *Musicology in china*, no. 3 (2000): 102-123.

Western music system, the majority of his approach to musical aesthetics was influenced by Confucianism.⁶¹

Qing Zhu, also known as Liao Shangguo, believed that although music is with social function, its primary purpose was not to reflect society or the external world; instead, it was to express the spiritual world and enhance spirituality.⁶²

In 1959, the Central Conservatory of Music's Department of Musicology formed an aesthetics study group and drafted Introduction to Music Aesthetics. The book *History of Chinese Music Aesthetics* by Zhongde Cai (1937-2004) had a tremendous influence on Chinese academics and established music aesthetics as a field. Chinese music aesthetics has evolved in recent decades. It has broadened its scope to encompass humanities and social studies and has grown increasingly autonomous and acknowledged. It originated as a single scientific research subject and expanded into teaching and assessment, allowing the three to interact. Chinese music aesthetics adapted to globalization while conserving national music culture and forming a Chinese music aesthetic.⁶³

⁶¹ Xiaoqiang Gong, "Re-Conceptualization of Huang Zi's Aesthetic Thoughts on Music." *People's Music*, no. 6 (1988).

⁶² Jiaying Tian, "A Brief Account of the Development of Chinese Musical Aesthetic Thought." *Divineland*, no. 29 (2018): 20-21.

⁶³ Teng Luo, "On the Development of Contemporary Musical Aesthetics in China." *Music Space*, no. 10 (2015): 103-104.

Ningwu Du's Remarks on Chinese Aesthetics

Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism

China's two main religions are Taoism, and Buddhism, while Confucianism is the primarily philosophy. They influenced many aspects of society as ideas and faiths. Their thoughts and teachings overlap, despite conflicts. The three entities have altered society, modified each other, and mixed. Understanding how these traditions interact reveals a lot about Chinese culture, both ancient and modern.⁶⁴

The ancient Chinese thought of Confucianism is more a way of life than a set of beliefs. It continues to wield enormous influence in China today. Confucius (551-479) was a statesman and philosopher who lived during a time when the conflict of political peoples distorted the traditional ethics and ideals of a people. He viewed some of the more nuanced ethical standards as the norms of contemporary social mores. His thoughts instructed the Chinese on many aspects of life. Confucius felt that everything could be subdivided: the responsibilities of individuals and their responsibilities, as well as the ceremonies that stressed the interdependence of all sectors.⁶⁵

He emphasized that everyone in the state might contribute to the growth of a greater nation by honoring their responsibilities and duties while treating others with respect and compassion. Confucius did not emphasize spiritual matters like the afterlife, gods and goddesses, or mysticism. To a great extent, even today, the framework of Chinese society, with its emphasis

⁶⁴ National Geographic Society, "Chinese Religions and Philosophies | National Geographic Society," *National Geographic Society*, 2022, <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/chinese-religions-and-philosophies>

⁶⁵ Jeffrey Riegel, "Confucius," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Accessed Sep 21, 2022, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/confucius/>.

on ritual, familial respect and responsibility, the worship of ancestors, and self-discipline, is still very much inspired by Confucius and the principles he imparted.⁶⁶

The central principle of Confucianism is known as *ren* (仁, Humanity) and its original meaning refers to the reciprocal ties that exist between individuals. As a result, the Confucian philosophy of *ren* may be seen as a doctrine of human interactions. The interaction between oneself and others, as well as the link between the person and society, is the pinnacle of human relations. Confucianism holds that man cannot survive apart from his family, society, or the state, and that only the community can assure the individual's survival and growth. Individuals should prioritize the public good over their interests. This is one of the major tenets of Confucianism.⁶⁷

This is also apparent in Ningwu Du's composition. It is revealed in Chapter Two that the story of Ningwu Du's grandparents served as this set's primary source of inspiration. This exemplifies how Confucianism strives to bring people together in harmony. The family is where one's interpersonal relationships get their start, and the interpersonal relationships that exist within the family, such as the kindness shown by parents, the filial piety shown by children, the friendship and respect shown by brothers, and the mutual love and respect that exist between a husband and wife, are the most fundamental interpersonal relationships that individuals have in

⁶⁶ Yi Liu, "The Contemporary Value of Confucian 'Harmony' Thought". (Diss., Shangdong University, Shangdong, 2010).

⁶⁷ "Ren | Chinese Philosophy," Religious Beliefs, *Britannica*, Last modified Dec 05, 2016, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/ren>.

society.⁶⁸ This is mirrored in the poem found in No.19 “Looking back,” which includes phrases such as "Benevolence of their parenthood" and "The housing of my childhood."

Around the same time as the development of Confucianism in China, about two thousand years ago, Taoism, also known as Daoism, emerged as a new religion. Taoism, in contrast to Confucianism, is primarily concerned with the spiritual aspects of existence, especially the nature of the world. This is because Taoism views life as having a spiritual dimension.⁶⁹ Taoism's guiding concept is translated as "Dao or Tao" (道), a harmonious natural order between humans and the world. Humans, according to the Taoist view of the organization of the cosmos, are supposed to acknowledge and submit to the Tao. They should only engage in behaviors that are natural and in harmony with the Tao. This is the idea of *wu-wei* (无为) which means "non-action," but more broadly refers to aligning oneself with the way things are in the world rather than exerting undue effort to achieve one's goals.⁷⁰ Taoism does not concern itself with humanistic morality, governance, or society. Taoists consider all of these things to be creations of humans and not necessarily a part of the Tao. During this same period, Taoists were influential in the development of longevity, specifically concerning the physical body and spirit.

⁶⁸ Yi Liu, "The Contemporary Value of Confucian 'Harmony' Thought". (Diss., Shangdong University, Shangdong, 2010).

⁶⁹ "Daoism | Definition, Origin, Philosophy, Beliefs, & Facts." Daoism, *Britannica*, Last modified Apr 01, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Daoism>.

⁷⁰ Edward Slingerland, *Effortless Action: Wu-wei As Conceptual Metaphor and Spiritual Ideal in Early China*. (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

The Taoist faith places a strong emphasis on developing a connection with the natural world to realize the goal of achieving spiritual immortality.⁷¹

The living philosophy of Confucianism and the religion of Taoism are diverse from one another and complement one another.⁷² Both of these fields are primarily concerned with the investigation of the human being, and the significance of the material conditions of existence and society is the element that underpins these fields to the greatest extent. The most prominent aspect of Confucianism is its humanistic ethos, which is concerned with the world and life as they are in this life and this moment. Taoism comes into its own when individuals are unable to realize who they are in the context of their varied social interactions. The social nature of man is given significance in Confucianism, whereas the natural nature of man is given importance in Taoism. Confucianism emphasizes one's participation in society as a means of realizing one's potential as a human being. In contrast, Taoism emphasizes the importance of detaching oneself from the constraints of social ethics to know one's potential as a living being via “non-action.”⁷³

Siddhartha Gautama, who is also known as the Buddha and who lived in India about the 6th century B.C.E., is credited with the founding of Buddhism. Buddhism is a school of thought that emphasizes the practice of one's character and the acquisition of profound wisdom. They think that life is temporary and full of sorrow and uncertainty; they believe that the only way to

⁷¹ "Daoism | Definition, Origin, Philosophy, Beliefs, & Facts." Daoism, *Britannica*, Last modified Apr 01, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Daoism>.

⁷² Frederick W. Mote, *Intellectual Foundations of China* (New York: Knopf.,1971).

⁷³ Xi Bai, "Laozi's Thought and the Complementarity of Confucianism and Taoism," *Thinker* (2009) <https://www.aisixiang.com/data/27481.html>

achieve peace is to reach nirvana, which is a joyous world beyond suffering. Mahayana Buddhism is prevalent in East Asia, including China. After its beginnings in India, Buddhism made its way to China in the 1st century CE, quickly gaining a following.⁷⁴

Chinese Han Buddhism embraces the belief that all things are changing all the time and are the product of karma and harmony; this is similar to Taoism, which states that all figures are formed by the “Tao” of karmic interactions. Buddhism emphasizes a negative approach to this life, seeking ascension in the next; Taoism, on the other hand, focuses on this life, hoping for longevity and actively using various natural scientific methods to continue life. Buddhism and Taoism address the question of where life goes from different perspectives. Buddhism treats this life negatively but strives to cultivate the afterlife, Taoism seeks to cultivate this life without focusing on reincarnation and the afterlife, but the essence is the same. If religious practice is not successful, Buddhists and Taoists continue to practice in the next life.⁷⁵ The last two preludes in Ningwu Du’s *24 Piano Preludes*, “Disembodiment” and “The Other World,” are conspicuously Taoist and Buddhist discourses on practice and the meaning of life. In addition to these two reasonably obvious instances, there is evidence of Taoist and Buddhist links in other preludes.⁷⁶ These subjects are going to be discussed in Chapter Five.

⁷⁴ National Geographic Society, "Chinese Religions and Philosophies | National Geographic Society," *National Geographic Society*, 2022, <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/chinese-religions-and-philosophies>

⁷⁵ Mabelle, "Difference between Taoism and Buddhism." Accessed July 10, 2022, <http://www.differencebetween.net/miscellaneous/difference-between-taoism-and-buddhism/#:~:text=Buddhism>.

⁷⁶ Jianyong Ding, "On the Musical Exploration of Ningwu Du's 24 Piano Preludes" (Diss., Inner Mongolia Normal University, 2017).

Nature

In no other cultural tradition has nature played a more significant role in the arts than China.⁷⁷ The importance of nature is emphasized in Chinese culture without necessarily being distinguished from the traditional Chinese philosophies, although there is a connection between the aesthetic of nature and the old Chinese traditions of Taoism and Confucianism. According to Taoism and Confucianism, the natural scenery is endowed with spirits or has spiritual significance. For instance, mountains are brimming with nature's life energy known as "qi" (气), which is the energy that is necessary for the creation of life. People lauded the mountains as a haven for mystical creatures, such as rare medical plants that may save a person's life. In addition, people believed that the "qi" that could be found in the mountains might assist in purifying their souls; therefore, they revered mountains as locations for spiritual awakening and practice.⁷⁸ This reverence for mountains for the piece "Tall Mountains, Flowing Water," chosen by Ningwu Du to serve as the opening prelude for the entirety of this set of *24 Piano Preludes*.

Along with the mountains, water is another element of nature that is immensely significant in Chinese culture. The Chinese have always held the belief that water possesses spiritual qualities. The Taoists believed that water was omnipresent and that it embraced all forms of life. In addition, Confucianism embraces that "Renzheyueshan, Zhizheyueshui" (仁者

⁷⁷ Department of Asian Art, "Nature in Chinese Culture." Accessed Sep. 27, 2022, https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/cnat/hd_cnat.htm.

⁷⁸ Xin Xia, "The Aesthetics of Nature, Harmony, and Pentatonicism in Chinese Culture and Its Influence on Selected Piano Works of Claude Debussy" (Diss., Shenandoah University, Virginia, 2017).

乐山 智者乐水).⁷⁹ “Renzheyueshan, Zhizheyueshui” implies that a virtuous person has a passion for mountains, whereas an intelligent people have a passion for water. The intelligent people are content with the water because they are sensitive to the circumstances and are always prepared to adjust.⁸⁰ The virtuous person is content with the calm and stillness of the mountain and the benevolence of his own heart. Taoists also held the belief that "man is part of nature, intertwined with it through and through."⁸¹ As a result, Chinese painting, music and literature are heavily influenced by the beauty of nature, which adopted landscapes as their principal subject matter of interest. Táo Yuanmin (365-427) was a Chinese poet and statesman, and is remembered as the poet most closely associated with the style of writing that is today known as Fields and Gardens poetry (a style of landscape poetry that found inspiration in the beauty and serenity of the natural world close at hand).⁸² The majesty and calm of the natural environment served as a source of creativity for Tao and we can find traces of his poetry “Peach Blossom Spring” (桃花源记) in the poems that are included in the No.3 “Peach Blossom Island” and No.10 “Romantic Countryside” of Ningwu Du's *24 Piano Preludes*.

⁷⁹ Shaofang Ying, *Kongzi: The Analects of Confucius Code. Gong Ye Chang and Yong Ye*. (Hill House Publishing, 2005).

⁸⁰ USC US-ChinaInstitute, "Confucius, the Analects - 6 | Us-China Institute." Accessed July 10, 2022, <https://china.usc.edu/confucius-analects-6#:~:text=The%20Master%20said%2C%20%22The%20wise>.

⁸¹ Yuan Qin, "Aesthetic Thought on the ‘Tian Ren He Yi’ in Traditional Chinese Music." *Journal of Chifeng College*, no. 7 (2012): 200-201.

⁸² Qiuping Wang, "The Expressive Forms of Natural Imagery in Chinese Poetry." *Advances in Literary Study* 05, no. 1 (2017): 17-21, doi:10.4236/als.2017.51002.

The highest aspiration of the literati of distant history was to achieve a balance of man and nature.⁸³ At the same time, they always had an admiration for *Guqin*⁸⁴ (a plucked seven-string Chinese musical instrument), and often utilized music as a medium through which to convey their philosophy. The well-known ancient composition for *Guqin* composed by Yu Boya (who lived during the Spring and Autumn Period), titled "Tall Mountains and Flowing Water" or "High Mountains and Flowing Water," aims to create the sensation of being in an area with those two nature features.⁸⁵

Ancient Chinese artists and philosophers promoted living in harmony with nature, which ultimately resulted in their being a part of nature rather than transcendent spectators or observers. For the Chinese, nature is in constant, unconscious transformation. It is not a conscious act of the gods, but a spontaneous unfolding of life; all things in the present moment are only momentary forms in the process of transformation. Thus, everything in the world is full of life and instantaneous. Ching Hao (or Jing Hao, 荆浩, Chinese Painter, c. ?850-?911) expresses this view: "There are the divine (shen), wonderful (miao-profoundly mysterious), clever, and skillful painters. The divine painter makes no effort but achieves the forms spontaneously by following the transformations of Nature."⁸⁶

⁸³ Yuan Qin, "Aesthetic Thought on the 'Tian Ren He Yi' in Traditional Chinese Music." *Journal of Chifeng College*, no. 7 (2012): 200-201.

⁸⁴ *Guqin*: A Chinese zither, *Guqin* is a significant solo instrument in Chinese music that have been around for more than 3,000 years. The art of playing the *Guqin* was originally reserved for the nobles and intellectuals and was never meant for display in front of a large audience.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Sirén Osvald. *The Chinese on the Art of Painting: Translations and Comments*. Schocken Paperbacks, Sb57. New York: Schocken Books, 1963, 41.

The ancient Chinese artists reached this state through the "oneness of the artist with nature," achieving this by paying close attention to nature, pondering it, and spiritually fusing into the object. This helped them get rid of the of the separation of subject and object, and allows the artists to change spontaneously with objects as they transform. What they see and touch is full of creative life. The majority of well-known traditional Chinese pieces such as "Spring River and Moonlight Night" (春江花月夜), "The Fisherman's Boat Sings in the Evening" (渔舟唱晚), "The Three Flowers of the Plum Blossom" (梅花三弄), and "Moon Reflected on the Second Spring" (二泉映月) are not solely intended to describe natural scenes. Every one of them demonstrates how musicians make an effort to be one with nature.⁸⁷

All the above-mentioned factors lead to a lot of music with titles and content in Chinese history and current times related to nature. Similarly, this an analogous technique used in Ningwu Du's *24 Piano Preludes*. For instance, the opening piece, "Tall Mountains, Flowing Water," carries the same idea as the *Guqin* piece "Tall Mountains and Flowing Water" with the same name. No.2 was known as "Boundless River Waters" before being renamed "Boundless Sentiments," which is likewise related to water. In addition to that, other works from this set like No.3 "Peach Blossom Island," No.4 "Wild Northern River," No.5 "Prairie Wind," No.10 "Romantic Countryside," and No.11 "Valley of Longing" are similarly connected with nature.

⁸⁷ Xin Xia, "The Aesthetics of Nature, Harmony, and Pentatonicism in Chinese Culture and Its Influence on Selected Piano Works of Claude Debussy". (Diss., Shenandoah University, Virginia, 2017).

***Yijing* and *Yixiang* in Chinese Poetry and Music**

In addition to composing the *24 Piano Preludes*, Ningwu Du also wrote a poem for each prelude. Composers in the history of the Chinese piano music have frequently been inspired to make music by a specific poem from the long and illustrious literary tradition of China or poems from other cultures. However, simultaneously composing music and poetry is an incredibly unusual occurrence. Understanding Ningwu Du's musical creations require not only an examination and comprehension of his poetry but also of the context in which it was written. In Chapter Five, a detailed examination of Ningwu Du's poetry and music will be presented. The concepts of *yijing* (意境) and *yixiang* (意象), which both impact the study and comprehension of poetry, are the primary focus of this section's discussion.

Yijing and *yixiang* are two concepts that must be mastered when appreciating Chinese poetry. According to the definition provided by “Key Concepts in Chinese Thought and Culture,” the *yixiang* (or imagery) refers to “a typical image in literary works, which embodies the author’s subjective feelings and unique artistic conceptions;”⁸⁸ and the *yijing* refers to “a state where the scene described in a literary or artistic work reflects the sense and sensibility intended.”⁸⁹

Yijing is an unfathomable, meaning-laden artistic realm the poets create by combining their thoughts and feelings with the items or scenes they paint in their poems. The portrayal of a

⁸⁸ Key Concepts in Chinese Thought and Culture, “Yixiang,” accessed September 26, 2022, https://www.chinesethought.cn/EN/shuyu_show.aspx?shuyu_id=2171.

⁸⁹ “Key Concepts in Chinese Thought and Culture, “Yijing,” accessed September 26, 2022, https://www.chinesethought.cn/EN/shuyu_show.aspx?shuyu_id=2318.

sensation or experience through the medium of words is referred to as imagery. The purpose of *yixiang* is to conjure up a mental image or to call to mind a certain bodily feeling.⁹⁰

In Chinese poetry, *yixiang* (imagery) is used to convey the poet's state of mind and the feelings that they are experiencing. Liu Xie was quoted as saying that "an original writer of a poem should create in imagery."⁹¹ Wang Changling (698–756) observed that imaging combines the subjective and the objective aspects of perception. Hu Yinglin (1551-1602), a Chinese poet, believed that "the core of the traditional poetry lay in the organization of imageries."⁹² Whereas, when people hear the term "imagery," their minds immediately conjure up visualizations, but imagery is not limited to the visual realm; instead, it may engage any one of the five senses.⁹³ The following is a list of examples of different kinds of imagery that resonate with various senses: auditory imagery, gustatory imagery, kinetic imagery, olfactory imagery, and tactile imagery.⁹⁴

Yi in *yixiang* and *yijing* relates to the poets and their ideas and emotions. The *xiang* in *yixiang* (imagery) refers to the item that the poet is describing in an objective manner.⁹⁵

According to the principles of Chinese aesthetics, the creation of a perfect artistic universe is

⁹⁰ Key Concepts in Chinese Thought and Culture, "Yixiang," Accessed July 10 2022.
https://www.chinesethought.cn/EN/shuyu_show.aspx?shuyu_id=2171.

⁹¹ Zhu Hui, "A Comparative Study on Imagery in Chinese and English Poetry," *Comparative Literature: East & West*, no.1 (2000): 106-114, DOI: 10.1080/25723618.2000.12015249.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Hui Zhu, "A Comparative Study on Imagery in Chinese and English Poetry." *Comparative Literature East & West* 1, no. 1 (2000), 106-114.

⁹⁴ Andrea Clark, "A Short Guide to Imagery, Symbolism, and Figurative Language." www.austincc.edu.
<https://www.austincc.edu/andreac/imagery>.

⁹⁵ Guangqian Zhu, *Zhu Guangqian on Beauty: Selected Essays of Zhu Guangqian*. Changjiang Literature and Art Publishing House, 2012.

only possible when the “meaning” and the “image,” as well as the “subject” and the “object,” and the “emotion” and the “scene,” are combined. At this point, the *yixinag* is not a thing that is completely objective; it has been spiritualized, and it bears the feeling of the poet, which means it is an object image that contains the subject's sentiment.⁹⁶

Yixiang (imagery) is a specific object of ideation; it is a subjective image that is observable, real, and tangible; while *yijing* (a state where the scene described in a literary or artistic work reflects the sense and sensibility intended) is primarily an atmosphere, which may be represented or generated by *yixiang*. It is necessary to have an abstract level of perception to understand *yijing*. Another point is that the *yixiang* is made up of *yijing*, either singular *yixiang* or a mixture of several *yixiang*.⁹⁷

Poet Ma Zhiyuan's “Autumn Thoughts” (秋思) is a lively example. The poem is frequently regarded as expressing a profound longing to return home.⁹⁸

A withered vine, an old tree, a crow at dusk
A small bridge, a flowing stream, a home
An ancient path, the west wind, an emaciated horse
The sun sets in the west; the heartbroken man is at the horizon

First, the readers might put themselves in the poet's shoes and try to picture what is being described in the poem. Some *yixing* (imagery) include rotten vines, evening crows, old trees, a

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Louis Liuxi Meng, "Idea-Scape(Yijing):Understanding Imagery in the Chinese Poetic Tradition." *Comparative Literature: East & West*, no. 1 (2015), 29–48, doi:10.1080/25723618.2015.12015443.

⁹⁸ Chinese Connects, "A Look at Homesickness in China's “Autumn Thoughts”." <https://www.austincc.edu/andreac/imagery>.

small bridge, a stream, an ancient road, a lean horse, the declined sun, and a heartbroken person.

Almost immediately after that, an image will be generated by the mind organically. A person with a sad expression riding a lean horse and meandering down an old road in the waning light of day; a narrow bridge across a stream; squat houses, withered trees, and a few crows in the dying light of the day strewn around the area.⁹⁹ The reader is then able to imagine the colors that are possibly present in the picture, able to provide this picture with some vitality once more, and able to make this picture acoustified.¹⁰⁰ Then eventually, the reader might have the picture that has the brown and rotten vines, leaves, and old tree with decay and death mode; the wind blowing, leaves rustling sound; the black-colored crows cawing and flying back to their nests in the trees, the running stream, and possibly smoke billowing up, and so on. People in traditional agricultural cultures in China tend to get their job done before sunset and return home. In contrast, the horse belonging to the heartbroken person who wanders alone is extremely lean, which may imply that this person has been wandering for a considerable amount of time and will likely continue to roam into the unknown.¹⁰¹ The author constructs those *yixiang* and links these noun images directly to create a series of associations for the reader, ultimately resulting in the

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Louis Liuxi Meng, "Idea-Scape (Yijing): Understanding Imagery in the Chinese Poetic Tradition." *Comparative Literature: East & West*, no. 1 (2015): 29–48, doi:10.1080/25723618.2015.12015443.

¹⁰¹ Chinese Connects, "A Look at Homesickness in China's 'Autumn Thoughts.'" Accessed Sep 27, 2022, <https://www.austincc.edu/andreac/imagery>.

sense of melancholy and atmosphere in this poem. This kind of rhetorical device appears rather frequently in Chinese poetry.¹⁰²

As stated previously, each prelude in this composition is accompanied by a poem. Analyzing *yixiang* (imagery) and *yijing* (a state) will allow one to have a better understanding of the emotions that the composer's poem is trying to convey. Comparing the descriptions of "water" in the poems of No.2 "Boundless Sentiments" with those in No.4 "Wild Northern River" reveals, for instance, that the two poems attempt to convey different emotions. The composer depicts a peaceful environment in the No.2 prelude by describing the "water" *yixiang* as "leisurely flows a little brook." And in No.4, "Wild Northern River," it is possible to sense a "water" *yixiang* that is more lively and vivid by the "crystal waves mysteriously sparkle." The two ways of depicting the "water" *yixiang* (imagery) create different *yijing* (a state).

Performing a piece of music involves recreating the *yijing* of the poems. Nevertheless, the composer, the performer, and the audience will each bring their unique understanding to the poem and its title. This indicates that the interaction among the three will result in various imaginings owing to the multiple associations. People have unique imaginations, which cannot be standardized in any way and hence cannot be routinely dictated. Some musicians enjoy playing with a specific image in their heads. In contrast, others find the act of visualizing unsettling or refuse to do so and instead focus more on the music itself. Therefore, while it is

¹⁰² Louis Liuxi Meng, "Idea-Scape (Yijing): Understanding Imagery in the Chinese Poetic Tradition." *Comparative Literature: East & West*, no. 1 (2015): 29–48, doi:10.1080/25723618.2015.12015443.

essential to get an understanding of the music via the examination of Ningwu Du's poems, one should not feel constrained by them.

Narration

Piano works with an extramusical narrative have a long history in both Chinese and Western piano music. Du stated in a lecture that the set of *24 Piano Preludes* was influenced profoundly by his grandparents' story and their virtuous spirit.¹⁰³ If his grandparents' experience can be investigated in greater detail, then the poems of this *24 Piano Preludes*' essential thoughts may be comprehended better. It helps to provide a complete storyline for potential performers, audiences, and readers.

After the British Navy won the first opium war, colonialism first appeared in China (1839-42). By the conclusion of the second opium war (1856–1861), colonialism's grasp over Chinese lands had been substantially cemented. The Qing dynasty was forced to sign a series of humiliating treaties (1842-44, 1854, 1858, 1860) that obligated it to pay an exceptionally large amount of compensation over time and to cede control of the principal coastal ports of China. The autonomous ownership of the treaty ports gave the conquering imperialists the freedom to engage in unrestricted commerce and even set their own tariffs (1854). The treaties of 1858 and 1860 paved the way for western nations to engage in commerce and expand their power into the interior areas of China. In 1937, Japanese armies controlled the whole nation.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Ningwu Du, "Ningwu Du's 24 Piano Preludes," Tengxun video, 00:02, June 2, 2019, <https://v.qq.com/x/page/h0879ydncmo.html>

¹⁰⁴ Mohammad Shakil Wahed, "The Impact of Colonialism on 19th and Early 20th Century China." *Cambridge Journal of China Studies* 11, no. 2 (2016).

The Republic of China and the Empire of Japan were the primary belligerents in the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945). This war was a military battle. The conflict occurred in China during the Second World War and was fought in the Pacific Theater's mainland theater. The traditional starting point for the conflict was the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, which occurred on July 7, 1937.¹⁰⁵ This was when a disagreement between Japanese and Chinese forces in Peking resulted in an all-out invasion by the Japanese. It is common practice to date the commencement of WWII in Asia to the outbreak of this full-scale conflict between the Chinese and the Empire of Japan. The Second Sino-Japanese War lasted from 1937 through 1945 and concluded with Japan's capitulation in September 1945. The Chinese often refer to this conflict as the Eight-Year War of Anti-Japanese Resistance.¹⁰⁶

Between 1910 and 1945, Korea became part of the Japanese Empire after being annexed. Korea entered Japan's sphere of influence in 1876, and a complex alliance of Meiji government, military and commercial officials began the process of integrating the politics and economy of the Korean peninsula with Japan.¹⁰⁷ In 1905, the Korean Empire became a Japanese protectorate; after that, Japan ruled the country indirectly through the Japanese General Representative in Korea. In the 1910 Japan-Korea Treaty, Japan formally annexed Korea.

¹⁰⁵ The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Marco Polo Bridge Incident | Asian History," Accessed Sep. 27, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Marco-Polo-Bridge-Incident>.

¹⁰⁶ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Second Sino-Japanese War | Summary, Facts, & Results," Accessed Sep. 27, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Second-Sino-Japanese-War>.

¹⁰⁷ USC-UCLA Joint East Asian Studies Center, "Treaty of Annexation," East Asian Studies Documents: Japanese annexation of Korea, accessed July 14, 2022, <https://web.archive.org/web/20070211234114/http://www.isop.ucla.edu/eas/documents/kore1910.htm>.

Japanese rule prioritized the Japanization of Korea and combated Korean independence movements. On August 15, 1945, Japan surrendered in WWII and Japanese rule over Korea ended.¹⁰⁸

These were the conditions that the grandparents of Ningwu Du endured throughout their lives. Tormented by the upheavals of life and plagued by anxieties over the fate of their nation and their fellow citizens. Ningwu Du's grandfather Kim Seong-sook (김성숙, 1898-1969) was a Buddhist monk, politician, and independence campaigner from South Korea.¹⁰⁹ While Kim was devoted to the study of Buddhism and the classics, he studied a large number of books on scientific topics, gained an understanding of contemporary social science, and became active in the Korean independence movement. Ningwu Du's grandmother Du Junhui (杜君慧, 1904-1981) was a pioneer who made an outstanding contribution to the liberation of Chinese women. She was one of the first female university students in Guangdong Province to study the theory of the Chinese women's movement during the May Fourth Movement in 1919. At the beginning of the 23rd year of the Republic of China, Du Junhui assisted Shen Zijiu in running the *Women's Garden* (妇女园地) magazine, in which she published several short and concise essays exposing the darkness, criticizing the darkness of the times and appealing for women's rights. "A lecture on women's issues" (妇女问题讲话), written by Du Junhui, revealed the root causes of women's

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Memorial Association of Mr Yunyan Jinxing Shu, "Bulletin Board." Accessed July 10, 2022, <http://kimsungsuk.org/ch/sub/promotion/notice.asp?mode=view&bid=12&idx=5375>.

oppression and pointed out the way to women's liberation, attracting a large number of Chinese women who were eager for liberation.¹¹⁰

In 1923, Kim Seong-sook went into hiding in China and organized an independence movement organization to engage in acts against the Japanese government. Additionally, it was around this time that he met and got married to Du Junhui. Following that, Du and Kim became members of the anti-Japanese movement to fight against the imperialist invasion of Japan together. After WWII ended in 1945, Kim went back to Korea. The information by the Kim Seong-sook Memorial Association mentioned "...although the war was over, Chinese society was still in chaos, and there was no way to get to Korea. Separation was inevitable. Kim Seong-sook's pain was great..."¹¹¹ To date the best information available does not reveal why Du's grandparents didn't have the opportunity to see each other again after their separation.

The protagonist's narrative in Ningwu Du's *24 Piano Preludes* is formed by the combination of the facts presented above. The story follows a young man from his youth until he dies. It praises the young man's spirituality and how idealistic he was while telling about the many things that happened in his life. Du notes that he envisioned this story into *24 Piano Preludes* to show his admiration to his grandparents who laid down their lives for their respective countries. Poetry and music are the mediums that Du uses to paint a picture of the

¹¹⁰ Anti-Japanese War Memorial Network, "Du Junhui, President of Sichuan Seventh Nursery School." Accessed July 10 2022, <https://m.krzzjn.com/show-947-55680.html>.

¹¹¹ Memorial Association of Mr Yunyan Jinxing Shu, "Bulletin Board." Accessed July 10, 2022, <http://kimsungsuk.org/ch/sub/promotion/notice.asp?mode=view&bid=12&idx=5375>.

phantasmagorical person that exists in his mind and represents the virtuous nature that his grandparents exemplified.¹¹²

¹¹² Ningwu Du, “Ningwu Du’s 24 Piano Preludes,” Tengxun video, 00:02, June 2, 2019, <https://v.qq.com/x/page/h0879ydncmo.html>

CHAPTER IV: ELEMENTS OF MUSIC IN DU'S 24 PIANO PRELUDES

Titles and Keys of Ningwu Du *24 Piano Preludes*

Table 1. Du, Ningwu. *24 Piano Preludes*, Numbers, Titles, and Keys.

Number	Title	Key	Number	Title	Key
No.1	Tall Mountains, Flowing Water	C major	No.13	Elegy to a Friend	G minor
No.2	Boundless Sentiments	E minor	No.14	The Ironclad Rider on the Desert	C minor
No.3	Peach Blossom Island	E-flat major	No.15	Faith	A-flat major
No.4	Wild Northern River	B-flat major	No.16	Anthem	D-flat major
No.5	Prairie Wind	F minor	No.17	Perseverance	B-flat minor
No.6	The Divine Dragon Is Dancing	F major	No.18	Hope	B major
No.7	Here Comes the Spring Festival	G major	No.19	Looking Back	E major
No.8	Scherzo	B minor	No.20	A Sigh	D major
No.9	The Divine Monkey King	A major	No.21	Farewell	A minor
No.10	Romantic Countryside	F-sharp minor	No.22	Funeral	E-flat minor
No.11	Valley of Longing	D minor	No.23	Disembodiment	G-flat major
No.12	Lonely and Deserted Village	C-sharp minor	No.24	The Other World	G-sharp minor

Each prelude in Ningwu Du's *24 Piano Preludes* has been given a literary title. These preludes have a quality similar to those written by Debussy by suggesting a mood, image, or event and then depicting it in sound. Whereas Debussy inserted his titles at the end of each prelude, implying the extramusical meanings in a subtle way, Ningwu Du's images, events, and moods are used as the outright titles. This may be further justification for performing each prelude on its own, rather than as a complete set.

One of the distinguishing characteristics of Chinese piano music has always been the inclusion of titles. As previously stated, composition for the piano in China started around the turn of the 20th century. The majority of Chinese piano compositions have titles that don't correspond to traditionally absolute music genres such as sonatas and preludes. Some of the pieces even have "hybrid titles" that combine the names of different musical genres with descriptive texts, such as "Prelude No. 2 - Flowing Water" by Zhu Jianer.¹¹³ A literary title of a piece can nudge the listener toward associating the sounds of the piece with an explicit image or story. It is believed that the love of titles in traditional Chinese instrumental music stems from the fact that traditional Chinese music has been handed down orally for centuries, and that both the instructor and the student need a clear title for it to be readily comprehended and effectively conveyed. This reinforces the view that music is about more than mere sounds and that all sounds have some meaning, whether emotional or extrasensory. Another possibility is that

¹¹³ Baisheng Dai, "The 'Chinese Style' of Chinese Piano Music and its Performance and pedagogy," *Journal of Zhejiang Arts Vocational College*, Vol.11 no.2 (2013).

ancient Chinese literati always had a soft spot for *Guqin*. Since *Guqin* masters and Chinese literati often utilized music as a medium through which to convey their emotions and ambitions, they were encouraged to give titles to their compositions that had literary overtones. This tradition has gradually evolved into a distinguishing aspect of Chinese music.¹¹⁴

According to what was discussed in Chapter Two, Ningwu Du's *24 Piano Preludes* may be broken up into three distinct sections. The first section, Nos.1-9, details the young man's love life before he enters the war. The majority of the titles in this section depict natural landscapes as well as folkloric scenes, as is evident from the table of titles shown above. For example, No.1 ("Tall Mountain, Flowing Water"), No.4 ("Wild Northern River"), and No. 5 ("Prairie Wind") are musical depictions of the beauty of the natural surroundings. The bulk of these works take their inspiration from traditional Chinese rituals and folklore. No.7 ("Here Comes the Spring Festival"), for instance, portrays the joyous sounds heard at "spring festival," and, upon hearing the boisterous trills, one can easily imagine children screaming with glee, and the dotted rhythms inspire a vision of dance. It also includes some works predicated on the traits of a specific character or figure, as well as Du's comprehension of those features. For example, No.6 is about the "Divine Dragon" and No.9 depicts the "Monkey King," colorful figures that are a part of Chinese folklore. The second part, Nos.10-18, describes Ningwu Du's grandfather's challenging existence after the war. Although there are also descriptions of the natural landscape in this part, such as in No.11 ("Valley of Longing") and No.12 ("Lonely and Deserted Village"), the titles

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

here include more emotional adjectives, such as "longing" and "lonely and deserted." In the third part, Nos.19-24, the composer portrays his grandfather's reflections and thoughts on his life up to the time of his passing, as well as the status of his spirit at that moment.

The titles of Wang Lisan's piano composition "Calligraphy and the Rhythm of the Qin" similarly employ direct use of ancient Chinese cultural forms and concepts. The listener is led in this manner toward an understanding of the cultural meanings associated with Chinese music. The thoughts and connotations of life and death in Chinese culture are represented in the ideas and connotations of the last three titles of Ningwu Du's *24 Piano Preludes* — "Funeral," "Disembodiment," and "The Other World."¹¹⁵ There is a blend of cultural elements, literature, and music in the *24 Piano Preludes*, which are intended to express emotions, as the ancient literati did. It is therefore essential to discuss each of these aspects to understand the composer's music in a revealing and all-encompassing way.

Traditional Chinese Scales and Modes

In Chapter Two it is mentioned that Ningwu Du wrote this set of *24 Piano Preludes* in all 24 major and minor keys, as Bach and Chopin did, from encouragement given by his Juilliard professor David Dubal. In order to appreciate the amalgamation of Chinese and Western compositional techniques, it is necessary to understand traditional Chinese scales and modes and Western major and minor scales, in order to understand how they intersect in Du's *24 Piano Preludes*.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

There are two types of modes frequently used in Chinese music: *wusheng* (five-tones) and *qisheng* (seven-tone). The pentatonic mode¹¹⁶ is the nucleus, which is made up of five basic tones. These five basic tones are called *zhengyin* (main degrees), which have their unique names: *gong* (宫), *shang* (商), *jue* (角), and *zhi* (徵); and *yu* (羽). They are correlated to the notes do, re, mi, sol, and la in Western solfège. The fourth and seventh scale degrees are omitted. Each of these five basic tones has the potential to serve as the tonic note of a different pentatonic mode. As a result, there are five fundamental pentatonic modes, which are referred to as the *gong* mode, the *shang* mode, the *jue* mode, the *zhi* mode, and the *yu* mode (see Example 1).¹¹⁷

Example 1. Pentatonic Scale in C-gong System.¹¹⁸

The image displays five pentatonic scales in the C-gong system, each on a five-line staff. The scales are:

- Gong mode (宫调式):** Notes are G, A, B, D, E. Chinese characters below: 宫, 商, 角, 徵, 羽, 宫.
- Shang mode (商调式):** Notes are A, B, C, E, F. Chinese characters below: 商, 角, 徵, 羽, 宫, 商.
- Jue mode (角调式):** Notes are B, C, D, F, G. Chinese characters below: 角, 徵, 羽, 宫, 商, 角.
- Zhi mode (徵调式):** Notes are C, D, E, G, A. Chinese characters below: 徵, 羽, 宫, 商, 角, 徵.
- Yu mode (羽调式):** Notes are D, E, F, A, B. Chinese characters below: 羽, 宫, 商, 角, 徵, 羽.

 A legend to the right shows a curved line for '大二度' (Major Second) and a line with a vertical tick for '小三度' (Minor Third).

¹¹⁶ The first historical mention of pentatonic scales comes from 600 BC, in the ancient book *Guan Zi • Di Yuan Pian*. This study is the world's earliest tonality calculation theory, which first calculate the fourth degree below the tonic, and then alternates up and down, to find the five notes zhi, yu, gong, shang, jue.

¹¹⁷ Jiazi Shi, "East Meets West: A Musical Analysis of Chinese Sights and Sounds, by Yuankai Bao." (Diss., Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, 2016).

¹¹⁸ Yinghai Li, *Han Modes and Their Harmonization*, (Shanghai Music Publishing House, 2001), 9.

There is no question Du's *24 Piano Preludes* make use of the pentatonic scale in a variety of different settings. At the beginning of No.1 "Tall Mountains, Flowing Water" (see Example 2) the right-hand part has notes E-D-C-G-A as the melody in measure 1, while the left hand is playing a long C major chord (tonic). The fourth degree of a diatonic scale is the third most powerful tone, alongside the tonic and dominant. In the first couple lines of prelude No.1 "Tall Mountains, Flowing Water," there is neither F (subdominant tone in C major scale) nor B (leading tone in C major scale). For this reason, the right-hand part is starting on a pentatonic mode, which is in C *gong* mode (C-D-E-G-A).

Example 2. Du, Ningwu. *24 Piano Preludes*, No.1, m.1-4.

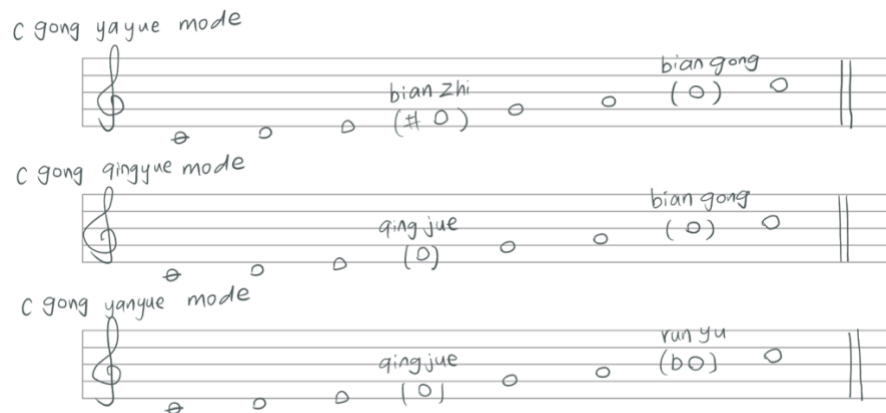
The image shows a musical score for the first four measures of Du Ningwu's 24 Piano Preludes, No. 1. The score is written for piano and is in 6/4 time. It consists of two systems of music. The first system is marked "Moderato rubato" and "pp". The right hand plays a pentatonic melody (E-D-C-G-A) and the left hand plays a long C major chord. The second system is marked "una corda" and "3". The right hand continues the pentatonic melody and the left hand continues the long C major chord.

Besides the *zhengyin* (five basic tones), the name for the other notes is called *pianyin* (altered notes, unimportant), which literally translates to "deviating notes." Besides the *wusheng* (five-tone) modes, another type of national mode frequently used is the *qisheng* (seven-tone, correlated to the heptatonic in Western music tonal system) mode. the *qisheng* mode refers to a

mode that adds two particular *pianyin* to the *wusheng* (five-tone) mode. These *pianyin* are *qingjiao* (清角, altered *jue*, half step up from *jue*, an IV in a major mode), *bianzi* (变徵, altered *zhi*, half step down from *zhi*, a sharped IV in a major mode), *biangong* (变宫, altered *gong*, half step down from *gong*, a leading tone in a major mode), and *runyu* (闰羽, altered *yu*, half step up from *yu*, a flat VII in major mode). These *pianyin* tones are considered borrowed pitches from closely related keys and are treated as ornamental functions within a pentatonic framework.¹¹⁹

There are commonly 3 kinds of *qisheng* (seven-tone) modes (by adding two *pianyin*, and each kind has also 5 modes, which are the same as five-tone modes, see Example 3): *yayue* (雅乐, adding *bianzhi* and *biangong*), *qingyue* (清乐, adding *qingjue* and *biangong*), and *yanyue* (燕乐, adding *qingjue* and *runyu*).

Example 3. C gong yayue mode, qingyue mode, and yanyue mode.



In No.9 “The Divine Monkey King,” the texture, in the beginning (see Example 4), is polyphonic, which is the simultaneous combination of two melodic lines. The polyphony here,

¹¹⁹ “Category: Chinese Style - IMSLP: Free Sheet Music PDF Download,” imslp.org, Accessed September 26, 2022, https://imslp.org/wiki/Category:Chinese_style.

however, is built on pentatonic modes, rather than on tonality. Even though this piece has all the notes of A major, it is better understood as a usage of the A *gong qingyue* mode (the same notes with A major scale). As indicated before, *pianyin* are unimportant notes and are treated as ornamental functions within a pentatonic framework. The fourth and seventh scale degree (D and G-sharp) of A major in this piece are clearly not important notes (see Example 4). Hence, No.9 “The Divine Monkey King” is in A *gong qingyue* mode (A-B-C-sharp-D-E-F-sharp-G-sharp), and the D (*qingjue*) and G-sharp (*biangong*) are *pianyin* (altered notes) here.

In this piece, Du explores the possibilities of combining Chinese musical styles with Western techniques. The use of polyphonic texture, vii-I, and VI-V resolution, and vi-V chord progression weaken the effect of pentatonicism, enhancing functional harmony, which is a tonality and modality combination (see Example 4).

Example 4. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.9, mm.1-8.

In the next section, a discussion of how Ningwu Du integrates Western and Chinese elements will be given. A musical analysis of each piece will be offered, including the following aspects:

1. General explanation: The possible origin and the story behind the poems will be discussed based on personal understanding.
2. Formal analysis: Through a table of structural analysis, the musical form and tempo will be described.
3. Harmonic analysis: The chords used in the piece will be explained by analyzing the tonal and/or modal system to which they belong.
4. Commentary: the style and theme of the music will be elaborated on.
5. Musical and interpretative analysis and performance tips of Ningwu Du's *24 Piano Preludes*: Du has stated that it is essential to comprehend his preludes by quickly catching their personalities and performing while highlighting their distinguishing characteristics

CHAPTER V: ANALYSIS OF DU'S 24 PIANO PRELUDES

No.1 Tall Mountains, Flowing Water

Table 2. Du, Ninwgu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.1, Sections.

Measure	Sections
1-12	A
13-23	B
24-29	Expansion
30-34	Coda

Tall Mountains, Flowing Water¹²⁰

Mountains stretching and rolling
In the distance
Are serene as a virgin.
Clouds cover her face
With a veil
Vast and wild oceans
of forest clothe her
Allover.

The morning sun rises in the east.
Mist disperses.
Clouds open.
Thousands of peaks
Shine upon each other
To vie for the glory of light.
A stream of clear spring water
Fall From the sky
And long agitates and surges
In my bosom

¹²⁰ Ningwu Du, *24 Piano Preludes* (Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 2015), 1.

Ningwu Du has provided both Chinese and English versions of the poems. There is no evidence of which language (Chinese or English) he originally used to write these poems, so it will be combined with both Chinese and English versions to understand the hidden meanings behind the lyrics here.

In traditional Chinese music, there is a famous *Guqin* (a plucked Chinese ancient instrument) piece also titled “High Mountain Flowing Water.” Legend has it that Zhong Ziqi (who lived during the Spring and Autumn Period) was good at playing the zither, and Yu Boya (who also lived during the Spring and Autumn Period) was good at listening to it. Whenever Boya played a tune describing high mountains and flowing water, Ziqi felt his zither sound like a lofty mountain or a mighty river. After the death of Ziqi, Boya sighed that he had no soulmate and stopped playing the *Guqin*.¹²¹ This story is often used to refer to the beauty of the music or the soulmate. Countless writers and painters have used the “High Mountain and Flowing Water” as a theme for their works. Du’s poem consists of two sections. The first half depicts a more tranquil moment. Lines such as “in the distance,” “clouds cover her face with a veil” and “vast and wild oceans of forest” suggest that this could be a mountain scene before the sun rises. Du used the phrase “vast and wild oceans” to characterize the infinite, mist-covered forests. It also implies that this is a view from a distant vantage point. At this moment, the distant rolling hills are barely discernible due to the fog.

¹²¹ Buwei Lü, J. Knoblock and J. K. Riegel, *The Annals of Lü Buwei: A Complete Translation and Study*. (California: Stanford University Press, 2000).

Here, Du uses “her” and “virgin” to refer to the “mountains.” In *Zhuangzi, A Enjoyment of Life in an Untroubled State*¹²² a phrase says: “that on the Miao-ku-yi mountain there lives a divine one, whose skin is white like ice or snow, whose grace and elegance are like those of a virgin.”¹²³ The word “virgin” here refers to a divine being. Such a beautiful figure, with skin like ice and snow, and a divine nature, is the personification of the ideal state of absolute freedom to which Zhuangzi aspired. As the first chapter of Zhuangzi's work, *Zhuangzi, A Happy Excursion* is the core of Zhuangzi's ideal of life and thought. “A Happy Excursion” in Zhuangzi's context refers to the most profound spiritual liberation one may attain by overcoming the limitations of earthly notions and values.¹²⁴ Du's placing of “Tall Mountains, Flowing Water” as the first prelude may represent the protagonist's state of being at peace, appreciating life, and swimming through the terrain. This probably corresponds with the concept of “A Happy Excursion.” The notation for the tempo of the prelude, “moderato rubato,” also indicates this. Although the music setting of the prelude employs quite even and repetitive rhythmic patterns and textures, it is preferable not to play it rigidly to convey a sense of leisure.

In the second verse, the lines “the morning sun rises” and “mist disperses” describe a scenario in which clouds disperse and the sun rises in the east. The line “shine upon each other” also means that all the peaks can be gradually disclosed with clarity. If the first stanza is a

¹²² A masterwork by Zhuangzi (庄子), a philosopher and literary scholar of the Spring and Autumn Period. It is the first chapter of the Taoist classic masterwork *Zhuangzi*.

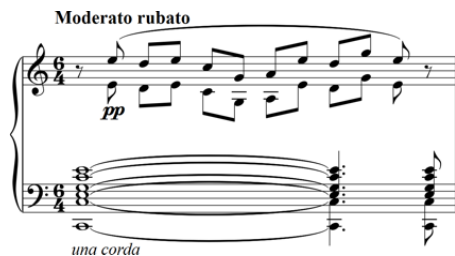
¹²³ Lianhe Deng, “The Annotation and Discussion of the Happy Excursion”. (Diss., Beijing University, Beijing, 2008).

¹²⁴ Ibid.

peaceful, enigmatic description of a mountain woodland populated by divine figures, the second paragraph contains a breathtaking morning view. The main character is atop a mountain, gazing down at the sunlit golden mountains. A waterfall nearby appears to be falling from the sky with enormous power. All of this is intended to convey the protagonist's ambitions, his desire for a better future, and a promising start.

The prelude begins with the “pp.” As shown in m.1, the rhythmic motif consists of block chords at a lower range followed by a succession of eighth notes (see Example 5). This texture evokes images of tall mountains and rolling hills. Moreover, Du has included “una corda” in the beginning to ensure that the volume remains very soft despite the large range and a large number of notes, thereby creating an extremely fuzzy, enveloped image.

Example 5. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.1, m.1.



The “cresc.” and the highest note E6, then appear in m.3 suggesting a rise to and then descent from the peaks (see Example 6).

Example 6. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.1, m.3.



In measure 13, the texture starts to alter slightly (see Example 7). The music continues to advance, and the entire texture gradually thickens, with the eighth-note figure symbolizing the peaks transforming into a three-octave parallel melody. The figure of block chords depicting the tall mountains also grows increasingly to m.16 with an enormous range spanning six octaves. This is when the sun rises in the east, and everything starts to revive.

Example 7. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.1, mm.13-16.

The rhythmic pattern finally changes in measures 24-27 (see Example 8). The right hand continues to keep a regular rhythmic pattern with quarter and eighth notes. In the left-hand part, syncopation rhythm begins to emerge. This interruption of the prior even rhythmic arrangement effectively depicts a mountainous landscape with undulations.

Example 8. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.1, mm.23-24.

As the music advances to measure 29 there appears a cadential closure on the tonic chord in the low register and “pp” (see Example 9). After “pp,” a surprising run of quick 16th notes with “ff” appears and concludes with “ff.” This can be interpreted as a word-painting of "a stream of clean spring water descends from the sky."

Example 9. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.1, mm.29-30.

The musical score for Example 9 consists of two measures, 29 and 30. Measure 29 shows a cadential closure on the tonic chord in the low register, marked *pp*. Measure 30 features a surprising run of quick 16th notes, marked *ff* and *veloce*. The score includes fingering numbers (1-5) for both hands.

No.2 Boundless Sentiments

Table 3. Du, Ninwgu. *24 Piano Preludes, No.2, Sections.*

Measure	Sections
1	Intro
2-9	A
10-17	B
19-20	Expansion
21	Transition
22-29	A'
30-34	Coda

Boundless Sentiments¹²⁵

On the wild
Land, leisurely flows
A little brook.
The cool wind strikes
My face. Countless thoughts
Arise.
How many past incidents
Reoccur
In my mind.

A red sun slowly rises,
Then leaves gradually,
Taking with it
My endless
Reminiscence

The term "boundless" in the English title means "infinite or enormous." A sentiment is a viewpoint or opinion, but it can also refer to a feeling. The "youyou" in the Chinese title refers to a concerned and contemplative appearance. Consequently, by merging the English and Chinese

¹²⁵ Ningwu Du, *24 Piano Preludes* (Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 2015), 6.

versions, this composition may be intended to convey an ongoing sense of concern and sorrow. In contrast to the first prelude, this entire poem depicts a relatively helpless and melancholy state. The phrase "leisurely flowing" in the opening verse of the poem is a description of water. One of the most common *yixiang* (imagery, see more details and information in the Chapter Three) in Chinese art and literature is "water." It can represent several things and convey various feelings. Artists and literati assigned various "water" *yixiang* to various sorts of water, including rivers, lakes, the sea, wine, tears, rain, snow, ice, etc. In addition to the aforementioned states of "water" *yixiang*, there are numerous others, including peaceful water, gently flowing water, furious water, and so on. Depending on the connotation of the word, depicting it can evoke various emotional responses.¹²⁶ The *yixiang* of water in this context is leisurely, slow-moving water. This is coupled with the phrase "countless thoughts arise" in the next lines to demonstrate that the slowly flowing water depicts the protagonist's never-ending sad feelings. In contrast to the hopeful optimism expressed in the poem for "Tall Mountains, Flowing Water," in which the "sun rises in the east and the mist clears," pessimism looms in the poem for "Boundless Sentiments," in which the "red sun" soon disappears in the second stanza, as if to convey that the main character's vitality is waning. Therefore, the overall feeling of the poem is one of melancholy and nostalgia for the past. As previously stated by Du, the first ten preludes describe the protagonist's joyful times before he departs for war. Then where does this grief originate

¹²⁶ Caijun Zhong, *Confucianism from an East Asian Perspective: A Traditional Interpretation*. (Academia Sinica, 2013).

from? As indicated previously, Du produced this prelude at the age of fourteen. In terms of chronology, this is the very first prelude. This may indicate that Du had already known a general storyline and the tragic ending of the young protagonist in mind. The prelude serves as a sad portent for the entire piece. It also expresses Du's desire to make an ambitious opening with "Tall Mountain, Flowing Water" as the first prelude rather than opening with a sad piece.

The tempo marking of this prelude is “andante” and begins at “p.” There are three motifs in each of the three parts and they are used throughout the prelude. The motif in the soprano part is a continuous, repeating triplet (see Example 10). The second and third notes of the triplet are the same notes in order to reduce the power of the motif making it more wondering, which is an expression of the slow flow of the river or of the protagonist's sadness. In the tenor voice, there is a dotted rhythm with a long note (G-A-B). This motif has a fourth interval up followed by a second interval down, sounding like a three-notes “sigh” motif. The “sigh” motif usually consists of a second step downwards or (less often) upwards, in which the first tone is clearly emphasized, and the following is tied, unstressed and quieter. Depending on the musical context, the expressive content can be pain, sadness, lamentation, grief, fear, or despair.

Example 10. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.2, mm.1-3.



The motif of the bass part in the beginning of No.2 consists of continually repeated octaves (see Example 10). The combination of these three motifs occurs in Beethoven's Piano Sonata Op.27 No.2. The difference is that Du puts the dotted note motif in the middle voice rather than in the soprano line as Beethoven did (see Example 11).

Example 11. Beethoven, Ludwig van. *Piano Sonata, Op.27 No.2*, mm.4-7.¹²⁷



From m.1 to m.12, the overall development is still based on the initial motif progression. By m.13, the soprano and tenor parts tend to move upwards, slowly building up to the “ff” of m.16 (see Example 12). But soon, three bars later, Du uses “dim.” to bring the music back to the beginning. This is when the recapitulation section appears. It corresponds to the red sun that rises briefly in the verse and leaves soon after.

Example 12. Du, Ningwu. *24 Piano Preludes, No.2*, mm.13-16.



¹²⁷ Ludwig van Beethoven, *Sonates Pour Piano* (Braunschweig: Henry Litolff, 1900).

In m. 32-34, “smorz.” which means “dying away,” combines with the pedal sign to create an empty and melancholy *yijing* (a state where the scene described in a literary or artistic work reflects the sense and sensibility intended, see Example 13).

Example 13. Du, Ningwu. *24 Piano Preludes, No.2*, mm.32-34.

No.3 Peach Blossom Island

Table 4. Du, Ninwgu. *24 Piano Preludes*, No.3, Sections.

Measure	Sections
1-32	A
33-36	Transition
37-69	B
70-76	Transition
77-101	A'
102-103	Coda

Peach Blossom Island¹²⁸

The lake is like
A mirror.
The white bird is like
A dream.
The feel of spring
Is everywhere.
The deep fragrance
Permeates the air.

The intoxicating pink
Makes us not think
About the time flying
Away, only leaving
The tender words
And faint shadows
To nature.

The “Peach Blossom Spring” is one of the literary classics of the Eastern Jin Dynasty poet Tao Yuanming (365-427). The Peach Blossom Land was about the accidental discovery of an ethereal utopia where people lived in harmony with nature for ages without knowledge of the

¹²⁸ Ningwu Du, *24 Piano Preludes* (Beijing: People’s Music Publishing House, 2015), 10.

outer world. Tao existed during a time when people desperately needed assistance. He was extremely upset with those in authority and their negligence of those members of his society who were in dire need. In order to convey his political ideas and thoughts, he felt compelled to utilize his compositions to express his emotions and create a beautiful realm in contrast to the filthy and dismal society.¹²⁹ Tao desired a peaceful and beautiful society, free of violence and exploitation, in which everyone lived and worked in peace and contentment.¹³⁰ This was the context in which the “Peach Blossom Spring” poem was created. The “Peach Blossom Spring” is most likely a figment of his imagination.¹³¹ In contemporary Chinese culture, “peach blossom” is commonly associated with flirtatiousness and frivolity, yet during Tao's time, it represented happiness, beauty, tranquility, and good fortune. It is conceivable that Ningwu Du titled this prelude "Peach Blossom Island" for the same reason. Through the structure, harmony, and melody of the music, the composer has created a scenario that resembles a paradise, replete with images of lovely nature. The lake's clean water is like a mirror that clearly reflects the shadows of objects and the sunlight. In full bloom on the island are pink peach blossoms. Everything appears to be a magnificent picture. The protagonist decides, then, that he is oblivious to the passing of time and desires just to appreciate the tender words and nature. It is a sight filled with warmth, happiness,

¹²⁹ Anthology of Chinese Literature, Volume I: From Early Times to the Fourteenth Century, edited by Cyril Birch (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 167-168.
http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/ps/china/taoqian_peachblossom.pdf.

¹³⁰ Cyril Birch and Donald Keene, *Anthology of Chinese Literature: From Early Times to the Fourteenth Century*. vol. 1, (Grove Press, 1967).

¹³¹ Fuming Wan, "The Beauty of Both Text and Context - an Appreciation of Tao Yuanming's 'Peach Blossom Spring.'" *Modern Chinese*, no. 4 (2009): 15-16.

and spring. As was noted previously, the protagonist in this poem is likewise in a tumultuous period, similar to Tao's story. Peach Blossom Land represents the protagonist's fantasy of a beautiful, peaceful, and war-free world.

The rhythmic pattern overall is relatively orderly, with every measure in 6/8 meter and a perpetual flow of 16th notes that may suggest flowing water around the peaceful island. The word “lake” in the poem evokes another *yijing* of water in this prelude. Here, the lake is portrayed as if it were a mirror. The waves of the water go back and forth in reaction to the breeze. To represent this lake, the piece’s rhythmic pattern is a continuous, rapid, and even succession of 16th-note groups (see Example 14). It provides a pleasant and relaxing listening experience. These running 16th notes are never performed as an etude; rather, they evoke the tranquil, gently rippling water of a lake. After the B section, the 16th-note cluster changes its shape and is played by the left hand. However, the rhythmic pattern remains unchanged.

Example 14. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.3, mm.1-3.



The phrases "intoxicating pink" and "tender words" appear in the second stanza of the poem. It is a world of a pleasant and romantic atmosphere. Consequently, the B section has a more lyrical melody than the A section, and the melody is placed in the right hand for emphasis, with the 16th notes representing the lake becoming the background note (see Example 15).

Example 15. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.3, mm.51-52.



At measure 77, the music returns to the beginning material and the key of E-flat Major (see Example 16). This corresponds to the "faint shadows to nature." The final two chords rest on "Eb-Bb-C-G" (see Example 17). This chord is known as a "pipa chord"¹³² and it is constructed by superimposing intervals of fifths and fourths. In the 20th century, this sort of chord was also commonly employed by Western composers. The interval relationship in the "pipa chord" between the notes within these chords is identical to that of the *pipa*'s four strings.¹³³ Therefore, the chords can be identified by Chinese national characteristics and are extensively employed in traditional Chinese works. *Plum Blossom Melody in Three Variations*, a renowned Chinese piano composition by Wang Jianzhong (1933-2016), employs this type of chord multiple times (see Example 18).

Example 16. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.3, mm.76-77.



¹³² A "pipa chord" is created by superimposing two pure fourths or fifths inside an octave.

¹³³ The Chinese plucked instrument *pipa* has four-string (A, D, E, and A), originates from prototypes found in West and Central Asia and first appeared in China between the years 386 to 534.

At the end of this prelude, Ningwu Du employs the “pipa chord” to imitate a sort of Chinese string instrument sound and provide a deep and void tone color (see Example 17).

Example 17. Du, Ningwu. *24 Piano Preludes*, No.3, mm.102-103.



Example 18. Wang, Jianzhong, *Plum Blossom Melody in Three Variation*, mm.11-14.



No.4 Wild Northern River

Table 5. Du, Ninwgu. *24 Piano Preludes*, No.4, Sections.

Measure	Sections
1-16	A
17-27	Transition
28-43	A'
44-55	Coda

Wild Northern River¹³⁴

Limpid ripples softly undulate.
Crystal waves mysteriously sparkle.

Mountains and water
Are so picturesque.
The state of my heart
Is so dreamy.
Seen from afar,
The mist is
Grand and hazy.

The pulse of life
And blood of ideals
Have been mixed into the waves,
Running towards the vast azure sky..

The title “Wild Northern River” suggests that this is yet another poem about “water” *yixiang*. The term “wild” in the English title gives the impression that it is extremely turbulent. The word “mangmang” in the Chinese title translates to “very vast.” Given the significance of the two names, this river image is expansive and wave-like. However, this prelude begins with

¹³⁴ Ningwu Du, *24 Piano Preludes* (Beijing: People’s Music Publishing House, 2015), 18.

“pp” instead of a great volume (see Example 19). The poem does not attain this level of vivacity until its third stanza, “the pulse of life... racing towards the great azure sky.”

Example 19. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.4, mm.1-5.

The musical score for Example 19 is written for piano in 4/4 time, key of B-flat major. The tempo is marked "Andante Moderato" with the instruction "leggiero e legato". The right-hand part begins with a triplet of eighth notes in the upper register, marked "pp dolcissimo". The left-hand part consists of a simple accompaniment of quarter notes and rests.

The first stanza describes an intimate scene, with “limpid ripples” softly undulating and “crystal waves” mysteriously sparkling. The markings “pp, dolcissimo” help to convey the softness and the mystery while the right-hand triplets suggest the gentle undulation. At this point, the river is still fairly calm. The river appears to have few rushing waves. The second stanza implies that the vast and misty image of the mountains and water is a metaphor for the protagonist’s mood—dreamy, grand, and hazy. The landscape is blanketed in fog, and the river appears to be unending in size. The final stanza of the Chinese version of the poem translates to “going towards the boundless sky.” Running toward the distance is a metaphor for hope in Chinese culture. Through the magnificent view in front of him, the third stanza communicates his ambitions and emotions.

The tempo marking of this prelude is “andante moderato,” and starts softly with a gentle triplet motion in the upper register, resembling No.2 “Boundless Sentiment.” Both preludes start with three parts, with the soprano voice adopting a triplet rhythm to portray the “water” motif. In No.2, the second and third notes of the triplet are the same to limit the forward momentum (see

Example 10), but in this prelude, the triplet is a wavy line that undulates up and down, full of an undulating motion musically depicting gentle waves (see Example 19). The bass part is a pedal point on B-flat, providing tonal stability and helping to create the image of the great expanse of the river. The tenor part is slightly different in its texture from the No.2, which used a “sigh” motif. And in this prelude, brief staccato eighth notes are used. It is conceivable that this is a description of the small splashes of water dashing over the clear surface of the river.

The recapitulation (m.28) employs the same melodic line in the upper part but strengthens it by an octave (see Example 20). The triplet pattern, which represents the “water” *yijing*, has been transformed from a modest wave of two beats in a one-octave range to a massive wave of four beats in a three-octave range, which is the river water combining the main character's goals for life and his aspirations. The dynamics have finally reached “ff,” and that “wild northern river” eventually appears.

Example 20. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.4, m.28.



The coda of a not-so-short coda (mm.44-55) is essentially the same material repeated three times and slowly fading (see Example 21). On the third time, it returns to “pp,” and the melodic content in the right hand is twice as long as before. The suggestion here is that as the

river flows further and further away, the water waves become broader and wider, slowly
blending into the sky.

Example 21. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.4, mm.44-46.

The musical score is written for piano in 4/4 time and B-flat major. It consists of three measures. The right hand (treble clef) has a melodic line: a whole rest in the first measure, followed by a slur over two eighth notes (B-flat and A) in the second measure, and a whole note (B-flat) with a fermata in the third measure. The left hand (bass clef) has a steady eighth-note accompaniment: G2, A2, B-flat2, C3 in the first measure; B-flat2, C3, D3, E3 in the second measure; and C3, B-flat2, A2, G2 in the third measure. The word "decrease." is written above the right hand in the third measure.

No.5 Prairie Wind

Table 6. Du, Ninwgu. *24 Piano Preludes, No.5, Sections.*

Measure	Sections
1-10	A
11-26	B
27-33	Coda

Prairie Wind¹³⁵

Boundless prairie,
Why are you so calm?
As a young lady,
Sleeping with charm
And letting the wind caress
Your fair hair,
But not aware,
You just sink deep
Into your own dream.

Little by little,
Sunshine of a pretty red rose
Pushes aside the clouds
To softly kiss your tender face.
Amidst the colorful clouds,
Dances a lark with grace,
Who is gently singing for you,
And who is the wind fay.

Another setting of nature is depicted in the poem "Prairie Wind." In the first line of the poem, it is hinted that the first stanza has a rather serene environment, and Du uses the image of a sweet sleeping girl to represent the "Prairie." The little breeze ruffling her hair does not even rouse her up. It may evoke the beauty and tranquility of the prairie at sunset or before sunrise.

¹³⁵ Ningwu Du, *24 Piano Preludes* (Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 2015), 23.

The second stanza breathes new vitality into this tranquil image. It is probable that the early morning rise of the sun awakens the vitality of the prairie. The only living thing in the first stanza is the blissfully sleeping girl. In the second stanza, there are vivid descriptions of sunshine that “pushes aside the clouds,” “sunshine that kisses your tender face” (“face” referring to the young lady used as a metaphor for the prairie), “dancing larks,” and “singing wind fay.” Obviously, these images are engaging in anthropomorphic behavior. This might be seen as a representation of the protagonist. This is because the main character's cheerful disposition causes him to view the world as full of joy and color.

The higher register of the piano, used for the rapid arpeggio figures, creates an atmosphere suggesting a windy terrain. In the left hand, Du uses the middle register to draw a melody. This phrase in the first measure is separated by an octave and a repeated rhythm pattern. This melody is made with the F pentatonic scale, but some accidentals like the D natural reveal a modal intention, maybe related to the Ab Lydian mode. The first two beats in measure 1 arrive to F, then jump an octave and are followed by a non-resolving phrase that ends with a C quarter note; that, taking into account the fast notes and the moderato tempo, implies a pause between this and the next sentence (see Example 22). This is very related to the structure of the poem, “Boundless prairie, why are you so calm?” when it presents the subject and a direct question to it in the same sentence. Then, Du follows the same formula, replicating the poem as musical phrases. However, in the poem there is no answer from the subject, in this case, the wind. The poem follows the narrator describing this character: “As a young lady, sleeping with charm.” On

the musical rhythm, Du shows four eighth notes that connect these two sentences a little more than in the first stanza by not showing faster notes than the others or extreme intervals like the octave movement shown earlier.

Example 22. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.5, mm.1-5.

The next measures follow a similar pattern but have fewer pauses between the phrases since the text here has no pauses such as periods or question marks. The little phrases are separated by commas. Also, this section ends in the middle of measure 5, and this kind of metrical asymmetry is not common in Western classical music (see Example 23). In this case, the left-hand melody in measures 1-5 is marked as 5 phrases, each indicated by Du with a slur, reflecting the five phrases of the first stanza of the poem. Du ends the measure without any melody, just the windy atmosphere in the higher register, and re-exposes some material from measure 6 to measure 9 but changing the scale and doubling the melody at a lower octave and

changing the key at measure 11 (see Example 24). At this point, the atmosphere in the higher register becomes a denser texture by changing the arpeggios to fuller chord-like tremolos.

Example 23. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.5, mm.5-6.

Example 24. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.5, m.11.

At measure 14 the melody in the left hand changes to longer note values, perhaps creating the effect of an ever-increasing wind or an ever-expanding terrain. It also may suggest that the wind strength can vary, sometimes strong enough to push aside the clouds (see Example 25).

Example 25. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.5, m.14.

At measure 19, the roles switch, and the left hand creates the fast note atmosphere, while the right-hand presents the main theme in quartal open chords (see Example 26). This might be a reference to the character that is no longer on the prairie. Now it is in the sky with colorful clouds.

Example 26. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.5, m.19.

This goes on until measure 25 when the notes in the melody begin to be longer and longer (see Example 27), connoting a gradual retreat from the prairie. At measure 30 there is no melody at all, and at measure 32, this fast atmosphere completely stops, and the composer presents a lonely melody in the high register that seems to be a reference to the last phrase of the poem, “who is gently singing for you, and who is the wind fay”(see Example 28).

Example 27. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.5, mm.24-25.

Example 28. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.5, mm.30-33.

*

No.6 The Divine Dragon is Dancing

Table 7. Du, Ninwgu. *24 Piano Preludes*, No.6, Sections.

Measure	Sections
1-16	A
17-24	Transition
25-40	A'
41-45	Coda.

The Divine Dragon Is Dancing¹³⁶

Incomparably light,
I soar in the blue sky,
And travel through
Clouds so white.

Free from worries,
The sun, the moon, and the stars
Are my fun dates.
Lightning and Hurricane
Are my playmates.

Noble and free,
Time and space everlasting
Are my land.
And I am her king

In Western mythology, the Dragon is a formidable beast. In Western fiction and movies, Western dragons are frequently represented as malevolent, monstrous, and incredibly powerful creatures.

There is an essential distinction between the Western dragon and the Chinese dragon. In Chinese history, the “dragon” is a totemic figure. In Chinese mythology, the dragon can be both

¹³⁶ Ningwu Du, *24 Piano Preludes* (Beijing: People’s Music Publishing House, 2015), 30.

visible and unseen, little and enormous, and short and long. It can ascend and soar through the universe while lurking beneath the seas. It can summon wind and rain, govern the seasons, and accomplish anything. During feudal times in China, the dragon also represented the emperor. Status-wise, Chinese dragons were adored as transcendent beings of majesty and supremacy distinct from the mortal realm. Dragons frequently have noble intents and can understand the misery of the people. Thus, in ancient Chinese folklore, they were a symbol of auspiciousness, able to ward off evil spirits and pray for good luck. Dragons are revered and deemed divine.¹³⁷

“The divine dragon has a divine nature, but it also has a human nature,” said by Ningwu Du.¹³⁸ The dragon is a magnificent and almost divine creature that people have imagined. The dragon has a tall appearance, a powerful strength, is solitary, soars in the sky, and is free to change.¹³⁹ Because of these characteristics, the dragon is tied to a man of noble character or the hero in a similar way, which gives the dragon human, ethical, and national characteristics. In this case, the protagonist in this narrative and the dragon seem to have a lot in common, both in terms of their personalities and their abilities.

In addition, the "dragon is dancing" is sometimes used to refer to a traditional kind of Chinese folk dance that is also known as the "dragon dance." During the Chinese New Year, it is

¹³⁷ Lina Yuan and Yunling Sun. "A Comparative Study between Chinese and Western Dragon Culture in Cross-Cultural Communication." *6th Annual International Conference on Social Science and Contemporary Humanity Development (SSCHD 2020)*, (Amsterdam: Atlantis Press, 2021), 74-77.

¹³⁸ "Piano Pedagogy Lecture Series: Performance and Pedagogy of the Piano Duet by Duning Wu," Bilibili Video, 20:02, posted by "XHT91," March 1, 2020, https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1ZE411J7KH/?spm_id_from=333.337.search-card.all.click&vd_source=a40cee6a1ab0d2204529c1dcd2ed275a

¹³⁹ Jiajin Xu, "A Study of the Similarities and Differences between Chinese and Western Dragon Cultures." *English Square*, (2015), doi:10.16723/j.cnki.yygc.2015.11.026.

traditional to do dragon dances and lion dances, both of which are quite popular. This ties in to the following prelude “Here Comes the Spring Festival.” The “dragon dance” is performed by a group of skilled dancers who manage a long and flexible large puppet of a dragon by using poles that are positioned at regular intervals across the performance space.¹⁴⁰ In a way that is both sinuous and undulating, the dance team creates an impression of the movements that might be made by this divine creature.¹⁴¹

This poem focuses on a divine dragon meant to represent the protagonist. The dragon is carefree and light as it soars over the sky. The fact that the dragon can interact freely with the natural elements, such as the sun, the moon, the stars, the lightning, and the wind, as well as the fact that “I am the king of the time and space,” demonstrates that the dragon is not restricted by either time or space. It is a repetition of the Daoist concept “Enjoyment of Life in an Untroubled State” presented in the poem from No.1 “Tall Mountain, and Flowing Water.”

This prelude is marked with the tempo “vivace” and with “p.” The right-hand part of the rhythmic motif is characterized by rapid 16th notes, and the left-hand part is characterized by staccato eighth notes (see Example 29). The 16th notes in the right-hand part have the shape of a winding dragon, with a continuous rise and fall, and are played with a light touch. This was done to portray the light and soaring nature of the dragon. As mentioned before, the “dragon dance” expert dancers lead the dragon through a variety of movements by interspersing them with one

¹⁴⁰ James Benavides, “Chinese Dragon Head Stage Puppet,” *UTSA Institute of Texan Cultures*, Accessed July 25, 2022. <https://texancultures.utsa.edu/collection/chinese-dragon-head-stage-puppet/>.

¹⁴¹ Xi Bai, “Laozi’s Thought and the Complementarity of Confucianism and Taoism,” *Thinker* (2009) <https://www.aisixiang.com/data/27481.html>

another, continually demonstrating twisting, swinging, bending, kneeling, jumping, shaking, and a wide variety of other postures. Because of this, it is conceivable that the staccato 8th notes around the left-hand part are supposed to represent the dance steps.

Example 29. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.6, mm.1-2.

Musical score for Example 29, showing two measures of music in 4/4 time. The tempo is marked "Vivace" and "leggierissimo". The first measure starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The right hand plays a continuous eighth-note pattern, while the left hand plays a staccato eighth-note pattern.

During the transition section (mm.17-24), the movement of the dragon shifts from a continuous up-and-down movement to a repetitive downward rhythmic pattern, which is more energizing and audibly invigorating (see Example 30). At measure 25, the music reverts to the beginning material, with a shift to the higher register (see Example 31).

Example 30. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.6, mm.15-18

Musical score for Example 30, showing four measures of music in 4/4 time. The right hand features a repetitive downward rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, while the left hand plays a staccato eighth-note pattern. A dotted line above the staff indicates an 8-measure phrase.

Example 31. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.6, m.25.

Musical score for Example 31, showing two measures of music in 4/4 time. The right hand plays a staccato eighth-note pattern in a higher register, while the left hand plays a staccato eighth-note pattern. The dynamic is marked "pp".

After that, starting from measure 39, the rhythmic pattern of the dragon undergoes another transformation; this time, it transforms into a rhythmic pattern that features repeated

upward motion (see Example 32). At last, the music moves higher and higher, giving the impression that the dragon is flying up and even higher, gradually receding from view until it is no longer visible.

Example 32. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.6, mm.39-45.

The light, almost weightless feeling that is created by the rapid 16th notes and the staccato 8th notes is one of the most crucial pictures of the dancing dragon that is conveyed throughout this entire prelude. At its core, this prelude calls for a level of playing that strikes a balance between sufficient lightness and a sense of being unconstrained by hard technical challenges in playing.

No.7 Here Comes the Spring Festival

Table 8. Du, Ninwgu. *24 Piano Preludes, No.7, Sections.*

Measure	Sections
1-12	Intro.
13-35	A
36-52	B
53-64	Trans.
65-73	A'

Here Comes the Spring Festival¹⁴²

Plum flowers in the snow
Gently waft their fragrance.
Firecrackers in the air
Sound a brisk resonance.
Gongs and drums

Announce the coming of festivities.
The heart-warming world
Holds joyous parties.
Silvery dishes and jade bowls
Are luminous.
Fried buns and boiled dumplings
Are delicious.
Colorful lions and long dragons
Are boisterous.
The creatures of the whole world
Are intoxicated along with me
Thus!

The Spring Festival is celebrated on the first day of the first month of the lunar calendar, which is also known as the Chinese Spring Festival. It is considered one of China's most

¹⁴² Ningwu Du, *24 Piano Preludes* (Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 2015), 35.

spectacular and exciting traditional events. The verses dwell on the joyous atmosphere of the festival.¹⁴³

The prelude, titled "The Spring Festival is Coming," has the most tempo changes in this whole set, and the opening tempo marking "andante rubato, poco a poco accel" has some unique effect in this piece. The rhythmic layout is used in Du's Prelude "The Spring Festival is Coming," beginning with four repeated half notes with appoggiatura figures. It is important to play each half note strongly and clearly. The same notes suddenly become four times faster in mm.3-4 (see Example 33). The four repeated half notes in mm.1-2 accelerate in tempo, connecting originally to the staccato eighth notes in measure 3.

Example 33. Du, Ningwu. *24 Piano Preludes*, No.7, mm.1-6.



The lengthy running notes in measure 5 seem to imply that it can be performed relatively freely, in the spirit of an improvised cadenza. Another well-known work for piano, titled "Zheng xiao Yin" (Bamboo in the Wind"), from a six-prelude set by Chu Wanghua (b. 1941), also has

¹⁴³ China Culture Tour, "Traditional Celebration of Chinese New Year," 2017, <https://www.chinaculturetour.com/culture/chinese-new-year.htm>.

this sort of note pattern.¹⁴⁴ This imitates the playing manner and sound of traditional Chinese instruments known as the *Guzheng*¹⁴⁵ and the *Xiao*¹⁴⁶. This long succession of flowing tones that frequently emerge in “Zheng Xiao Yin” is designed to emulate one of the playing methods of the *Guzheng* known as “sweeping the strings.” “Sweeping strings” refers to the quick plucking of numerous neighboring strings by the fingers, moving up or downward in a sweeping motion (see Example 34).¹⁴⁷ It is typically employed in situations characterized by a sense of urgency, zeal, or excitement. In the introduction to this piece of music, Chu Wanghua explains that the rhythm being used is a *sanban* (散板),¹⁴⁸ which refers to a style of music characterized by free meter and an irregular rhythm that is frequently found in traditional Chinese music.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁴ Wenhong Li, "A Study of Chu Wanghua's Six Piano Preludes" (Diss., Shandong Normal University, Shandong, 2009).

¹⁴⁵ Guzheng (古筝) is a Chinese plucked zither. It has 16 or more strings and movable bridges, and the modern guzheng usually has 21 strings and bridges.

¹⁴⁶ The xiao (箫) is a Chinese vertical end-blown flute. It is generally made of bamboo.

¹⁴⁷ Xi Chen, "Chinese Piano Music: An Approach to Performance". (Diss., Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, Louisiana, 2012).

¹⁴⁸ “Sanban (散板), a Chinese musical term related to rhythm, is a form of music with free meter and irregular rhythm, often seen in traditional Chinese music. It is similar to *senza misura* in Western music,” as mentioned by Wei Jiao in her D.M.A dissertation “Chinese and Western Elements in Contemporary Chinese Composer Zhou Long's Works for Solo Piano Mongolian Folk-Tune Variations, Wu Kui, and Pianogongs.”

¹⁴⁹ Wei Jiao, "Chinese and Western Elements in Contemporary Chinese Composer Zhou Long's Works for Solo Piano Mongolian Folk-Tune Variations, Wu Kui, and Pianogongs". (Diss., The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, North Carolina, 2014).

Example 34. Chu, Wanghua. *Bamboo in the Wind*, m.23.¹⁵⁰

The image displays a musical score for Example 34, consisting of three systems of piano notation. The first system features a treble clef staff with a melodic line and a bass clef staff with accompaniment. Above the first system, the tempo marking "Lento poi accel." is written, followed by "Cadenza" and "(8^{va})" in parentheses. A dashed line indicates the end of the cadenza. The second system continues the melodic and accompaniment lines. The third system shows the continuation of the piece, with a "pp" (pianissimo) dynamic marking and a "una corda" instruction. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and fingering numbers (1, 2, 3, 4, 5).

The impact of *sanban* and “Sweeping strings” is most noticeable in measure 5 of Du's “Spring Festival is Coming” and later reappears several times (see Example 35). The tempo marking “andante rubato” at the beginning of this prelude hints at this, which means this introduction section can be performed with a fair amount of leeway. A full and long pedal is used to imitate the sound of the *Guzheng*, which has a thicker resonance when sweeping and scating. The pedal only use has to be done in one go because changing pedals in the middle would result in a sonic break and the single pentatonic scale used in this passage produces no dissonance. As the music moves closer to the measure 6, Du has placed a pedal mark to indicate that performers

¹⁵⁰ Shu Li, “A Study of the Piano Works of Chu Wanghua, with an Emphasis on Six Preludes.” (DMA dissertation, University of Kansas, 2016)

should change the pedal, helping the accumulated sound to diminish. The only way to successfully reproduce the resonant sound of the “Sweeping Strings” is to slightly change the pedal, and then a full pedal to sustain all of the notes again. Other similar parts in this prelude can use the same approach to achieve the effect.¹⁵¹ Beginning in the A section (m.13), the composition adopts a faster tempo, ushering in an atmosphere that is cheerful and full of happiness (see Example 35).

Example 35. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.7, mm. 11-19.

¹⁵¹ Jianyong Ding, "On the Musical Exploration of Ningwu Du's 24 Piano Preludes". (Diss., Inner Mongolia Normal University, Inner Mongolia, 2017).

Additionally, the tempo shifts again at measures 55 (see Example 36) and 65. The prelude then ends in a tempo that is passionate and joyous. Because there are so many different tempo shifts, the performer needs to be attentive when arranging the speed and overall organic growth of the piece.

Example 36. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.7, mm. 53-55.

The musical score for Example 36 shows three measures (53-55) in G major. Measure 53 begins with a forte (*ff*) dynamic. The right hand plays a staccato melody of eighth notes, while the left hand provides a bass line of eighth notes. Measure 54 shifts to a mezzo-forte (*mp*) dynamic, with the right hand playing a more legato melody. Measure 55 continues with the *mp* dynamic and includes the tempo marking "Andante rubato" and "poco a poco accel." above the staff.

This prelude “Here Comes the Spring Festival” is also very heavily marked with the most detailed notation of dynamics. There are huge dynamic contrasts in places. The dynamic markings that can be found in measures 13-17 deserve special attention (see Example 35). The melody in the right hand is performed at “f” in measure 13, and immediately after that, in measure 14, there is a “p,” which could very well be interpreted as an answering melody. Each subsequent octave in the lower range played at the “p” dynamic is a response to the previous loud melody. In addition, the notes in measures 13-15 are mainly staccato, while the notes in measures 16-17 are legato. Both staccato and legato, as well as strong and weak, can be distinguished straightforwardly. This could be a discussion taking place between two instruments, or it could be a communication taking place between the orchestra and the instruments.

The work is in a persistent feeling of jubilation and concludes definitively with two “sfz” symbolizing the jubilant attitude (see Example 37). There is a chance that the two “sfz” represent a gong sound. These two notes must be played firmly and solidly.

Example 37. Du, Ningwu. *24 Piano Preludes, No.7*, mm.72-73.



The musical score consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and the lower staff is in bass clef. Both staves have a key signature of one sharp (F#). The music is written in a style that suggests a gong-like sound, with chords and dynamic markings. The first staff has a series of chords in the first measure, followed by a single note in the second measure. The second staff has a series of chords in the first measure, followed by a single note in the second measure. The dynamic marking *sfz* is placed below the notes in the second measure of both staves.

No.8 Scherzo

Table 9. Du, Ninwgu. *24 Piano Preludes, No.8, Sections.*

Measure	Sections
1-8	A
9-16	Trans.
17-24	B
25-32	Trans.
33-64	A'

Scherzo¹⁵²

You have worn your clothes
 Inside out
I have fastened my button
 To the wrong hole.
We are not much different.
 If you cannot help
Laughing, first laugh at
 "Yourself.

 Go, go, go.
 Hurry up to wash.
Do not keep your hair puffy
 Nor your face dirty,
As if you were a sleepy
 Fox!

Scherzo is a genre of instrumental music with a witty and humorous atmosphere.¹⁵³

Throughout the poem, there are moments of laughter and joking among family and friends, which can be clearly seen in the first stanza of this poem. Only family or close friends would tell

¹⁵² Ningwu Du, *24 Piano Preludes* (Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 2015), 42.

¹⁵³ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Scherzo | Music," Accessed Sep. 27, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/art/scherzo>.

them they had worn their clothes inside out. The humor is obvious and aptly related to the word “scherzo.”

This is the only piece in the set that uses a musical genre for its title rather than a literary one but is still relatively literary. The “fox” *yixiang* (imagery) in the second stanza of the poem reinforces this sense of humor. The “fox” *yixiang* in this poem is utilized as a metaphor for a spirited, intelligent, and crafty person. This use of “fox” *yixiang* combines Chinese and Western cultural influences. In both Chinese and Western cultures, the “fox” is a common symbol that is an animal that really exists in nature, as a specific object for literary processing. In Chinese culture, however, the fox has a mysterious character and is frequently referred to as a “fox fairy” or “fox spirit,” causing people to dread and admire it. As time progressed, the fox progressively transformed from an originally virtuous creature to a demonic monster with a horrible reputation. In the well-known “Aesop’s tales,” for instance, the fox is typically portrayed as intelligent, crafty, hypocritical, and deceitful. There is nothing mysterious about it, and it may be interpreted both positively and negatively.¹⁵⁴ To bring this fun scene alive, Ningwu Du combines the favorable description of the clever, cunning personality of the Western “fox” image with the anthropomorphic rhetorical method of the Chinese “fox.”

A scherzo form is typically characterized by a lively 3/4 meter and an A B A' structure. Du also utilizes the ABA form, but in 2/4 rather than the typical 3/4.¹⁵⁵ This prelude and the

¹⁵⁴ Xiaolin Wang, "An Introduction to Chinese and Western 'Fox' Imagery." 1-4.

¹⁵⁵ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Scherzo | Music," Accessed Sep. 27, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/art/scherzo>.

No.9 require a high level of digital dexterity due to their rapid, dense, and continuous staccato 16th notes. Evenness of tone and clarity are other technical necessities in these. The humorous, good-natured, and entertaining musical image is conveyed through the utilization of the perky rhythms (see Example 38).

The scale used primarily is B Dorian (B – C# – D – E – F# - G# – A) in the beginning. This modal context means there will be a tendency to create intervallic patterns without having the sensation of a strong resolution point.

Example 38. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.8, mm.1-4.



There is a “sforzato” played at the end of the climax of the transition section, in measure 32, perhaps a musical shock akin to a joke in which “Boo!” is shouted (see Example 39). Scaring friends can also be an aspect of playfulness.

Example 39. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.8, mm.32-33.



The primary theme from the A section is used by Du from measure 53 to measure 64 again, but he starts it an octave higher, perhaps suggesting an impish, squealing conclusion to a joke. And in this section, Du extensively uses rests and dynamic shifts (a sudden change from

pianissimo to fortissimo), which makes the sudden fortissimo conclusion even more of a comic ending (see Example 40).

Example 40. Du, Ningwu. *24 Piano Preludes*, No.8, mm.63-64.

The image shows a musical score for two staves, likely piano and bass clef. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The first staff (treble clef) begins with a rest, followed by a series of chords: a triad of D4, F#4, and A4, then a dyad of D4 and F#4, then a dyad of A4 and F#4, and finally a dyad of D4 and F#4. The second staff (bass clef) begins with a rest, followed by a single note D3, then a rest, then a single note D3, and finally a rest. Dynamic markings include *ff sfz* under the first staff and *sfz* under the second staff.

No.9 The Divine Monkey King

Table 10. Du, Ninwgu. *24 Piano Preludes, No.9, Sections.*

Measure	Sections
1-16	A
17-32	B
33-41	Trans.
42-56	A'
57-68	Coda

The Divine Monkey King¹⁵⁶

He has fun in Flower-Fruit Mountain.
He enjoys time in Water-Curtain Cavern.
With a somersault he rides on clouds
To arrive in a blink at Palace of Heaven.

He indulges in testing the divine peaches.
He steals the magical pills with a sweep.
Going in and out as if no one's around,
He displays his supernatural feat!

One of the most iconic figures to appear in Chinese literature is known as the Monkey King, also known as Sun Wukong.¹⁵⁷ The Monkey King (Sun Wukong) is a legendary and mythical creature who is most known for his role as one of the main characters in the Chinese

¹⁵⁶ Ningwu Du, *24 Piano Preludes* (Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 2015), 46.

¹⁵⁷ Sun Wukong boasts several powers such as he can carry the burden of two mountains on his shoulders while simultaneously moving at high speed; he is capable of traveling 54,000 kilometers in a single somersault, and he can transform into a total of 72 distinct objects. In spite of the fact that the Monkey King possessed a wide range of skills and magical abilities, he was duped into accepting the role of "Horse Protector" in the Heavenly Palace. After the monkey realized that his responsibility was to watch after the horses, he turned around and went back to his Mountain of Flowers and Fruits and put up a sign proclaiming that he was the "Qi Tian Da Sheng," a man who possessed an extraordinary amount of power. A violent conflict broke out almost immediately between the Heavenly Soldiers and Generals and the Monkey King, and eventually, the Monkey King won. The Jade Emperor did not want the Monkey King to create any additional chaos within the Heavenly Palace. He could only formally recognize the Monkey King as the "Qi Tian Da Sheng" and was instructed that he take charge of the Peach Garden. After finding out that he was not invited to an important conference, the Monkey King angrily stole peaches and elixirs after getting drunk and disrupting the Conference. After coming to his senses and seeing that he had created a significant amount of disruption, he once more went back to his Mountain of Flowers and Fruits.

classic novel *Journey to the West* (西游记), which was written by Wu Cheng'en (born in 1500 or 1505) in the 16th century and has since been adapted into many different stories.¹⁵⁸ In the novel *Journey to the West*, Sun Wukong is a monkey who was born from a stone and later obtains extraordinary powers via the practice of Taoism. Following his defiance of heaven, the Buddha puts him in solitary confinement at the foot of a mountain. After a period of five hundred years, he travels with the monk Tang Sanzang and two other pupils on a mission to retrieve Buddhist sutras from the West (India), where Buddha and his followers are believed to be residing at the time.¹⁵⁹

The Monkey King is a symbol of many things, including the quest for freedom and equality, a courageous and militant fighting spirit, and an unbridled rebellious attitude, as well as a bright, happy, and funny personality.¹⁶⁰

At first, this prelude expresses a character that has a lot of features itself. It is a playful monkey, that has fun and steals things, but it's also a magical divine creature, that not only has supernatural features, but it's the king of this monkey kingdom located at the Flower-fruit Mountain. Du starts describing this character at first by choosing a fast tempo, and by indicating it with the word "scherzando." It also presents staccato notes all along the main theme of the

¹⁵⁸ Jimmy Yu, "Meir Shahar, The Shaolin Monastery: History, Religion, and the Chinese Martial Arts." *The Journal of Religion* 89, no. 3 (2009): 457–459.

¹⁵⁹ Cheng En Wu and Anthony C Yu, *The Journey to the West. Volume 1*. (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2012).

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

piece, and also very rhythmical motives, also syncopated, that complement the narrative (see Example 41). This divine monkey king is active and mischievous.

Example 41. Du, Ningwu. *24 Piano Preludes*, No.9, mm.1-3.



The texture is relatively simple, using only two voices and creating a counterpoint between them (see Example 41 and Example 42). There are no chords until measure 16 once the main theme has been completely presented.

Example 42. Du, Ningwu. *24 Piano Preludes*, No.9, mm.16-18.



The form of this piece is also related to western structures. Du presents the main theme in the first 8 measures, divided into two four-bar subphrases. At the ninth measure, this theme is repeated, using octave doubling. From measure 16 to measure 31, he presents a development of the motives of the main theme, now with some accompaniment arpeggio chords, made by intervals of “pipa chords” (see Example 42).

At measure 32, there is a transition made by various ascending pentatonic scales figures that lead to the higher register of the keyboard, to achieve a high-sounding apex before the

recapitulation of the main theme. The repeated chords, based on quartal sonorities and alternating between piano and forte, are a distinct break in the previous textures and are an attention-grabbing climax before the recapitulation (see Example 43).

Example 43. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.9, mm.38-39.

At measure 42, there is a re-exposition of the main theme like the first 16 measures of the piece, followed by 4 measures of transition with scalar figures and 4 measures of high quartal chords, to end with a 4-measure coda (see Example 44). In measures 61-64, the rise of the right-hand chords, together with the exploration of this super-high register of the keyboard, produces sonic effects akin to monkeys and their playmates screaming with earsplitting laughter (see Example 45).

Example 44. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.9, mm.41-44.

Example 45: Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.9, mm.61-64.

The musical score for Example 45 consists of four measures (61-64) in 2/4 time, key of A major. The right hand (RH) plays a melody of quarter notes, starting with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a *sempre cresc.* instruction. The left hand (LH) plays a bass line of quarter notes, starting with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The piece concludes with a key signature change to B-flat major in the final measure.

This structure can be related to the poem, as it presents two parts. At first, the Monkey King is described playing and having fun, but then it describes how he is capable of reaching the clouds and Palace of Heaven. The high piano register in the middle of the piece and the open quartal chords might be related to this representation. But then, the second part talks about how “he indulges in tasting the divine peaches,” so Du goes back to describe this playful side of the Monkey King.

The use of pentatonic scales and quartal chords is highly related to Chinese traditional music, especially when these scales are used in an ascending way. In this case, the melody is based on these scales but is not completely tied to them since it has the leading note of the A major scale. The bass line in the first measures also draws a harmonic progression very related to a famous western harmonic progression I – vi – V – I (see Example 41). This mix of Western and Eastern traditions is an example of the uniquely hybrid influences in Du’s compositional style.

No.10 Romantic Countryside

Table 11. Du, Ninwgu. *24 Piano Preludes*, No.10, Sections.

Measure	Sections
1-8	A
9-15	B
16-23	A'
24-27	Coda

Romantic Countryside¹⁶¹

A melodious sound of a flute
Is floating with the breeze.
Sweet and tender clouds
Are stirring up our melancholy.
Today we are united here.
Tomorrow where will we be?

No need
For too many words.
Let us feel
In silence this world
Full of golden leaves
And the time in a blink that
Leaves.

As indicated previously, Nos.10-18 depicts the protagonist's difficult existence when he joins the war. At first glance, the term "Romantic Countryside" may suggest a highly pleasant, unhurried, and cozy atmosphere. However, beyond the beauty of the description is a concealed sadness.

¹⁶¹ Ningwu Du, *24 Piano Preludes* (Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 2015), 51.

The first two lines of the poem are a landscape description. Both the “sound of the flute” and the “sweet and tender clouds” contribute to the delicate and mournful ambiance. The following two lines explain the cause of the protagonist's melancholy: "Today we are united here, tomorrow where will we be?" A strong contrast exists between today's reunion and tomorrow's separation, which contributes to the sadness of the coming separation. There is another contrast between here and the ambition of the preceding section. This is a major turning event in the life of the protagonist.

The use of the phrase "full of golden leaves" in the second stanza implies that this is an autumnal scene. Typically, spring signifies life and energy, as exemplified by the No.3 “Peach Blossom Spring,” an unhurried and pleasant mood. Autumn, in contrast, is sometimes emblematic of decay, decline, old age, and even death, with associations of things beyond their prime. The sensitivity of the Chinese literati has always been awakened by the change of the seasons. In autumn, when the flowers are wilting, the yellow leaves are falling to the ground, and everything appears to be deteriorating, these scenes undoubtedly generate a sense of melancholy among the literati. From antiquity to the present, numerous Chinese literary works have explored the issue of autumnal melancholy. The majority of autumn-themed pieces are melancholy and lonely.¹⁶² Similarly, the second line "full of golden leaves" and “the time in a blink that leaves” emphasizes a slightly confused, gloomy, nostalgic, and anxious tone.

¹⁶² Qiuping Wang, "The Expressive Forms of Natural Imagery in Chinese Poetry." *Advances in Literary Study* 05, no. 1 (2017): 17-21.

This mood is enhanced by the tempo marking “Andante un poco sostenuto” at the beginning. “Sostenuto” means "sustained." Occasionally, it refers to a slower tempo, but more frequently, it refers to an extremely legato style in which the notes are prolonged beyond their regular values. This prelude begins with an “mp,” accompanied by the three melodic notes "C-sharp, A, and B" and a block chordal accompaniment in simple triads. The melody then meanders and lengthens, and the entire phrase (mm.1-4 and mm.5-8) travels gradually downhill (see Example 47). The half notes convey a sense of stillness, whereas the eighth notes convey a sense of gentle motion. In *Flight of the Bumblebee* composed by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov for instance, there is a relationship between the quick movement of the notes and the sense given by the speed of flight of some flying object, giving birth to the "flight of the wildebeest" association. On the opposite, No.10, the use of long notes and a slow tempo creates a link with time standing still, reflecting the composer’s desire to enjoy a quiet life at this moment. To produce this melancholy ambiance, each note must be played with a gentle, legato touch, ensuring that the sound is broad, soft, and lyrical.

From measures 1 to 8, each short phrase ends with a long half note, and, combined with the tempo marking “Andante un poco sostenuto,” there is an effect as if the sound of the flute were fading away in the air gradually (see Example 46). And within this section, the time signature alternates between 4/4 and 2/4, allowing for irregular phrase lengths. For instance, the first short phrase lasts four quarter-note beats, the second six quarter-note beats, and the third phrase four quarter-note beats. This metrical organization evokes the freedom of phrasing by

speech. It is recommended to make the expiration and inhalation between these phrases audible to the audience, and the tempo marking “Andante un poco sostenuto” facilitates this.

Example 46. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.10, mm.1-8.

Andante un poco sostenuto



The section from measures 9 to 14 becomes more contrapuntal, during which two voices interweave and circle back and forth in no particular direction, highlighting the protagonist's perplexity at "tomorrow where will we be?" (See Example 47)

Example 47. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.10, mm.9-10.

legato molto e espressivo



In measure 16, the melody goes back to the beginning, but it transforms into chords rather than the single notes used in the beginning (see Example 48). The initial left-hand block chords transform into ascending pentatonic scales with 16th notes, with each pentatonic scale commencing on the base note of the preceding block chords. With the ascending 16th-note accompaniment figures, the music has more flow than at the beginning and suggests the existential unease alluded to in the poem. This questioning continues until the end of the prelude

and, while there is a Picardy third ending, the deeper underlying questions are not really resolved (see Example 49).

Example 48. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.10, mm.16-18.

Musical score for Example 48, measures 16-18. The score is in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. Measure 16 starts with a forte (*f*) dynamic and a Picardy ending (Ped.) marked with an asterisk (*). The right hand plays a series of chords, while the left hand plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. Measures 17 and 18 continue this pattern, with the right hand playing chords and the left hand playing eighth notes. The score includes markings for *f*, *Ped.*, and *simile* with asterisks (*).

Example 49. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.10, mm.25-27.

Musical score for Example 49, measures 25-27. The score is in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. Measure 25 starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a Picardy ending (Ped.) marked with an asterisk (*). The right hand plays a series of chords, while the left hand plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. Measures 26 and 27 continue this pattern, with the right hand playing chords and the left hand playing eighth notes. The score includes markings for *p*, *dim. e smorz.*, and *Ped.* with an asterisk (*).

No.11 Valley of Longing

Table 12. Du, Ninwgu. *24 Piano Preludes*, No.11, Sections.

Measure	Sections
1-16	A
17-28	B
29-44	A'
45-54	Coda

Valley of Longing¹⁶³

The open valley
Is soundless.
Only my thirsty pulses
Are vibrating lightly.

Every blade of grass and
Every tree and rock
Is echoing my heartfelt thoughts
But I can only try,
In the faint night sky,
To look for the shadow
Of you.

The word “longing,” which appears in the poem's title, is the subject of this prelude. The utilization of the image of a desolate and silent valley serves to convey this idea of being isolated and yearning for something. The main character either imagines that he is in a quiet valley or is genuinely in one that is so quiet that he can hear the sound of his own heartbeat. His restlessness is reflected in every strand of grass and rock. In the wee hours of the morning, he thinks about things that happened in the past and the individuals involved. wistfully pining away for the

¹⁶³ Ningwu Du, *24 Piano Preludes* (Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 2015), 54.

tranquil existence of days gone by. However, the only thing the protagonist can do is look for, or try to remember, the shadows of people and events from the past in the hazy night sky.

In the first four measures, the composer presents the main theme for the piece which starts out like a canon at the octave (see Example 50). This might be a reference to the “echoing” mentioned in the poem's second stanza. The right-hand part presents the first three notes of the melody, and the left-hand part repeats them almost immediately, echoing them. This exact echo is only completed with the first sentence, made on the first two measures on the right hand and ending at the first beat of the third measure. This feature causes a displacement between both hands’ rhythms, so the melodies on the right hand always end with the last beat, and the left-hand melodies ending on the first of the next measure. The juxtaposition of eighth-note triplets and sixteenth notes, along with the constant imitative counterpoint, convey a feeling of unrest. Even though “the open valley is soundless,” there is a constant whirring inside the protagonist’s mind.

Example 50. Du, Ningwu. *24 Piano Preludes*, No.11, mm.1-8.

The musical score for Example 50 consists of two systems of music. The first system contains measures 1 through 4. The right-hand part (treble clef) begins with a melody of eighth-note triplets: G4, A4, B4 in the first measure, C5, B4, A4 in the second, G4, F4, E4 in the third, and D4, C4, B3 in the fourth. The left-hand part (bass clef) echoes this melody almost immediately, starting with F3, E3, D3 in the first measure, C3, B2, A2 in the second, G2, F2, E2 in the third, and D2, C2, B1 in the fourth. The second system contains measures 5 through 8. The right-hand part continues with a more complex melodic line, while the left-hand part provides a rhythmic accompaniment of sixteenth notes and eighth notes, maintaining the imitative counterpoint.

The poem describes an open valley at night, and Du creates that atmosphere by using a D minor, a key that has often been viewed as an appropriate tonality for a brooding or melancholy state.¹⁶⁴ At measure 17, a new melodic figure in 16th notes appears, slowly ascending in register and volume, coming to what sounds like a joyous apex in measure 25 (see Example 51). The expanded texture, now using octaves, requires a virtuosity not predictable from the work's simple and poetic opening. It's almost as if the protagonist has an outburst to express the active ramblings in his brain. This can be related to the anxiety of looking for something that breaks that calm feeling, but also, the way the melody rises up from the low register recalls the images from the poem (the grass, then the trees and the rocks, and then the sky) that would be the highest point of the poem.

Example 51. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.11, mm.16-25.

¹⁶⁴ August Gathy, 1835; Karl Herlosssohn, 1839; J.A. Schrader, 1827—as cited by Rita Steblin in her book *A History of Key Characteristics in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries*, Second Edition, (University of Rochester Press, 2002.)

A recapitulation begins at measure 44 which then leads to a gradual diminuendo, with the piece ending pianissimo in measure 55. The bombast of the middle gradually fades away, not exactly giving a sense of peace but perhaps an abatement of suffering (see Example 52).

Example 52. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.11, mm.44-55.

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system begins at measure 42, marked with a *dim.* (diminuendo) instruction. The right-hand staff features a melodic line with a series of eighth-note chords, while the left-hand staff provides a steady accompaniment of eighth notes. The second system starts at measure 48, marked with a *rit.* (ritardando) instruction. The right-hand staff continues with a similar melodic pattern, and the left-hand staff maintains the accompaniment. The piece concludes in measure 55 with a *pp* (pianissimo) dynamic marking.

No.12 Lonely and Deserted Village

Table 13. Du, Ninwgu. *24 Piano Preludes*, No.12, Sections.

Measure	Sections
1-16	A
17	Trans.
18-25	B
26-30	Trans.
31-55	A'
56-58	Coda

Lonely and Deserted Village¹⁶⁵

There has been no news about you.
I have only fatigue and feebleness.
The heat-lacking stoves
Quietly stay in
The corner forgotten.

How I miss
The peaceful life.
But in a moment like this,
My sole companion is
Boundless loneliness.

The words "lonely" and "deserted" appear in the title of this poem to emphasize the protagonist's solitude. In No.11, the protagonist is having difficulty finding a tranquil life like they used to. The protagonist is still struggling to accept the fact that things have moved on at the beginning of this prelude, which picks off directly where the previous one left off. The exhausted and vulnerable protagonist is a side note to Du's use of the unheated and forgotten fireplace. The only thing the protagonist can do in this desolate setting is pine for a tranquil existence that

¹⁶⁵ Ningwu Du, *24 Piano Preludes* (Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 2015), 58.

seems like an unreality. The happy scenes of being reunited with loved ones in No.7, No.8, and No.9 provide a striking contrast to the current atmosphere.

A canonic melody is utilized, similar to how it was in the No.11. In contrast to No.11, where there appears to be a bit of hopeful seeking, the “andante sostenuto” and the longer timed melodic tones in this prelude convey the hopelessness of the protagonist as well as a further sense of loneliness and melancholy (see Example 50 and 53). Despite the fact that No.11 contains some elements quite similar to this one, the melodic progression in this prelude moves at a much slower pace and in thinner textures, illustrating the ever more desperate mood. It is possible to play it a bit more slowly and with less drive than in No.11, which reflects the exhausted and hopeless state of the protagonist. This feeling of anxiety and despondency has been gradually building ever since No.11.

In the first measure of No.12, Du presents a lonely descending melody on a C# minor scale that has some notes related to the pentatonic scale. This motive is repeated canonically in the left hand an octave lower. In the next measures, Du keeps developing small phrases but does not give any specific order or direction to follow. Also, at the end of the fourth measure, the melody has an A# that doesn't have a harmonically clear context (see Example 53).

Example 53. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.12, mm.1-4.

Andante sostenuto

The musical score for Example 53 consists of four measures. The key signature is C# minor (three sharps) and the time signature is 2/4. The tempo is marked "Andante sostenuto". The first measure begins with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic. The right hand plays a descending melody: G4 (quarter), F#4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), D4 (quarter), C4 (half with fermata). The left hand plays a similar descending line an octave lower: G3 (quarter), F#3 (quarter), E3 (quarter), D3 (quarter), C3 (half with fermata). The second measure continues the melody: right hand G4 (half), F#4 (quarter); left hand G3 (half), F#3 (quarter). The third measure: right hand E4 (half), D4 (quarter); left hand E3 (half), D3 (quarter). The fourth measure: right hand C4 (half), B3 (quarter with fermata); left hand C3 (half), B2 (quarter with fermata). The final note in the right hand is an A#3, which is noted as having no clear harmonic context.

At measure 10, this A# appears again and gives the melody a feeling of the C# Dorian scale, but still, its function is not clear, and the chord sequence is not clear either (see Example 54). Often, new material is presented as variations of the first idea, but never in structured sentences. This can be related to the main character's idea of the poem, about someone who is lonely and is thinking about someone or something else. The poem is called “Lonely and Deserted Village,” so it might be related to a person who is far from home and misses his old life or someone that comes back home but realizes things have changed too much.

Example 54. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.12, mm.9-15.



At measure 11, the main theme made by eighth notes changes to triplets, which creates a little rush in the rhythm feeling and creates a transition for the next section of the piece (see Example 54).

When Du wrote, “There has been no news about you,” it gives the idea that the character is talking to himself but also thinking randomly about this place that is now gone. This first section of the poem centers on this person who divagates from himself and the feelings of absence. This section might be represented until measure 16, when this soft chaos drastically changes into fast scales in sixteenth notes. The center also seems to be changing from C# minor and E major (relative major) to a modal scale with F# as the center and a cadence to B minor on

measure 21, when the A# resolves as the leading note of B (see Example 55 and 56). This new mood might be related to the second section, starting with “How I miss.” When this person remembers that peaceful life, it seems to be referring to happy moments at home. This deserted village might be a physical place that is far away, but also the emptiness of being far from family and friends. So, there is a contradiction between those good memories and the feeling of absence that remains. These harmonic changes and the resolutions to unexpected minor chords seem to be a representation of that.

Example 55. Du, Ningwu. *24 Piano Preludes*, No.12, mm.15-16.



Example 56. Du, Ningwu. *24 Piano Preludes*, No.12, m.21.



At measure 30, these sixteenth notes patterns suddenly stop on a long note, and the left-hand part presents the first motive of the piece, which represents this thought about loneliness and self-awareness of this feeling (see Example 57). The last sentences of the poem recap this sensation by saying: “My sole companion is boundless loneliness.” This sentence is like a resignation to the unavoidable present and the memories that won’t come back.

Example 57. Du, Ningwu. *24 Piano Preludes*, No.12, mm.29-33.

The musical score is for Example 57, measures 29-33. It is in 2/4 time and has a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The score consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. Measure 29 features a rapid sixteenth-note run in the treble and a half note in the bass. Measure 30 begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and features a half note in the treble and a half note in the bass. Measure 31 has a quarter note in the treble and a half note in the bass. Measure 32 has a quarter note in the treble and a half note in the bass. Measure 33 has a quarter note in the treble and a half note in the bass.

No.13 Elegy to a Friend

Table 14. Du, Ninwgu. *24 Piano Preludes*, No.12, Sections.

Measure	Sections
1-8	A
9-14	B
15	Transition
16-22	A'
23-27	Coda

Elegy to a Friend¹⁶⁶

Your grand aspiration
Has not been accomplished.
Your heroic soul
Has vanished,
Your voice and laughter,
And gesture and movement
Have been stopped
All of a sudden.

I wish you to be
A flying battle steed
In the other world
To help me
Succeed.

The content is as implied by the title; a friend has passed away. This prelude was an homage to a deceased friend, and the tone throughout the poem is rather somber. Previous poems have made oblique references to separation and individuals who have not been heard from. This is a plain reference to the death of a buddy. It is evident from the poem that the friend of the protagonist, or rather this group of the protagonist's friends, had lofty aspirations. Based on the

¹⁶⁶ Ningwu Du, *24 Piano Preludes* (Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 2015), 62.

preceding background information and the "heroic soul" expressed here, the friend is an aspiring young man who sacrificed his life for his nation. In the second stanza of the poem, the protagonist wishes his friend to assume the appearance of a warhorse to aid him in achieving success. The "battle steed" generally referred to a war horse or destrier that carried warriors into battle.¹⁶⁷ This "battle steed" *yixiang* (imagery) implies that the protagonist mourns his friend's unfulfilled legacy and devotes himself to defending his country.

The first 8 measures show a melody in the right hand, accompanied by some triplets descending in the left hand (see Example 58). The key signature indicates Bb major or G minor scales, but the first chord is C7 chord, pointing toward modality. The chords implied by the first four measures – C7, Gm7, C9—suggest G Dorian or C Mixolydian mode. Then, in bars 5-8, the chords F7, Ebmaj7, Gm, and then G point back to a G minor tonality (with a Picardy 3rd twist in bar 8).

Example 58. Du, Ningwu. *24 Piano Preludes*, No.13, mm.1-8.

The musical score for Example 58 consists of two systems of music. The first system covers measures 1 through 4, and the second system covers measures 5 through 8. The key signature has two flats (Bb major or G minor), and the time signature is 4/4. The tempo is marked 'Andante sostenuto' and the dynamics are 'mp'. The right hand plays a melody with a long note in the first measure of each system, followed by eighth notes. The left hand plays descending triplets of eighth notes. The first four measures of the first system are marked with '3' below the notes, indicating triplets. The second system begins with a measure marked '5' above the staff, showing a change in the right-hand melody and the continuation of the left-hand triplets.

¹⁶⁷ Merriam-Webster, "Definition of Destrier." Accessed July 10, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/destrier>.

At measure 9, an ascending melody begins, accompanied by a more active left hand, promoting more outspoken drama (see Example 59). The melody now is harmonized with the high register chords, even presenting new rhythmical motives, but keeping this harmonic feeling of constant modulation and no clear tonal center.

Example 59. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.13, mm.9-12.

Measure 15 allows connecting this section with some scales in opposite directions (see Example 60). The left-hand part goes down, while the right-hand part goes up. Then at measure 16, the chords return to the original rhythm pattern shown at the beginning of this prelude and even share some of its counterpoint ideas by keeping some chord notes on long figures. The left-hand rhythm, originally composed of triplets, is now made with 32nd notes, giving the piece more movement. By now, Du might be referring to the second part of the poem. At first, he refers to the main character's friend as someone he misses and who died unexpectedly. But in this second stanza, he mentions: "I wish to be a flying battle steed In the other world to help me succeed." This change in the rhythm might refer to the flying horse. And at the end of the piece,

at measures 24-25, Du shows for the first time a dominant and its resolution to G major, a reference to the clear tonality and perhaps the clarity hoped for in the poem (“to help me succeed”).

Example 60. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.13, mm.15-16.



In the poem, the last word, “succeed,” is separated from the rest of the text. This unexpected resolution emphasizes this positive word, after a description of the pain and memories of the people who died. This last chord and the pentatonic scales that end the piece show a little hope in the situation (see Example 61).

Example 61. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.13, mm.24-27.



No.14 The Ironclad Rider on the Desert

Table 15. Du, Ninwgu. *24 Piano Preludes*, No.14, Sections.

Measure	Sections
1-18	A
19-24	Transition
25-36	B
37-50	A'
51-61	Coda

The Ironclad Rider on the Desert¹⁶⁸

On the vast and desolate
Desert, starlight shines
And hooves resonate.

Shadows of the devil stir
In the dark and yet
I betray the smile
Of a victor.

The “ironclad rider” here is linked to the battle steed of the previous verse. The association suggests that “ironclad rider” refers to the image of a soldier on a battle steed in full armor. Many of the *yixiang* used in this poem, such as “ironclad rider,” “desert,” and “hooves,” are often used in the genre of poetry called “Border poetry” or “Frontier poetry.”¹⁶⁹ The poem is based on the theme of that. Border poems focus on military life at the country border, either describing the exotic scenery of the border or reflecting on the hardships of being a soldier at the border. These poems are extremely rich in content: they can express the desire to build a

¹⁶⁸ Ningwu Du, *24 Piano Preludes* (Beijing: People’s Music Publishing House, 2015), 66.

¹⁶⁹ Yanqing Mi, “The Establishment of Northern Guanzhen and the Evolution of Frontier Fortress Poems in the Tang Dynasty.” *Inner Mongolia Social Sciences* 42, no. 1 (2021): 155-164.

successful career and serve the country; they can express the nostalgia of the soldiers at the frontier, and the hatred of the women at home; and so on.¹⁷⁰ In the second stanza of the poem, the enemy appears, “shadows of the devil stir in the dark.” So, what the protagonist is trying to express here is a kind of generosity in joining the army, a desire for victory, and the defense of the motherland.

The tempo for this prelude is “presto.” The rapid-moving rhythmic pattern in 16th notes played by the right hand in this prelude create a perpetual motion energy that is sustained throughout the piece. It is a picture of the never-ending sound of horses' hooves, which contributes to the tense mood of being in the middle of a conflict. And the short, rapid-moving octave chords mixed with the rests are meant to evoke both the picture of a heroic figure and the image of an aggressive devil (see Example 62).

Example 62. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.14, mm.1-2.



The melodic notes in the left hand have similarity in some way to the first theme of Rachmaninoff Piano Concerto No.2 in the Orchestra part, perhaps an unintentional reference but indicative of Du’s background and compositional sources (see Examples 63).

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

Example 63. Rachmaninoff, Sergei. *Piano Concerto No.2*, the first theme.



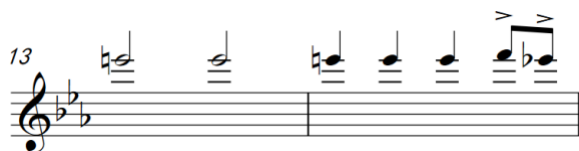
This prelude makes use of a parallel progression of the “pipa chord” in conjunction with octaves at various points throughout its duration. For instance, the left-hand part does a parallel movement in octaves from measure 1 all the way through measure 10. At measure 11, the parallel octave motions have been replaced by “pipa chords” (see Example 64).

Example 64. Du, Ningwu. *24 Piano Preludes*, No.14, mm.9-11.



At measure 9, there is a shift toward D minor (see Example 64). It contains a simultaneous appearance of a natural E in both the left and right hands in measures 13-14. The use of the octatonic scale and the natural E gives the impression to the audience that the key is shifting to the parallel major key of C major. On the final beat of measure 14, using neighbor tone movements (E-F-E flat) returns quickly back to the key of C minor and back to the material that was presented at the beginning of this prelude (see Example 65).

Example 65. Du, Ningwu. *24 Piano Preludes*, No.14, soprano part, mm.13-14.



The B section (measures 25-37) begins in C major (see Example 66), but then passes back to C minor (measures 29-31) before an abrupt switch to G-flat major in measure 33, a wild key to precede the C minor recapitulation in bar 37. This tonal adventurousness shows how Du is not confined to the modal and pentatonic context of traditional Chinese folk music. He explores chromaticism in a way that echoes the tonal wanderings of Mahler and Wagner. It's conceivable that the repeating chords are supposed to portray sparkling and shining stars (see Example 66).

Example 66. Du, Ningwu. *24 Piano Preludes*, No.14, mm.25-27.

In the long coda (mm.51-61), Du makes a point of moving the right-hand apart section from C7 back to C4 and the volume back to “p” in measure 55, to create a majestic ending (see Example 67). In addition, it is a commentary on the last line, "I betray the smile of a victor."

Example 67. Du, Ningwu. *24 Piano Preludes*, No.14, mm.54-55.

The composition is brought to an ending by Du with a cadence from minor V to I rather than major V to I. Du places the dominant seventh chord (G B D F) in measure 59 (see Example 68). However, on the final beat of measure 60, he plays a flat B to make the chord turn to a minor fifth chord. This sort of chord progression is frequently used in Chinese music.

Example 68. Du, Ningwu. *24 Piano Preludes*, No.14, mm.59-61.

The musical score for Example 68 consists of three measures (59-61) in G minor (two flats) and 4/4 time. Measure 59 begins with a forte (*ff*) dynamic. The bass line plays a dominant seventh chord (G-B-D-F) in the first two beats, followed by a melodic line in the treble. Measure 60 features a *sfz* dynamic. The bass line plays a minor fifth chord (G-B-flat-D) in the first two beats, followed by a melodic line in the treble. A red 'v' is marked under the flat B in the bass line. Measure 61 features a *sfz* dynamic. The bass line plays a tonic chord (G-B-D) in the first two beats, followed by a melodic line in the treble. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

No.15 Faith

Table 16. Du, Ninwgu. *24 Piano Preludes, No.15, Sections.*

Measure	Sections
1-16	A
17-32	A'
33-48	A''
49-64	A'''
65-68	Coda

Faith¹⁷¹

Lightning on the horizon
Enlightens me.
Within its silent curves
Hides infinite energy.

That is a portrait of my will.

In traditional Chinese culture, the “lightning” *yixiang* has long been symbolic of force, power, warning, or justice. “Lightning” *yixiang* appeared early in literature as a symbol of might, turmoil, and incredible power.¹⁷² Li Bai's poem "A Dream Journey to Tianwu and a Parting of the World" (梦游天姥吟留别), for instance, describes how he employs the extreme potency of “lightning” to break down the gates that lead to the fairy world.¹⁷³ The protagonist of this poem by Ningwu Du receives some enlightenment from the "lightning." This may mean the protagonist gets endless strength from the lightning, or it may signify that what they accomplish is something that symbolizes justice. Either way, it's a very significant implication. It is possible

¹⁷¹ Ningwu Du, *24 Piano Preludes* (Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 2015), 72.

¹⁷² Zhiqian Shen, "On the Related Images between Lightning Prototype in Zhouyi and Ancient Literature." *Zhejiang Social Sciences*, no.8 (2009):101-105, doi:10.3969/j.issn.1004-2253.2009.08.017.

¹⁷³ Yuanchong Xu, *Poetry of the Tang Dynasty* (Beijing: Beijing Dolphin Press, 2015).

to infer from the circumstances, the potency of the protagonist's lightning, and the strength of the protagonist's resolve that the protagonist's goal is to engage in combat with the adversary successfully. This is made clear by the music's dramatic conclusion at the end.

The rhythmic pattern of this composition does not alter from the first measure onwards (see example 69), with the exception of a change that takes place during the final coda. This has a rhythmic pattern that is reminiscent of the second movement “Scherzo” of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony (see example 70). While this was probably not an intentional reference to Beethoven, as in the previous prelude’s melodic resemblance to Rachmaninoff, it is another indication of Du’s Western influences.

Example 69. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.15, mm.1-16.

Presto

pp *sempre staccato*
una corda

5

9

13

Example 70. Beethoven, Ludwig van. *Symphony No.9 in D Minor, op.125, mm.1-14.*



What is most notable about this prelude is its absence of any accidentals, which super reinforce the Chinese pentatonic character while retaining a fierce compliance with the A-flat major key signature. Also striking is the piece's unrelenting repetition of the rhythmic motif and notes; 62 of the piece's 68 measures end with the same notes, Bb-Ab-F-Eb-Ab. This repetition almost creates a hypnotic effect and differs wildly from the extreme chromaticism and organic development found in other preludes (such as No. 14).

An examination of the musical material and the poem indicates that the rhythmic pattern of constant repetition is the equivalent of the *yixiang* of "lightning." At the same time, the main character's "will" can be seen portrayed in the "lightning." This rhythmic pattern, with its ongoing alterations and superimpositions, is the protagonist's "will" being presented in a cyclical fashion throughout the narrative.

The first change that Du makes to the material occurs in measure 17, which also is the beginning of the second variation with moving the main theme an octave higher (see Example 71). At the beginning of measure 33, the third variation starts, with both hands playing the main theme material from the preceding variation concurrently. It is noteworthy to observe that here, in order to emphasize the dotted beat, Du adds dynamic signs "forte and piano." This clue regarding the dynamic contrast was not offered by Du earlier in the prelude. It is conceivable that

Du intended for the dotted rhythm to have an additional accent, and therefore, this variation needs to be played with extra caution in terms of the dynamic contrast (see Example 72). The fourth and final variation starts at measure 49 when the pattern returns to the theme material in which the left-hand and right-hand parts are alternating (see Example 73). The difference between this and the previous theme and variations is that both the left and right hands are playing in octaves, and the dynamic contrast between forte and piano is no longer present. The intensity of the song stays at the level of the fortissimo throughout.

Example 71. Du, Ningwu. *24 Piano Preludes*, No.15, mm.17-18.

17

Example 72. Du, Ningwu. *24 Piano Preludes*, No.15, mm.32-34.

32

Example 73. Du, Ningwu. *24 Piano Preludes*, No.15, mm.49-50.

49

No.16 Anthem

Table 17. Du, Ninwgu. *24 Piano Preludes*, No.16, Sections.

Measure	Sections
1-16	A
17-22	Transition
23-38	A'
39-46	Coda

Anthem¹⁷⁴

What is burning
Is the frozen water;
What is flowing
Is the condensed fire.

Quietly
They nurture
My life and stir
My pulse.

This is my blood.
I wish I can
Dedicate it to my
Homeland.

The issue of who or what is being praised in the poem “Anthem” may be prompted by its title. The poem's closing line "dedicate it to my nation" gives the impression that the poem's subject matter is an homage to the motherland. Besides showing homage to the motherland, it also praises the loyalty that the protagonist provides to his nation. It shows in the lines "flaming frozen water," "streaming concentrated fire," and “nature my life and stir my pulse.” As was stated before, Ningwu Du holds his grandparents in high regard because of the dedication they

¹⁷⁴ Ningwu Du, *24 Piano Preludes* (Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 2015), 76.

showed to their respective countries. The combination of the No.13 “Elegy to a Friend” and the fact that the protagonist's untimely death was previously anticipated contributes to the prelude's overall mood, particularly solemn.

A hymn-like texture is heard at the beginning of the prelude, which is appropriate given that the piece is called an anthem (see Example 75). This, in turn, demonstrates that the prelude represents a fusion of Chinese and Western musical elements. An examination of the first measure of the prelude's bass notes (D flat-E flat-F), played in the key of D-flat major, reveals that the harmonic progression of the three chords is I-ii-iii. Bass notes move by the interval of a 2nd while the other notes move in contrary motion to the bass notes. In the fourth measure, the harmonic progression arrives at a plagal cadence (IV-I). In measure 6, there is a slight turn towards B-flat minor, the relative minor of the piece’s main key, giving a small inkling of drama in an otherwise joyous and serene state.

Example 75. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.16, mm.1-6.



In measure 10, the previous hymn-like texture becomes more animated with the introduction of 16th notes, perhaps even suggesting a brass proclamation with the rhythmic figure of an 8th-note and two 16ths on the first beat. This more rhythmically sharp texture may also evoke the verse's "searing cold water and streaming condensed fire" (see Example 76). The

secondary dominant chord in measure 15, Eb7, does lead to the first modulation of the piece, tonicizing Ab, the previous dominant.

Example 76. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.16, mm.10-16.

The musical score for Example 76 is presented in two systems. The first system covers measures 10 to 12, and the second system covers measures 13 to 16. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is 3/4. The right hand in the first system plays eighth-note chords, while the left hand plays single notes. In the second system, the right hand plays thick chords, and the left hand plays arpeggiated notes. A 'poco a poco cresc.' marking is present in measure 15.

In measure 23, the musical content is brought back to its very beginning (see Example 77). At this point, the chords played with the right hand become increasingly thick, while the single notes played with the left hand become arpeggios as additional tones are added. However, each bass note of the left-hand part that makes up a broken chord is the same as it was at the beginning.

Example 77. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.16, m.23.

The musical score for Example 77 is presented in one system for measure 23. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is 3/4. The right hand plays thick chords, and the left hand plays arpeggiated notes. A 'ff' marking is present in measure 23.

These repeated notes in measures 40 to 42 propel the music forward intensely, echoing the phrase where it says, "they nature my life and stir my pulse" (see Example 78). This pulse ushers in the wonderful conclusion of the prelude, characterized by the intensity of the sforzando

and the repeated chords. The way that this work ends suggests that Rachmaninov may have been an inspiration to Du. Since the last measure is comparable to the final measure of Rachmaninoff's Etude Tableau Op. 39 No.9, the martial conclusion effectively uses the peal of the Russian church bells (see Example 79). Consequently, this concluding chapter of Du is likewise a bell effect of some kind.¹⁷⁵

Example 78. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.16, mm.41-46.

The musical score for Example 78 consists of two systems. The first system, measures 41-43, shows a piano introduction with triplets in the right hand and a steady eighth-note bass line. The second system, measures 44-46, shows the final measures, including a powerful sfz chord in the right hand and a final bass line.

Example 79. Rachmaninoff, Sergei. Etude tableau Op. 39 No.9, mm.95-97.

The musical score for Example 79 consists of two systems. The first system, measures 95-96, shows a piano introduction with a steady eighth-note bass line and a melodic line in the right hand. The second system, measure 97, shows the final measure, including a powerful sfz chord in the right hand and a final bass line.

¹⁷⁵ Boris Giltburg, "Boris Giltburg — Classical Music for All," Accessed Sep. 27, 2022, <https://borisgiltburg.com/CMFA/rachmaninov-etudes-tableaux-Op-39-moments-musicaux/>.

No.17 Perseverance

Table 18. Du, Ninwgu. *24 Piano Preludes*, No.17, Sections.

Measure	Sections
1-32	A
33-64	A'
65-96	A''
97-128	A'''
129-160	A''''
161-192	A'''''
193-228	A''''''
229-233	Coda

Perseverance¹⁷⁶

Endless dark.
Thin air.
In the narrow tunnel
I grope hard.

Threat from the wolf
Cannot scare me.
Torture by sickness
Cannot crush me.
I am a fearless warrior,
A sage smiling forever.

The first stanza of the poem is a metaphorical description of a situation in which the protagonist is attempting to find his way down a tiny tunnel, where the air is thin, and the darkness is infinite. This scene takes place in the poem's opening stanza. One of the possibilities is that the protagonist is actually located in a confined tunnel. This passage may be alluding to such a setting. He maneuvers through this constrained area with a tremendous effort in the hopes

¹⁷⁶ Ningwu Du, *24 Piano Preludes* (Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 2015), 80.

of locating a means of egress. One other possibility is that this confined space serves as a metaphor for the challenges that the protagonist faces in real life. Despite encountering a tremendous amount of anguish along the way, the main character eventually triumphs over these challenges. In the second stanza, there is a significant “wolf” *yixiang*. The “wolf” has always been depicted as avaricious, shrewd, and vicious in traditional Chinese writings, where it is frequently represented as having malicious intent. And in the contemporary Chinese context, the “wolf” *yixiang* would signify an enemy.¹⁷⁷ This suffering mentioned above is analogous to the danger posed by the adversary as well as the agony brought on by the disease. The poem demonstrates the main character's dogged determination and his ability to face whatever challenges lie ahead without showing any sign of quitting or giving up. The expression "a sage smiling eternally" appears in the end, which is an indication of a grand finish that represents success.

This prelude is the most extended piece in the set, clocking in at 233 full measures and featuring a theme developed through six different variants. This prelude's thematic part employs a method similar to a toccata in order to generate a persistent and fearless personality for the piece. Each variation is precisely 32 bars long and keeps the harmonic function, thematic material, and so on in the same order as the original. Changes in tonality, texture, rhythm and other elements can be found in each variation.

¹⁷⁷ Poon Ming Kay, "The Jackal Is the God of Road and Land -- on the "Jackal" in Chinese and Western Cultures." *Knowledge of Classical Literature*, no. 1 (2021).

The theme part, which spans measures 1 through 32, is carried throughout the entirety of the prelude and features two distinct rhythmic motifs. The staccato eighth notes that are played in the left hand of the first and second measures tend to be presented as a rhythmic theme in this piece (see Example 80). The right-hand triplets pattern serves as another rhythmic motif; nevertheless, the genuine melodic notes are hinted in the right-hand section in the shape of phrases that are each comprised of eight measures (see Example 81).

Example 80. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.17, mm.1-2.

Presto misterioso
semi tremulo

pp una corda

Example 81. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.17, right-hand part, mm.1-8.

Presto misterioso
semi tremulo

It is interesting to note that in the fourth phrase (mm.25-32), the melody notes in the right hand are constructed with a whole-tone scale (see Example 82).

Example 82. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.17, right-hand part, mm.24-32.

Every variation moves the preceding section up one whole step to a new key (B-flat minor – C minor – D minor – E minor – F-sharp minor – G-sharp minor – B-flat minor). The first variation takes the original key (B-flat minor) and transposes it to C minor. In the key of C minor, the right hand ascends by a major second, while the left hand ascends by a major 9th compared to the main theme (see Example 83). The second variation is transposed once more to D minor. The right-hand part moves up a major 9th and becomes alternately double and single while the left-hand part stays the same and only moves a major 2 up (see Example 84). When the subsequent variation (in E minor) begins, not only do the right-hand notes all become double notes, but the left-hand part also becomes octaves. Additionally, the texture gets denser inside this pattern, and the dynamic range is expanded from pianissimo to mezzo forte. The intensity of the music is continuing to rise gradually (see Example 85). When compared to the third variation, the fourth one does not differ greatly from it, but the total range is expanded. The fifth one, which is in the key of G-sharp minor, introduces a different melodic architecture when compared to the preceding one (see Example 86). The right-hand rises by a major 9th up, while the octaves played by the left hand descend by a major 7th. The fifth variation introduces a novel element into the musical framework. The left-hand part of this variation has a rhythmic pattern consisting of triplets that it used only in right-hand part before, while the right-hand part has a rhythmic pattern consisting of staccato eighth notes. The melody, however, still stays in the right-hand part and is highlighted by the use of chords (see Example 87). The final variation utilizes the original key (B-flat minor), although the volume has been increased to fortissimo

level by this point. After moving back to the right hand, the triplet pattern is coupled with the mean eighth note rhythmic pattern played by the left hand to produce a rhythm that sounds like a battleground rumble. A potent acoustic impact might be achieved by employing a greater use of pedal in this context (see Example 88).

Example 83. Du, Ningwu. *24 Piano Preludes*, No.17, m.33.

33



Example 84. Du, Ningwu. *24 Piano Preludes*, No.17, m.64.

p



Example 85. Du, Ningwu. *24 Piano Preludes*, No.17, m.97.

mp



Example 86. Du, Ningwu. *24 Piano Preludes*, No.17, m.129.

129

mf

8va



Example 87. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.17, m.161.

Musical score for Example 87, measures 189-190. The score is in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. Measure 189 features a treble clef with a whole note chord of G4, B4, D5 and a bass clef with a whole note chord of G2, B1, D2. Measure 190 features a treble clef with a quarter note G4, a quarter rest, a quarter note B4, a quarter rest, a quarter note D5, and a quarter rest, and a bass clef with a steady eighth-note accompaniment of G2, B1, D2.

Example 88. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.17, m.189.

Musical score for Example 88, measures 161-162. The score is in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. Measure 161 features a treble clef with a whole note chord of G4, B4, D5 and a bass clef with a whole note chord of G2, B1, D2. Measure 162 features a treble clef with a quarter note G4, a quarter rest, a quarter note B4, a quarter rest, a quarter note D5, and a quarter rest, and a bass clef with a steady eighth-note accompaniment of G2, B1, D2.

The piece concludes with a coda that is ten measures long and is still building up until the final chord, which reaches its climax with its fortississimo (see Example 89). This chord also happens to be the broadest chord in the composition, since it spans seven octaves. The final four measures are a build-up passage consisting of only four notes (B-flat, D-flat, E-flat, F), possibly indicating that Du would want to consider employing more or longer pedals here to reach the final chord.

Example 89. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.17, mm.228-233.

Musical score for Example 89, measures 228-233. The score is in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. Measure 228 features a treble clef with a sixteenth-note chordal texture and a bass clef with a steady eighth-note accompaniment. Measure 229 features a treble clef with a sixteenth-note chordal texture and a bass clef with a steady eighth-note accompaniment. Measure 230 features a treble clef with a sixteenth-note chordal texture and a bass clef with a steady eighth-note accompaniment. Measure 231 features a treble clef with a sixteenth-note chordal texture and a bass clef with a steady eighth-note accompaniment. Measure 232 features a treble clef with a sixteenth-note chordal texture and a bass clef with a steady eighth-note accompaniment. Measure 233 features a treble clef with a sixteenth-note chordal texture and a bass clef with a steady eighth-note accompaniment.

This prelude in variation form uses the same rhythmic pattern from the very beginning to the very end. Depending on the situation, the pattern may be single notes or double notes, but it never stops repeating itself and has the feel of an eternal loop because of this. This not only contributes to the music's unwavering determination but also conveys the "fearless" willpower that the protagonist possesses at all times. In spite of the fact that the music, in the beginning, explores a limited dynamic range and a narrow level, it eventually broadens out into a grand ending that mirrors the phrase "a wise man smiling eternally."

No.18 Hope

Table 19. Du, Ninwgu. *24 Piano Preludes*, No.18, Sections.

Measure	Section
1-19	A
20-45	A'
46-54	Coda

Hope¹⁷⁸

The body is weakening
Day by day.
The heart is even more
At peace.
In a niche deep
Down my soul,
There is a charming
And distant scene.

That is
A joyful world filled
With songs of consolation,
Where stars shine
For eternity.

The first line of the poem refers to the fact that the protagonist's physical body is already showing signs of disease and is starting to become frailer. After this point, the following preludes will gradually turn attention to a more in-depth philosophical debate. Ningwu Du mentions that the set of preludes embodies Buddhist, Daoist, and Confucian ideals. The poem's allusions to the "joyful world" and the "songs of consolation" are a reflection the concept of *Sukhavati* from

¹⁷⁸ Ningwu Du, *24 Piano Preludes* (Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 2015), 94.

Buddhist. *Sukhavati* is a pure place in Mahayana Buddhism linked with the Buddha Amitabha.

Sukhavati is often referred to as the Western Pure Land or the Western Paradise.

Pure Land schools believe that rebirth in Amitabha's Western Paradise, Sukhavati, known as the Pure Land, or Pure Realm, is ensured for all those who invoke Amitabha's name with sincere devotion

Sukhavati is expressively described in the Pure Land sutras as being a joyous world, soft and glowing, filled with the music of birds and the tinkling of trees adorned with precious jewels and garlands of golden bells. Amitabha sits on a lotus in the midst of a terraced pond, attended by the bodhisattvas ("buddhas-to-be") Avalokiteshvara and Mahasthamaprapta. The newly dead enter into lotus buds, which unfold when the occupants have become entirely purified and have attained enlightenment. Many are said to be reborn on Earth after leaving Sukhavati to become bodhisattvas working toward the liberation (moksha) of all sentient beings.¹⁷⁹

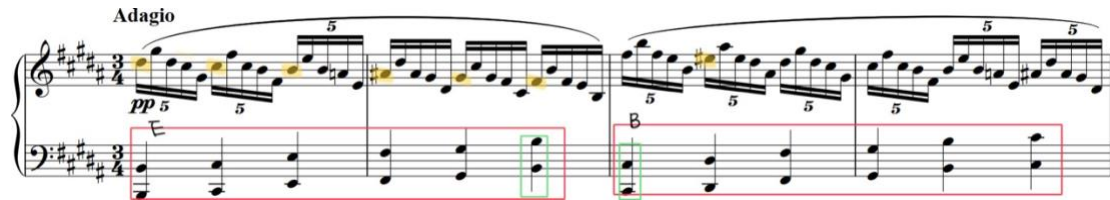
The "joyful world" that is stated in this poem might be interpreted as the protagonist's longing *Sukhavati*.

There are two basic textures in this piece, found in the left-hand and right-hand sections: a slow melody using quarter notes, half notes and dotted half notes; and an accompanying figure using 16th-note quintuplets. In measures 1-4 (see Example 90), the left-hand section shifts between the E pentatonic mode (E F# G# B C#) and the B pentatonic mode (B C# D# F# G#). Although the last note in the second measure jumps a seventh down, it still can be seen as a continuous upward motion. If the first note of each group is extracted from the right hand and combined with the note E#, the right hand can be seen to be moving down the G-sharp Dorian

¹⁷⁹ The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Pure Land Buddhism | Buddhist School," Accessed Sep. 27, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Pure-Land-Buddhism>.

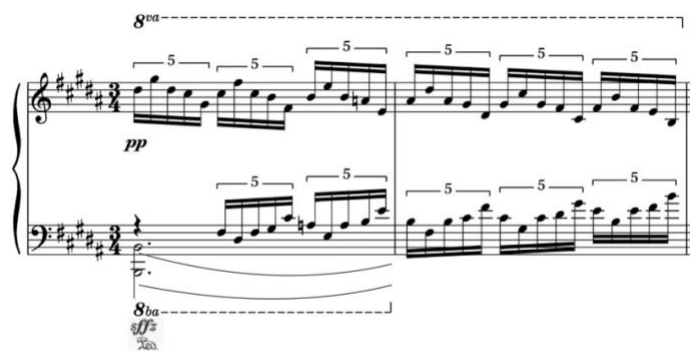
mode. The same fragment is used for measure 20, but at this time the right and left hands are moved up an octave at the same time.

Example 90. Du, Ningwu. *24 Piano Preludes*, No.18, mm.1-4.



In measure 36, the left hand suddenly introduces a low octave, creating a three-voice texture that has not appeared before (see Example 91). The melodic shape of the first right-hand line is derived from the initial 16th-note motif and uses the higher octaves and the pianissimo to build up a heaven-like new world. To make the texture more interesting, Du uses a contrary motion for two voices in measures 36-37. The lowest voice in measure 36 is a long-time value octave that has not been used before. These long-time value octaves may be imitating bells. The fact that Du does not indicate how long the octaves need to be extended means that the sound should fade out slowly like a heavy bell, perhaps using a pedal to imitate this effect.

Example 91. Du, Ningwu. *24 Piano Preludes*, No.18, mm.36-37.



The interweaving of three voices occurs again in measure 46, and Du uses the bass clef and treble clef specifically to create this three-voice texture (see Example 92). There are still octaves of long duration. As before, it is an imitation of the sound of bells. The “shining stars” mentioned in the verses vividly portray the repeated “pipa chords” in the higher voice. And as the verses depict the shining stars as shining in eternity, the repeated chords in the right hand are maintained until the end.

Example 92. Du, Ningwu. *24 Piano Preludes*, No.18, m.46.

46

p poco a poco cresc.

5 5 5

No.19 Looking Back

Table 20. Du, Ninwgu. *24 Piano Preludes*, No.19, Sections.

Measure	Section
1-11	A
12-23	A'

Looking Back¹⁸⁰

Vaguely I see
The house of my childhood.
On the round table,
There maybe
Lingers smell of food?
In my warm memory,
I still feel
Benevolence of their parenthood.

And your voice
Is still echoing
In my heart...

The physique of the main character has deteriorated, as was alluded to in the poem that came before this one. It's possible that the protagonist in this poem experienced a revolving lantern phenomenon¹⁸¹ right before he passed away, which is used a lot in the Chinese contemporary context. This is the cause of the recollections of his boyhood home, the generosity of his parents, and the voices of his friends and loved ones.

¹⁸⁰ Ningwu Du, *24 Piano Preludes* (Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 2015), 101.

¹⁸¹ The original term "revolving lantern" was a distinctive craft and was a trendy festive toy for children in ancient times. It works by relying on the heat generated by the burning candles inside the lantern to drive the rotation of a paper-covered wheel, which "moves" through the shadows created by the opaque parts of the paper cuttings as the light and shadows intermingle. The coherence of this movement organically links the jumping episodes of the paper cuttings into a complete story.

Because of the similarities between the working pattern of the light and the “life review” process that people go through before they die, it has gradually become synonymous with this revolving lantern phenomenon in China. In simple terms, this is a phenomenon in which the dying person recalls his or her life in a concise time.

Some material used in No.13 is similarly used here. For instance, the right hand plays melodies while the left-hand is playing rolling arpeggios (see Examples 58 and 93), a kind of “Elegy” that appears again. This time, however, it is no longer an elegy for a friend, but an elegy for the main character. The melodic notes are all single notes from the soft opening, a rare pattern after the No.13 prelude. This gives the whole piece a feeling of longing and reminiscence as if the audience and the performer had gone back in time. This prelude also puts emphasis on the perfect fifths, which is another one of its defining characteristics. As an illustration, the first note “B” and the last note “E” in the first phrase together form a perfect fifth.

Example 93. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.19, mm.1-2.

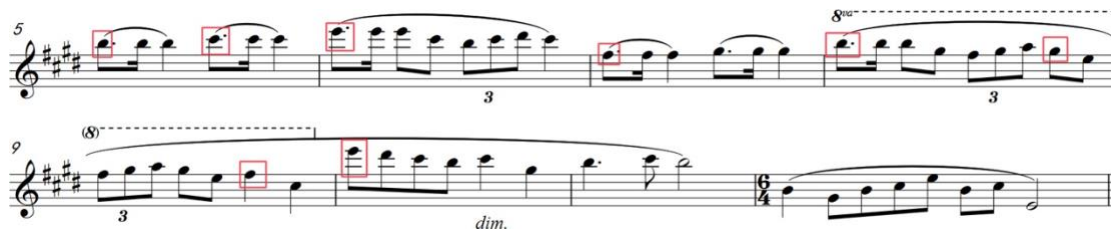


In addition, there are a lot of parallels to be found between the structural arrangement of this prelude and that of No.13. After the B section (measure 5), for instance, measures 5-6 are two measures of brief phrases, followed by a two-measure sequence, and then a prolongation that consists of three measures. This structure is identical to that found in No.13 mm.9-14, and both

of these structures are preceded by the return of section A. Following section A', Du provides a coda to both No.13 and No.19.

In this piece, Du has structured various hidden melody lines, for example from measures 5 to 12, and a closer analysis of the right-hand part reveals that there is in existence a hidden E pentatonic scale ascending (mm.5-8) and an E pentatonic scale descending (mm.8-12). It's possible that this will serve as the basis for this section of the melody (see Example 94).

Example 94. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.19, right-hand part, mm.5-12.



Utilization of the secondary dominant is yet another aspect that warrants further inquiry. The prelude is in the ternary form of a triadic progression. At the end of each section, there is a secondary dominant that is used (see Example 95). This is the method that Du uses to maintain the key in an alternating state between the E pentatonic mood and the B pentatonic mood. It's likely that this is a clue that the prelude will end in the dominant key at some point in the future (B pentatonic).

Example 95. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.19.

(a) m.4.



(b) m.10

Musical score for measure 10. The piece is in A major (three sharps) and 4/4 time. The right hand features a melodic line with a slur over the first six notes: A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4. The left hand plays a steady eighth-note accompaniment: A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3. A *dim.* (diminuendo) marking is placed above the left hand's notes.

(c) m.21.

Musical score for measure 21. The piece is in A major (three sharps) and 4/4 time. The right hand has a chordal accompaniment: A4-G#4 (chord), A4-G#4 (chord), A4-G#4 (chord), and a descending eighth-note run: F#4, E4, D4, C4. The left hand plays a steady eighth-note accompaniment: A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3. A *rit.* (ritardando) marking is placed above the right hand's notes.

No.20 A Sigh

Table 21. Du, Ninwgu. *24 Piano Preludes*, No.20, Sections.

Measure	Section
1-8	A
9-11	Transition
12-27	B
28-38	Coda

A Sigh¹⁸²

My thoughts are like mist,
Gathering and becoming thick.
Scene by scene,
Incidents from the past
Are performed on stage.
What will be
The ending of the last scene?

The misty air
Transforms into countless little
Drops of water which lightly
Fall, leaving only white and bright
Moonlight.

Another allusion to the revolving lantern in the previous poem may be seen in this poem's line, "Incidents from the past are performed on stage." The protagonist's imagination of what happens to the world after death is alluded to in the phrase "What will be the ending of the last scene?" in the poem. Its purpose is to continue the narrative and set the stage for the following verse, which discusses the protagonist's thinking about death.

¹⁸² Ningwu Du, *24 Piano Preludes* (Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 2015), 104.

The term "misty air" is referenced again in the second stanza, and a study of the first stanza indicates that the word "mist" relates to a depiction of the protagonist's thoughts or state of mind. In the second stanza, the recurrent *yixiang* (imagery) of water is presented as "Drops of water." The phrase "lightly fall" might be read to suggest that in the first stanza of the poem, the protagonist is filled with a sense of yearning and sorrow for the existing world, but that it has since been replaced by a brilliant moonlight. Numerous interpretations of the "moon" *yixiang* can be found in the works of many poets and writers in Chinese literature. It may be interpreted as a symbol of homesickness, romance, or the usage of the word "moon" to refer to one's life goals and ambitions. The well-known poet Li Bai takes advantage of the brilliant moonlight to refer to the unfair situation that he was subjected to throughout his career and to proclaim his capacity to possess the power to overcome those unfair situations.¹⁸³ The moonlight is a metaphor for the protagonist's thoughts and dreams in "A Sigh."

In the beginning, the left hand is where the melody is introduced, playing a heavy, deep melody. The melancholy and intensity of the poem are carried throughout the entire tune by the melody line. The melody moves from the left to the right hand in m.12, while the left-hand part is a rolling notes accompaniment.

It could be interpreted that rising and falling sextuplets of the right hand, in the beginning, are the manifestations of meandering thoughts. The sextuplets in the right hand,

¹⁸³ Bai Li, Keith James Holyoak and Fu Du, *Facing the Moon: Poems of Li Bai and Du Fu* (Oyster River Press, 2007).

which represent "mist," appear to be covering the left hand, which is playing in the lower register (see Example 96). It is noteworthy that a “Seufzer” (sigh figure) appears at the end of measures 1 and 2, giving another significance to the prelude’s title. Then, following a flip in measure 12, the right-hand moves into the upper register, and the melodic tone can now be heard and is no longer concealed (see Example 97). This manifests the protagonist's thoughts that are "gathering and getting thick."

Example 96. Du, Ningwu. *24 Piano Preludes*, No.20, mm.1-2.



Example 97. Du, Ningwu. *24 Piano Preludes*, No.20, m.12.



The fact that notes are in the lower and heavier bass register and the rapid tempo can cause measures 7, 8, 13, 15, and 23–24 to have a somewhat murky quality to their sound (see Example 98). This accumulation of sound on a modern grand piano requires a sensitive and flexible use of the damper pedal, with slight changes or half-pedal usage to avoid getting too loud or thick.

Example 98. Du, Ningwu. *24 Piano Preludes*, No.20, mm.7-8.

The image displays a musical score for two measures of music. The score is written in 9/8 time and features a key signature of one sharp (F#). The music is presented in a grand staff, with a treble clef on the upper staff and a bass clef on the lower staff. The first measure begins with a fermata over the first eighth note. The second measure also begins with a fermata over the first eighth note. Below the bass staff, there are two markings: "8^{va}" followed by a dashed line and a vertical bar line, indicating an octave transposition for the first measure. A second "8^{va}" marking with a dashed line and a vertical bar line is present below the second measure.

No.21 Farewell

Table 22. Du, Ninwgu. *24 Piano Preludes*, No.21, Sections.

Measure	Section
1-8	A
9-23	A'
24-28	Coda

Farewell¹⁸⁴

Warm breeze,
Please put on me
A pair of wings
To fly to the realm
Of my dream.

My longings and wishes
Are going away slowly.
And I am gazing at them
Gradually vanish...

The setting of this poem, as well as the poem's title, gives the impression that the protagonist has come to terms with the fact that he will soon be leaving this world and is offering a final farewell to the world. He pleads with the wind to become wings and carry him to the "joyful world"- *Sukhavati* spoken about earlier in the eighteenth prelude. He does this while emphasizing the fact that he is going to pass away in the near future. In the second stanza, the protagonist expresses his regret at having to give up his hopes and ambitions for this life, as well as his unwillingness to bid farewell to this world.

¹⁸⁴ Ningwu Du, *24 Piano Preludes* (Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 2015), 109.

Careful consideration must be given to the prelude's key to properly analyze it. This prelude's second measure has an F#, and if the first measure is interpreted as an A minor chord, then the chord that appears in the second measure is a neighbor 6/4 chord (D Major 6/4). The use of these two chords together gives the impression that the composition opens with A Dorian mode (a b c d e f# g a). Following the appearance of a natural "F" on the final beat of the third measure, the mode of the music shifts to A minor for a short period. However, it quickly returns to the A Dorian mode after being inspired by an F# in the fifth measure (see Example 99).

Example 99. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.21, mm.1-5.

The phrase "warm breeze" is brought to life throughout the composition by the sextuplet in 16th notes. There is a chance that the audience is hearing an imitation of the timbre of a harp that is relatively light, distant, and quiet. The fact that the majority of the sextuplet is in a comparatively lower register indicates that the melodic notes in the right hand could be the spirit of the protagonist or the embodiment of his longings and wishes and that these are being carried by the breeze flying to the realm of his dream. As an illustration of "fly to the realm of my dream," the final note of the first phrase in the right-hand part, an A4, leaps up an octave to A5 to become the opening note of the second phase of the melody (see Example 100). Another one

of these can be seen in the transition from the last note of measure 5 (E5) to the first note of measure 6 (B5).

Du's use of harmony transcends the system of functional tonality (see Example 100). This type of progression can be seen in the rapid chords shifting in measures 9-11 (E minor -G minor -E minor-G minor-E major).

Example 100. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.21, mm.9-11.

Musical score for Example 100, measures 9-11. The score is in treble and bass clefs. Measure 9 starts with a treble clef and a bass clef. The right hand plays a series of notes: D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5, D5. The left hand plays a series of notes: C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5, D5. Measure 10 is similar to measure 9. Measure 11 has a *cresc.* marking and the right hand plays a series of notes: D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5, D5. The left hand plays a series of notes: C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5, D5.

In addition to these two examples, there is also a simultaneous whole tone and octatonic usage in measures 12-17 (see Example 101). In these measures, the notes played by the right hand rise up by the whole tone scale ascending (D-E-F-Sharp-A flat-B-flat-C-D), while the bass notes of the left-hand part engage in an octatonic scale movement (D-C-sharp-B, F-sharp-F natural-E-flat).

Example 101. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.21., mm.12-16.

Musical score for Example 101, measures 12-16. The score is in treble and bass clefs. Measure 12 starts with a treble clef and a bass clef. The right hand plays a series of notes: D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5, D5. The left hand plays a series of notes: C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5, D5. Measure 13 is similar to measure 12. Measure 14 has a *b* marking and the right hand plays a series of notes: D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5, D5. The left hand plays a series of notes: C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5, D5. Measure 15 is similar to measure 14. Measure 16 is similar to measure 15.

The purpose of the recurring crescendos (mm.9-16), which are explicitly notated in each measure, is to emphasize the intensely emotional nature of the farewell experience (see Example 102). This is why it is vital to constantly repeat the crescendos with intensity, ending strong and beginning weak again and again.

In measures 12 through 17, the right hand moves suddenly slowly in half notes while the left hand moves fast in sextuplets (see Example 102). It is as if the right hand's prolonged duration and the rapid sextuplets are merged. The same situation appears in the last measure, in which the music concludes with a single note of prolonged length in the right hand and running sextuplets in the left. It is as though the breeze is carrying away the protagonist's fading longings and wishes. The longing and reluctance are expressed lyrically.

No.22 Funeral

Table 23. Du, Ninwgu. *24 Piano Preludes*, No.22, Sections.

Measure	Section
1-10	A
11-20	A'
21-31	A''
32-33	Coda

Funeral¹⁸⁵

The body has come to its end.
The spirit has not perished.
In the sad steps,
There contain resolution
And strength.

Keep walking,
Undying soul.
Walk towards the future.
And stop never.

The key signature, meter, and title of the piece, “Funeral,” inevitably bring to mind Chopin’s funeral march from his Sonata, Op. 35. The steady quarter notes and repeated short phrases in both Du’s and Chopin’s pieces suggest the trudging pace of a funeral cortège (see Example 102). Although the key signature matches the B-flat minor tonality of Chopin’s funeral march, Du’s use of E-flat minor, F minor, and A-flat major chords suggests an E-flat Dorian harmonic context. This creates a static atmosphere that evokes the idea of a funeral. Du starts the

¹⁸⁵ Ningwu Du, *24 Piano Preludes* (Beijing: People’s Music Publishing House, 2015), 115.

musical procession in the lower register of the keyboard, another resemblance to Chopin's funeral march.

Example 102. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.22, mm.1-6.

The musical score for Example 102 is presented in two systems. The first system consists of three measures, and the second system also consists of three measures. The music is written in bass clef with a 4/4 time signature. The key signature has two flats (E-flat major/A-flat minor). The tempo is marked 'Andante' and the dynamics are 'p' (piano). The score features dense chords in the right hand and a bass support line in the left hand. The first system shows the initial theme with a descending bass line and dense chords. The second system continues the theme with similar chordal textures and a descending bass line.

At measure 11, Du shifts the theme to the treble clef, another similarity to Chopin's *Marche funèbre* (see Example 103). This is the first noticeable change until this point, but it is not a point of climax or high contrast. This works like a consequence of the theme presented before. Melodically, this piece is made entirely by dense chords and a bass support, but the upper notes draw some lines, mainly with close intervals and with no big direction changes. Even when the melodies are not divided into phrases, there are some apparent groups of motives that go together, repeat, and complement each other. These groups have different lengths, recognizable due to the descending motives at the end, and the long notes that follow them. Besides, the Dorian scale also gives direction to E-flat minor and A-flat Major, and these motives usually go to the E-flat minor followed by the A-flat Major on the long chord at the end that gives a sense of ending to the phrases.

Example 103. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.22, mm.10-11.



The piece continues with this martial bass line, and the register and dynamics grow until “ff” in measure 21. So, despite the stasis conveyed by a modal harmonic context, there is a growing dramatic narrative. This change sounds natural due to the elements of the piece that remain to this point (see Example 104). The tension keeps growing until the climax at measure 31 when the higher register of the piano is reached, and the bass line completely stops and joins this whole-note chord (see Example 105). This chord is repeated 3 times which, in the context of a funeral, might be related to the ringing of a church bell. In the context of the piece, the forcefulness of these three strikes in the E-flat minor chords break the monotone march of the soul described in the poem and marks an end that seems permanent.

Example 104. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.22, m.20.



Example 105. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.22, mm.31-33.



No.23 Disembodiment

Table 24. Du, Ninwgu. *24 Piano Preludes*, No.23, Sections.

Measure	Section
1-9	A
10-18	A'
19-28	A''
29-36	Coda

Disembodiment¹⁸⁶

Spiraling up slowly
And leaving far away
From the earthly world
And the body,
It no longer has
Sadness and worry
But only lightness and grace.

A voice from another
World is summoning
In murmur,
Calling softly the name
Of the one who has passed away
With tenderness and mystery.

The Disembodiment is a religious ritual performed as part of the mourning process in Chinese funeral customs, and its purpose is to pray for the departed person's blessings. In Buddhism, it refers to assisting the creatures in overcoming their suffering and achieving bliss. "Spiraling up slowly" and "leaving far away from the earthly world, and the body" are two lines

¹⁸⁶ Ningwu Du, *24 Piano Preludes* (Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 2015), 118.

that give the impression that the protagonist has recently passed away as well as represent the state of the protagonist's soul after his death.¹⁸⁷

It is claimed in Pure Land Buddhism that the soul of a person who has recently passed away is in a condition called “Bardo,” which may be translated as an intermediate, transitional, or liminal state between the states of death and rebirth. After passing away, it is generally believed by Pure Land Buddhism that a person would continue to exist on earth in the form of a soul for some time. The duration of this phase might range anywhere from seven to fourteen to even forty-nine days. It is necessary at this time to hold a ritual to chant sutras and pray for the deceased to increase the blessings of the deceased, in the hope that the deceased can be reborn into a happy place, or even be reborn into the *Sukhavati*.¹⁸⁸

“Disembodiment” is a very complex concept. “Spiraling” would be one of the keywords to describe the musical approach to this poem. The piano depiction of this process is written entirely with arpeggiated chords and pedal points that build an atmosphere. In other preludes, the composer takes some literal aspects from the text, like forms, the rhythm of the words and the sentences, or some elements that might be described in it. In this case, the piece is more static and develops the atmosphere of this timeless and disembodied state. The poem seems to be talking about someone who just died and left his body and the earth's existence. It is related to the previous and the final piece in this set that create a sort of trilogy about the three-stage

¹⁸⁷ National Religion Information Network, "Super Commend," Accessed Sep. 27, 2022, <https://religion.moi.gov.tw/Knowledge/Content?ci=2&cid=227>.

¹⁸⁸ Karma-Gliñ-Pa and W Y Evans-Wentz, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead, or, the after-Death Experiences on the Bardo Plane, According to LāMa Kazi Dawa-Samdup's English Rendering* (Oxford University Press, 2000).

process from death to disembodiment and finally to the afterlife. This piece becomes a passage from No.22 to the No.24 and describes this middle state in which our souls might be just floating in space, and we find ourselves aware of the life we've left behind.

Example 106. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.23, mm.1-4.

Adante
sempre pp e una corda

The musical score consists of two systems of staves. The first system shows measures 1 and 2. Measure 1 is in 4/4 time, and measure 2 changes to 6/4 time. The second system shows measures 3 and 4, both in 4/4 time. The right hand plays a sequence of four-note chords, and the left hand plays three-note chords, both arpeggiated upwards. The tempo is Adante and the dynamics are pianissimo (pp) with the instruction 'sempre pp e una corda'.

The multiple changes of meter, mostly from 4/4 to 6/4, are intended to help create a floating and diffuse atmosphere (see Example 106). While there is no clear developmental structure, by virtue of the main theme's repetition in continually higher registers (measures 1-9 repeated up an octave in measures 10-18 and then two octaves higher in 11-19), there is an eventual sense of elevation, as if the spirit were ascending to a higher place after death. This is also an interesting feature that, along with the “sempre pp e una corda” indication, makes a serene sonic environment instead of a clear dramatic narrative. There is no “beginning-middle-end” but rather a continually evolving setting. Du uses a variety of quartal chords, all with three notes in the left hand and four notes in the right hand and all of them arpeggiated from the bottom toward the top. Also, the pedal point that divides the motives made with the chords might

be related to this feeling that, even when this spirit is floating, there is something that still ties it to the earth, like memories or emotions. Describing this “disembodiment” also means leaving the body and the terrene experience that comes to it. But, in this part of the story, this soul is still in that process.

No.24 The Other World

Table 25. Du, Ninwgu. *24 Piano Preludes*, No.24, Sections.

Measure	Section
1-2	Intro
2-25	A
26-52	B
54-86	Coda

The Other World¹⁸⁹

In the vast space,
It runs towards
A remote constellation.
The distance of millions
Of light years is
Travelled in a blink.

Be a happy star.
Release the final light.
In ethereal time
And space,
Gain a new life.

This piece seems to be closely related with the last two. Du is now presenting the end of the set that has deepened into different subjects related to love, nature, life and death. This poem and this prelude reinforce the idea of the afterlife as a state of transcendence of the human body, the soul and the conscience.

This piece starts with a very soft texture made by descending motives in the higher register (see Example 107). Written in the key of G-sharp minor, most of the opening right-hand

¹⁸⁹ Ningwu Du, *24 Piano Preludes* (Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 2015), 123.

figures encompass a pentatonic scale, meaning that the pianist will play mainly black keys. The last two pieces, preludes 23 and 24, have key signatures with a lot of flats and sharps (G-flat major for No. 23 and G-sharp minor for No. 24), which requires the pianist to play many black keys in succession and inevitably connotes pentatonic concepts.

Example 107. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.24, mm.1-6.

The musical score for Example 107 consists of two systems of piano music. The first system covers measures 1-3, and the second system covers measures 4-6. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 4/4. The tempo is marked 'Allegro moderato' and the dynamics are 'pp sotto voce'. The right hand plays eighth-note sextuplets, while the left hand plays a folk-like melody with eighth notes and rests. The piece modulates from G-sharp minor to C major by measure 24.

The time signature presented is common time, but the light high motives in the right hand are written as eighth-note sextuplets, giving the sense of a 2/2 meter. At measure two, the left-hand presents the main theme of the piece, a singable tune that sounds as if it could be a folk song. This theme is made by semi-phrases of two measures, all based on the opening melody. With sextuplets in the right hand and an ample number of eighth notes in the left hand from measures 7-21, a three-against-two polyrhythm is established as one of the key rhythmic components of the piece.

By measure 19, the left-hand melody starts going up in register and the piece modulates to C major, arriving to this chord in measure 24 (see Example 108). The lower melody starts

going up while the higher motives start going down, until they change their places in measure 23.

This part could be related with the first section of the poem, in which the text describes at first the vast space, as something empty, followed by the sighting of a far-off constellation,

represented by this light and single descending sounds. The bright chords in the right hand at

measure 26, marked “ff” and reached seamlessly after the roughly 40 seconds of measures 1-25,

sonically depict “the distance of millions of light years... travelled in a blink.”

Example 108. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.24, mm.19-24.

The musical score for Example 108, Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No. 24, mm. 19-24, is presented in two systems. The first system (measures 19-21) shows a right-hand melody of eighth notes and a left-hand accompaniment of quarter notes, marked "poco a poco cresc.". The second system (measures 22-24) shows a right-hand melody of eighth notes and a left-hand accompaniment of quarter notes, marked "sfz" and "6" (sextuplets).

In the poem, this second section talks about the light and the message is directly to the reader, in second person narration. The strong character of this section and the loudness and change of texture, might be related to the light. But still, this second section does not have a big contrast with the last one, since it presents the same theme and the two-measure semi-phrases that emulate the sentences of the text. The climax of the piece starts at measure 44, with the chords of the right hand presented as repeated chords in sextuplets, and the left-hand melody in octaves (see Example 109). The repeated chords motif appears again, which also appears in No. 14 to portray sparkling and shining stars. This is echoing the line “It runs towards a remote

constellation” from the poem. This section extends to measure 52, followed by a recap of the motives in the beginning of the piece and the opening tenderness now converted to a “fff” dynamic, the obvious climax of the piece. After that, from measures 59 until the end, there is a gradual tapering of both dynamics and texture. At measure 85 there is some silence that breaks the motives’ continuity and suggests that the end is truly near. In these last two measures, the melody is repeated as if to emphasize this atmosphere of tenderness and spiritual levitation (see example 110).

Example 109. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.24, m.44.

Example 110. Du, Ningwu. 24 Piano Preludes, No.24, mm.85-87.

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

Fewer than one hundred years have passed since China began teaching Western music in an academic setting. Composers in China are making efforts to familiarize themselves with the many eras of Western music's stylistic development and to embrace the compositional styles of Western music. However, composers in China were concerned that no new music would ever be composed that would successfully blend the esthetics of Chinese music with the forms and styles of Western classical music.

Through a comprehensive and in-depth examination of each of Ningwu Du's *24 Piano Preludes*, the objective of this dissertation has been to contribute to the existing body of knowledge concerning Chinese piano preludes and the piano works of Ningwu Du. Readers can genuinely experience the infinite charm of this work through close examination of the score and poetry as well as performing it. They will discover that composer Ningwu Du expertly blends traditional Chinese musical culture essence with Western compositional techniques. The *24 Piano Preludes* are excellent Chinese piano works that reflect both a history and sound which are relevant today. From the perspective of piano pedagogy, Du's set can be used by piano teachers all over the world to explore the meshing of traditions and new repertoire at the intermediate-advanced level. Ningwu Du's *24 Piano Preludes* not only illustrate his unique compositional voice but also show the evolution of Chinese piano music. Even though these preludes are played rather often in China, comparatively speaking, they have received significantly less research and exploration than other Western preludes. In addition, many studies of Chinese piano compositions

concentrate solely on performance techniques. There is a lack of attention paid to the historical context and the composer's compositional approach. As is the case in the music of any culture, performing a Chinese composition is better served by one having a strong grasp of Chinese culture as well as an awareness of the history of music and the biography of the composer. As it result, the necessary background information has been provided in the preceding chapters in the form of a concise guide. Also, this dissertation provided an outline of the development of Chinese piano music as well as the history of the preludes in China to help readers obtain a more in-depth and appreciative understanding of these preludes.

Ningwu Du's *24 Piano Preludes* constitute a significant addition to a repertoire that has been traditionally defined by the works of Western composers. This dissertation can be used as a foundation to familiarize people all around the world with the piano compositions by Ningwu Du. It provides students and musicians who are learning Chinese compositions with pianistically satisfying textures, beautiful new melodies and harmonies, and a richly moving extramusical storyline conveyed through stirring poems.

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