

THE *YELLOW RIVER PIANO CONCERTO*: A PIONEER OF WESTERN CLASSICAL
MUSIC IN MODERN CHINA AND ITS SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT

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A DOCUMENT

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts
in the Department of Music
in the Graduate School of
The University of Alabama

TUSCALOOSA, ALABAMA

2017

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ABSTRACT

The *Yellow River Piano Concerto* (1969) by Yin Chengzong (b. 1941), the most popular piano concerto in China, was composed at the time of the Chinese Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, or simply the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). It was intentionally written as a rearrangement of its predecessor – the 1939 *Yellow River Cantata* by Xian Xinghai (1905 – 1945). Created with strong political motivations and ideologies, the concerto was considered appropriately nationalistic and consistent with the principle of “soviet realism,” especially by the Chinese musical world before the 1980s. Specifically, motivated by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the composition of the piano concerto carries many connections with the musical works by the renowned Armenian composer Aram Khachaturian, including imitations of national instruments and applications of folk music. After the Cultural Revolution, Yin and his *Yellow River Piano Concerto* underwent severe repression due to Yin’s misunderstood relationship with the Gang of Four, a group later charged with causing chaos and tragedy during the political movement.

As China becomes more open and wealthy, the *Yellow River Piano Concerto* has undergone a resurgence of popularity and is now recognized as one of the first large musical forms created by Chinese composers. Additionally, Yin and his work played a critical role in making the piano the most common instrument among a new generation of Chinese performers and composers.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this document to my beloved family. I am very thankful for my parents, who have provided strong support for me, especially during the last year of the program. They have sacrificed their time and enjoyable life in Taiwan so that I am able to finish my degree without much distraction.

Moreover, it was the encouragement from my husband that makes this journey possible. His thoughtfulness and perseverance always inspires me through peaks and valleys. While he was also preparing his own dissertation and working a full-time job, he was dedicated to supporting me and our family. I could not have survived the doctoral program without him.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I express all my gratefulness to Dr. Kevin T. Chance. Dr. Chance patiently led me through the doctoral program to learn skills, to overcome difficulties, and to become a more mature and refined pianist. He also provided substantial insights throughout my work on this document. Throughout the four years, it has been an honor and a joy to work with Dr. Chance, who will be my mentor and friend in my lifetime.

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INTRODUCTION

As the prevalence of both capitalism and industrialization escalated, especially in European countries, Western music gained unprecedented popularity around the world. Before the 19th century, however, Eastern countries including the Celestial Empire of China were resistant to accepting Western musical aesthetics and cultural reasoning.¹ The introduction of Western music into China can be traced back to the Christian mission trip of Jesuit Matteo Ricci in the late 16th century when he had the chance to present a harpsichord to the Chinese emperor in 1601. To further promote Christianity, Grimaldi and Pereira played the harpsichord and an organ for the Kangxi Emperor (r. 1661 – 1722) in 1679.² Nevertheless, the appearance of Western music in China was not seen until the First Opium War (1839-1842). Despite that the primary interests of European merchants in China were related to the economy, they gradually realized their musical need for Westernized sounds and formed the famous Shanghai Municipal Symphony Orchestra in 1907.

Before musical events were initiated by Chinese musicians and communities, European musicians played the main role promoting Western music in China in the early 1900s. Even though most of the audience consisted of Europeans in China, Western music had its chance to spread to Chinese communities.³ For example, around 1936, Arthur Rubinstein (1887-1982) gave many performances in Shanghai, Beijing, and Hong Kong, at which most of the audiences

¹ Bruno Nettle, *The Western Impact on World Music: Change, Adaption, and Survival* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1985), 5.

² Jonathan Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1984), 194-97.

³ Zhang Jiren, “*Qie’erpin yu Zhongguo de yinyue* [Tcherepnin and Chinese Music],” *Bright News Monthly* 165 (1979): 18-19.

were non-Chinese. However, he eventually singled out another performance in Guangzhou for a group of Chinese university students in the same year.⁴ Another enlightenment of Western music in China was brought by the eighteen thousand Jewish refugees from Europe in the late 1930s. They came with their own music, and some of them later joined the Shanghai Municipal Orchestra.⁵

However, not until 1939 did China see the composition of its first large musical form—*The Yellow River Cantata* by Xian Xinghai. Around the time when the cantata was scored, socialist realism⁶ was becoming prevalent with the rise of the CCP in northern China. As the head of the Lu Xun Academy of Arts at Yan'an, Xian enjoyed much support from the Party due to the patriotic spirit in his compositions.⁷ The main theme of his works during the Yan'an period⁸ was to promote anti-Japanese mass songs as a propaganda tool for the party during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945). At the end of 1940, due to the lack of facilities in Yan'an, Xian moved to Russia to compose music for a film, *Eighth Route Army and the People*, made by the Communist Party. The Chinese composer suffered tremendous economic difficulties while in Russia and lived on rations with poor health conditions until he died in Moscow in 1945.⁹ Despite the difficult situation, Xian re-scored the *Yellow River Cantata* for conventional symphonic instruments even when he was sick in bed.¹⁰

⁴ Arthur Rubinstein, *My Many Years* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980), 372.

⁵ David Kranzler, *Japanese, Nazis & Jews: The Jewish Refugee Community of Shanghai, 1938-1945* (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1976), 363.

⁶ First developed in the Soviet Union, socialist realism is an artistic style characterized by praising communist values and ideologies, such as emancipating the proletariat and eliminating social classes.

⁷ Xian Xinghai, *Wo xuexi yinyue de jingguo* [My music learning experience] (Beijing: Beijing People's Music Press, 1980), 11-12.

⁸ The CCP's headquarter after the Long March (October 1934 – October 1935) moved from Ruijin in Jiangxi province to Yan'an in Shaanxi province. Yan'an remained as the Party headquarters until 1947.

⁹ Mark O'Neil, "Giant of Chinese Music," accessed April 25, 2017, <https://www.macaomagazine.net/culture/giant-chinese-music>.

¹⁰ Xian, *Wo*, 37.

Subsequently, the *Yellow River Piano Concerto* by Yin Chengzong and his composing group during the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) became the most famous piano concerto in China. Not only did it inherit the Chinese revolutionary spirit expressed by its predecessor, the *Yellow River Cantata*, it combined the extensive idiomatic features of Chinese instruments and folk songs from the original work and started the era of piano compositions by Chinese musicians. Even though the motivation of the CCP to encourage the composition of this piano concerto was to promote the socialist ideology associated with their political movement, its musical merits have made it prevalent in China since the 1960s, and it has become the iconic representation of Western music in China.¹¹

To fully understand the musical themes and the stories embedded in the *Yellow River Piano Concerto*, it is very helpful to have a comprehensive understanding of what the Yellow River (Huang He) represents to Chinese people, including the group of composers who wrote the concerto. The Yellow River itself is a symbolic image of Chinese civilization, and it is a cradle of Chinese culture. Originating from melted ice on the Tibetan Plateau, the Yellow River flows through nine provinces of China and has nurtured the five-thousand-year history of Chinese culture along the river valley. In addition, the route that the Yellow River follows seems to visually form the shape of a dragon, a powerful symbol which is considered by the Chinese people to be their cultural totem. All through Chinese history, the Yellow River has always been tightly bound with the concept of China as a nation. Although dozens of imperial dynasties ruled this land over the past two thousand years, the Yellow River remained the unchanged symbol of Chinese culture.¹²

¹¹ Richard Kraus, *Pianos and Politics in China: Middle-Class Ambitions and the Struggle over Western Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 55.

¹² Kevin Sinclair, *The Yellow River: A 5000 Year Journey Through China* (Knapp Press, 1987), 14-21.

Controlling the waters of the Yellow River to prevent massive flooding has been a chronic challenge for China. One of the main approaches was to build dams to control the waters. However, the 1938 Yellow River Flood, or the Huayuankou¹³ embankment breach incident, was a major flood purposefully created by the Nationalist Government of China as an attempt to hamper the rapid advance of the Japanese invasion into the central part of China. Even though it might have slowed the Japanese troops, it also flooded several provinces of China, and the death toll of Chinese civilians reached almost one million.¹⁴ Therefore, the Yellow River is at times perceived as “China’s sorrow” – the sorrow of losing the family and homes of Chinese people. The *Yellow River Cantata* composed by Xian Xinghai expressively depicts the tragic experience of China during the war. As directly evidenced by the name of the cantata and the concerto, the essential idea of both compositions was to depict the tragic history of China and its people and to eulogize the Chinese people’s patriotism during the hardships of war.

Besides being affected by the symbolic meanings of the Yellow River, the piano concerto was also influenced by important several factors. First, Yin Chengzong’s concerto embraces this idea as the work was motivated as a promotion of the revolutionary enthusiasm. Secondly, Chinese folk music influenced on the composition of the concerto, including adoption of famous Chinese folk songs and the imitation of Chinese traditional instruments using the Western instruments. Additionally, the composition of the concerto had applied many Western musical materials, such as Western instruments and compositional skills. Finally, the musical socialist

¹³ Huayuankou is a town by the bank of the Yellow River in Henan Province, China. During the Second Sino-Japanese War, the dike at Huayuankou was destroyed intentionally to slow the rapid advance of Japanese troops.

¹⁴ Diana Lary, “Drowned earth: the strategic breaching of the Yellow River Dyke, 1938,” *War in History* 8, no. 2 (2001): 191-207.

realism from the Soviet Union also influenced the composition of the concerto under the historical background of Chinese socialist Cultural Revolution.

This document conducts a detailed study of the musical influences on the *Yellow River Piano Concerto*. These influences include a combination of Western classical music and Chinese folk music as well as the politics of a socialist society. To gain perspective, I will compare the Chinese socialist musicians Xian Xianghai and Yin Chengzong with the Soviet socialist musician Aram Khachaturian.

Among those influences, the most critical one is the political background under the Cultural Revolution. Primarily driven by the Communist Party of China, the concerto was created as a propaganda tool to mobilize mass workers and peasants to participate in the revolution. Although Yin now claims that he has few political beliefs,¹⁵ the Party and its revolutionary motivations had a decisive impact on his compositional process. Chapter one presents the political and musical history of modern China in the twentieth century to establish a background for this discussion. Additionally, chapter two focuses the discussion on the composition of the concerto in the context of the radically Cultural Revolution.

Beyond the political impact, Yin Chengzong's background in Western classical music had the next most influential impact on the concerto. While politically motivated, the piano concerto, as a large piano rearrangement of Xian Xinghai's cantata, could not achieved its success without Yin's virtuosic pianism and knowledge of Western classical forms. Ironically, Chinese folk music had perhaps a lesser impact on the piano concerto. The piano concerto not only has inherited the Chinese folk music from Xian's cantata.

¹⁵ Kraus, *Pianos*, 160. He described his experience during the political movement using "driven to climb Liang Mountain," which meant that the government compelled him to the fate.

Chapter three narrows the discussion of the *Yellow River Piano Concerto* by comparing the work with pieces by Aram Khachaturian. To align with the renowned, prolific, and long-lived Soviet Armenian composer, we consider Xian and Yin together, in terms of their musical works, political understanding, and lifetime achievements. Xian was two years younger than Khachaturian. When Xian was in Yan'an, he was a young and very prolific composer. His works were nationalistic, revolutionary, and musically sophisticated. Similarly, the young Khachaturian became very active in composition when he was studying at the Moscow Conservatory.¹⁶ Khachaturian's works also showed strong patriotic influences by drawing from Armenian folk traditions. Unfortunately, Xian died at an early age (1945) in Moscow, while Khachaturian was able to secure his musical and political career in Socialist Russia until his death in 1978.

The later musical career of Khachaturian is more comparable with that of Yin Chengzong in communist China. During the regime when Joseph Stalin was in house as the General Secretary of the Central Committees of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (1922 – 1952), Khachaturian's compositions closely complied with the socialist guidelines for all artistic works.¹⁷ The composition of Yin's concerto — arguably his most influential work — was also tightly controlled by the Chinese Communist Party during the Cultural Revolution. Additionally, Khachaturian served as the Secretary of the Union of Soviet Composers until his death, and Yin was also nominated as the deputy leader of the Chinese Central Philharmonic and a member of the 1975 National People's Congress.¹⁸ Their ties with their respective the communist parties had a strong bearing on their musical achievements.

¹⁶ Anastasia Christofakis, "The Music that Shaped a Nation: The Role of Folk Music, the Duduk, and Clarinet in the Works of Contemporary Armenian Composers Aram Khachaturian and Vache Sharafyan" (DMA diss., Florida State University, 2015).

¹⁷ Dubravka Juraga, *Socialist Cultures East and West: A Post-Cold War Reassessment* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002), 176.

¹⁸ Kraus, *Pianos*, 145.

CHAPTER ONE POLITICAL AND MUSICAL BACKGROUND

Political and historical factors had a very important impact on the birth of *The Yellow River Piano Concerto*.¹⁹ This chapter will briefly review twentieth century Chinese history from a musical perspective as well as the political environment surrounding the composition of the piano concerto. Additionally, this chapter will review the status of Chinese music during the Cultural Revolution in the late 1960s.

TWENTIETH CENTURY CHINA

Through wars, revolution, starvation, and political suppression, the Chinese people have experienced many political and social disruptions in the twentieth century.²⁰ With the rise of Western economies and political powers, the Qing dynasty of China had diminished control over the country. Shortly after the Boxer Rebellion (1899 – 1901), the abdication of the last Manchu emperor Aisin Gioro in 1912, who is also known as Henry Pu Yi, officially announced China's transition to a Republican state.²¹ While the Nationalist Party (Guomindang/GMD) under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek (1887 – 1975) gained control of the central government in 1928, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), founded in 1921, struggled to compete for national leadership. Facing the accelerated threat of Japanese imperialism, the two major political powers

¹⁹ Feng Guangyu, *The Critics on Chinese Modern Music* (Beijing: China Wenlian Publishing Co., 1997), 110.

²⁰ He Qin, *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo lishi* [The history of People's Republic of China] (Beijing: Higher Education Press, 1997), 43.

²¹ Edward JM Rhoads, *Manchus and Han: Ethnic Relations and Political Power in Late Qing and Early Republican China, 1861–1928* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000), 226.

– the GMD and CCP – temporarily came together as the Second United Front to fight against Japan.²²

With the defeat of Japan in 1945, the two parties became rivals again until the withdrawal of Chiang Kai-shek and his party from mainland China to Taiwan. Not long after the establishment of the People's Republic of China by the CCP in 1949, the party leader, Mao Zedong (1893 – 1976), launched the Cultural Revolution in 1966 with the intention to preserve the ideology of Communism by purging both capitalist remnants and many traditional Chinese cultural elements including Confucianism.

Very quickly the political movement was filled with violent turmoil. A group of radical revolutionaries, later known as the Gang of Four, rose into power with Mao's fourth wife, Jiang Qing (1914 – 1991), as the leader.²³ After the termination of the Cultural Revolution and the collapse of the Gang of Four, China had finally become a relatively stable sovereign state. Despite the fact that China was often accused of human rights issues represented by the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989, it became more prosperous because of continuous development after a series of economic reforms that were led by Deng Xiaoping (1904 – 1997).²⁴

The political climate of the entire span of the twentieth century is strongly associated with the composition of the *Yellow River Cantata* and the piano concerto as well as the repression of the piano concerto and later its reemergence and prevalence in China. To be specific, the political influence upon Xian Xinghai's *Yellow River Cantata* was the Second Sino-Japanese War, which is considered by the Chinese people as the war against the Japanese invasion. As a musical device, the *Yellow River Cantata* was to encourage Chinese people to

²² Zhaoyan Ye, *Nanjing 1937: A Love Story* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 25.

²³ Wang Nianyi and Michael Berry, *1949-1989 nian de Zhongguo: dadongluan de niandai* [China 1949–1989: The time of great turmoil] (Beijing: Beijing Publishing Press, 2001), 66.

²⁴ Jan Wong, *Red China Blues: My Long March from Mao to Now* (Toronto: Anchor Canada, 2011), 278.

defend their country and to musically symbolize their patriotic spirits. During the Cultural Revolution, the cantata was chosen by Jiang Qing to be recreated into a piano concerto with the purpose of advertising their political movement. After the death of Mao and the takedown of the Gang of Four, the piano concerto experienced a radical repression because Yin Chengzong, its composer, was considered politically related to Jiang Qing. As China becomes more politically open and economically prosperous, musical education is more accessible to the Chinese. Not long after piano became popular in China, people started to recognize Yin's piano concerto as a sparkling gem created during the political chaos in the 1960s and the work gradually helped Yin secure his reputation in modern Chinese musical history.

XIAN'S CANTATA AND ITS SUCCESSOR

After the Long March,²⁵ the communist party settled in the Shaanxi province and made Yan'an its new headquarters in 1936. Although extremely impoverished, the new political center had a need for cultural and propagandistic support to sustain its revolutionary enthusiasm and anti-Japanese military spirit. With the constant emphasis on mass songs, Yan'an gained its reputation as "City of Song."²⁶ Zheng Lucheng (1918 – 1976), a close friend of Xian in Yan'an, said:

Everyone sang, then morale was very high. At first we sang Red Army songs, like "The Three Main Rules of Discipline and the Eight Points of Attention," and we also had local folk songs. Later, the songs of Nie Er, Xian Xinghai, and Lu Ji also became popular, like "In the Taihang Mountain." This revolutionary and expressive song was very stirring; as soon as you began singing, people would be moved endlessly... We sang before class, we sang before eating, and whole units sang on the march. Students sang, cadres sang, ordinary people sang. There was

²⁵ After being defeated by the Nationalist troops in October 1934, the CCP embarked on a military retreat, which is later known as the Long March.

²⁶ Arnold Perris, "Music as Propaganda: Art at the Command of Doctrine in the People's Republic of China," *Ethnomusicology* 27, no. 1 (1983): 16.

solo singing, ensemble singing, and choral singing. Yan'an was not only the sacred place of the revolution, it also became a true city of song.²⁷

Under such tremendous demand for revolutionary mass songs, the Lu Xun Academy of Arts founded by the Chinese Communist Party in 1938, which had more than 150 faculty, became the musical hub for the Party.²⁸

This active revolutionary environment in Yan'an witnessed Xian's most prolific years as a red musician, whose musical thoughts were closely bound to the Communist ideology. Altogether, Xian wrote four cantatas and more than five hundred songs.²⁹ In the majority of his works, including his famous *Yellow River Cantata*, Xian consciously combined Western musical forms with Chinese traditional instruments and excessive displays of musical patriotism.³⁰ After the premiere of the cantata in 1939 with Mao Zedong sitting among the audience, the composition immediately became prevalent not only in Yan'an but also in other cities of China such as Chengdu and Chongqing, which were controlled by the rival Nationalists.

Two decades later in 1956, Chairman Mao Zedong and Prime Minister Zhou Enlai (1898 – 1976) had several discussions and suggestions on developing artistic works with strong national and political characteristics, and they turned their attention to this beloved work of the Second Sino-Japanese War. With China's rising musical prominence in the realm of virtuoso pianists in the late 1950s,³¹ Jiang Qing suggested that a concerto could be composed based on the

²⁷ Kraus, *Pianos*, 55.

²⁸ Ellen Judd, "Prelude to the 'Yan'an Talks': Problems in Transforming a Literary Intelligentsia," *Modern China* 11 (1985): 394.

²⁹ Jen Wen-Hsing, "Blaze New Trials, Socialist and Proletarian – Something New and Something Distinctive," *Chinese Literature* 10 (1968): 5.

³⁰ Ross Terrill, *Madame Mao: The white boned demon* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 1999), 317.

³¹ During the decade before the Cultural Revolution, Chinese virtuosic pianists, such as Fu Cong (1934 –) and Liu Shikun (1939 –), had gained considerable reputation through famous international piano competitions such as 1955 Chopin Competition and 1958 Tchaikovsky Competition. Yin also won the first prize in the Piano Competition of the Seventh World Youth Festival at Vienna in 1959.

Yellow River Cantata in honor of Xian Xinghai. More importantly, Jiang and the Party considered the piano concerto as a good channel to promote their political agenda. In 1969, Yin Chengzong was assigned to compose the *Yellow River Piano Concerto* in hopes that it would have at least as lasting an impact as the cantata upon which it was based.³²

In the 1960s, the Cultural Revolution, motivated by the authoritative leader, Mao Zedong, quickly developed into one of the historical tragedies of China. The movement created chaos in Chinese society and resulted in devastating consequences, such as abandoned cultural heritage, shattered industries and careers, and halted education.³³ Besides the direct economic damage and cost of human lives, literature and the arts were among the most disrupted areas of Chinese culture.³⁴ A few outstanding masterpieces, however, were created despite the difficult political atmosphere, including the *Yellow River Piano Concerto*. Composed during the Cultural Revolution between 1966 and 1976, the *Yellow River Piano Concerto* was meant to address very particular propagandistic themes, such as serving the mass workers and encouraging their allegiance.³⁵ To fully understand the symbolic meanings behind the composition, it is helpful to have a brief review of the Chinese musical world during the Cultural Revolution.

MUSIC UNDER THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

In the first half of the twentieth century, all the aspects of Chinese culture including all arts and music were influenced by anti-feudalism.³⁶ In fact, there were two primary musical

³² Yin Chengzong, "How the Piano Concerto 'Yellow River' was Composed," *Chinese Literature* 11 (1974): 97.

³³ Harry Harding, "The Chinese State in Crisis," in *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 15, edited by Roderick MacFarquhar and John K. Fairbank (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991): 110.

³⁴ Harry Harding, *China's Second Revolution: Reform after Mao*. (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2010), 45.

³⁵ Yin, *Yellow River*, 101-2.

³⁶ Gao Mou and Yan Jiaqi, *Shinian wenge* [Ten years of Cultural Revolution] (Tianjin: Tianjin People's Publisher Co., 1986), 87.

doctrines holding different opinions on how to reform Chinese music from the broken, corrupted, and so called “feudal” Confucian musical ideologies that had dominated nearly all the parts of Chinese society for thousands of years. The biggest disparity between these two doctrines pertained to the particular methods that were to be used to improve Chinese music.³⁷ The first idea was pro-Western classical music because they, including the famous Chinese composer He Luting (1903-1999), held the belief that as China became a more stable and developed country, Chinese music would foresee more vibrant interactions with Western music and eventually become a part of the international musical world. On the other hand, the group of musicians that were against westernization insisted that Chinese music of the new era must serve the purpose of praising the Party and its leader Mao Zedong and be easily understandable to the lower class, such as the undereducated peasants and workers. This faction, such as Nie Er (1912 – 1935) and Xian Xinghai, believed that although the Western musical techniques could be partly retained, the ultimate objective was to let Western classical music serve and inform the reformation of existing Chinese musical traditions.³⁸

With the outburst of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in 1966, the latter ideology became the only musical concept allowed to exist. For example, a member of the Chinese Academy of Sciences said, “If you listen to more Western bourgeois classical music, it slowly muddles your class’s viewpoint for understanding problems.”³⁹ This comment reflects the social circumstances of China at this time, which were that the Party’s political discretion and revolutionary ideas were dominant over any other aspect of the country. Everything, including

³⁷ Kraus, *Pianos*, 106-7.

³⁸ Kraus, *Pianos*, 53.

³⁹ Ma Tingheng, “Xiyang zichan jieji yinyue dui wode duhai [Poisonous impacts of the Western Bourgeoisie music on me].” *Guangming Daily* (1965): 150.

musical composition, agricultural production, and education, had to serve the political target to ensure social class discretion and firm control of the revolutionary movement.

Besides the conservative musical group, the most influential individual determining how music and musicians would be treated was the leader of the Chinese Communist Party, Mao Zedong. In “On New Democracy” written in 1940, Mao Zedong states:

China also has a semi-feudal culture which reflects her semi-feudal politics and economy, and whose exponents include all those who advocate the worship of Confucius, the study of Confucian canon, the old ethical code and the old ideas in opposition to the new culture and new ideas. Imperialist culture and semi-feudal culture are devoted brothers and have formed a reactionary cultural alliance against China’s new culture. This kind of reactionary culture serves the imperialists and the feudal class and must be swept away.⁴⁰

This was possibly one of the earliest comments from the communist leader on how new China’s arts should be envisioned. Specifically, new China’s culture, which certainly includes music, needs to have strong tendencies of anti-imperialist, anti-feudal thought patterns and should be led by the proletariat. With the prevalence of Maoist ideology in China during the Cultural Revolution, traditional social hierarchy headed by the educated elites followed by peasants, artisans, and merchants was completely reversed.

As one of the most effective propaganda tools to promote Maoist ideology to the masses, revolutionary choruses and patriotic songs were the musical mainstreams of the newly-born socialist China. One of the direct impacts on musical compositions is that these patriotic choruses and songs had to be simple enough to be understood by workers and peasants. Among Mao’s most praised compositions was the *Yellow River Cantata* honored as “the Nation’s Music,” and Xian Xinghai was given the title “People’s Musician.”⁴¹

⁴⁰ Mao Zedong, *Five Documents on Literature and Art* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1967), 58.

⁴¹ Somerset Maugham, *On a Chinese Screen* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1922), 81.

In November 1964, the attempt to reform Chinese national music as a propaganda tool was publicly addressed by Jiang Qing.⁴² Throughout her unorganized yet consistent comments on Chinese musical reform, there was a clear idea of reforming and modernizing Chinese music by combining Western musical techniques with Chinese cultural traditions.⁴³ The following are some comments directly from Jiang Qing on Chinese musical reform in 1965:

1. China's musicians must find a course independent of both Western bourgeois standards and native feudalism. The "foreign tiger" and "native tiger" are both ferocious, but we must not be bound by them.
2. Western music is politically unhealthy. *Madama Butterfly* describes the shaming of Japanese women by American imperialism, and *La Traviata* dignifies prostitution. Capitalism's music is headed for destruction. You do not want to go die along with the foreigners.
3. The modernization of instruments must proceed, but with caution. Unreformed national ensembles cannot perform revolutionary music effectively, as the *erhu* cannot compare to the violin in richness. I hear that the 'Vanguard Song and Dance Troupe' has reformed the *sheng* by making it from metal, enlarging its sound. Is it true that they have put metal strings on the *erhu*? Because capitalist industry developed early, there has been time to develop a complete set of industrialized instruments in the West, while Chinese instruments are still handcrafted products.⁴⁴

In the book written by Richard Kraus in 1989, the author summarizes Jiang Qing's opinion on reforming Chinese and Western instruments:

At the same time, Jiang Qing was suspicious of reforming instruments to the point that they lose their special color; someone had made a *suona* (a double-reed instrument) of the bass range so absurdly long that it bumped the floor. Western musical instruments should be protected. Jiang Qing criticized the rectification of musical ensembles of 1963, during which many Western instruments were dismissed. She asked Lin Biao to protect them in the military, where the air force was most successful at retaining its wind and string orchestras. Each province should have its own orchestra. It is a pity to make musicians change occupations, as they have studied for many years to acquire their skills.⁴⁵

⁴² Zhao Feng, "Musical Authority Calls Jiang Qing 'Plagiarizer,'" *Hong Kong AFP* (1977): 5-6.

⁴³ Kraus, *Pianos*, 133.

⁴⁴ Jiang Qing, *Jiang Qing tongzhi lun wenyi* [Discussion on literature and arts by comrade Jiang Qing] (Beijing: Beijing Press, 1968), 62.

⁴⁵ Kraus, *Pianos*, 135-136.

In August and September of 1966, China saw the short-lived yet radical campaign attempting to eliminate the “Four Olds” — old customs, old habits, old culture, and old ways of thinking — as the beginning of the Cultural Revolution.⁴⁶ However, compared to Mao’s assault on his political opponents within the Party establishment, the seemingly secondary movement to combat the “Four Olds” was taken seriously by the Red Guards.⁴⁷ As a result, radical torture and persecution purged a large number of educated elites and intellectuals, who were considered by the Red Guards to be China’s “bourgeois” classes.⁴⁸ Musicians, especially those who had received foreign education, were among them.⁴⁹ During this campaign, artistic works and musical compositions were extensively affected, and even the national music reform once suggested by Jiang Qing was purged by the extreme activists among the Red Guards. Particularly, the performance and possession of Western instruments including piano were strictly forbidden by the Red Guards. Also, classically trained Chinese musicians who were mostly educated in Europe or Russia, for example, were considered the representatives of Western immoral cultures against the communist ideologies. The repression even spread to musicians who did not receive a foreign education but were otherwise exposed to Western classical music.

Regarded as a symbolic representative of the Western bourgeois culture, the piano was severely attacked by the Red Guards, who destroyed all pianos they saw and beat people who owned pianos claiming that they were not loyal to the revolution. As a result, people had to

⁴⁶ Jonathan Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1999), 575.

⁴⁷ Harding, *Chinese*, 144. In 1966, the Red Guards were a group of fanatic middle school and high school students who were excited by encouragement from the leader Mao to participate in a national revolutionary movement and the opportunity to mobilize upward in the social classes. Unexpected by Mao himself, the Red Guards movement quickly turned into a violent chaos. It is commonly believed the Red Guards disappeared in 1967 from the scene when they were sent from the cities to the countryside to be re-educated by the peasants.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 211.

⁴⁹ Xin Fengnian, *Gangqin wenhua sanbai nian* [The 300 years of piano culture] (Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Co., 1998), 157.

destroy their pianos or sell them at an extremely cheap price to avoid being caught by the Red Guards.⁵⁰ If musicians were caught possessing any books or records related to Western classical music, they would be prosecuted, humiliated, and even tortured by the Red Guards in public.⁵¹ Additionally, many people who could not stand this extreme suppression committed suicide. The political movement aimed at eradicating Western bourgeois arts seemed to be a massacre of the most highly trained and gifted Chinese artists and musicians.⁵²

Serving as Mao's personal cultural watchdog,⁵³ Jiang Qing quickly gained political power during the movement. She fortified the ideas of censoring and dictating the forms of arts that would serve the masses. However, almost all the existing forms of entertainment were banned, such as performances of the Peking opera, which were considered reminiscent of feudalism, and all performances of Western ballet, which were also considered a bourgeois symbol of Western ideology. To produce some musical forms to serve her Maoist ideology, she commissioned the composition of several modern ballets and operas which comprised the only legally permitted musical works and were called "Eight Model Plays." They shared the characteristics of being revolutionary and praising the party and Mao as the leader. The *Yellow River Cantata* by Xian is one of the few musical works beside the "Eight Model Plays" that were allowed to be performed.⁵⁴

Although considerable effort and resources were provided for musical compositions, the musical values of the so-called "national music" were fiercely criticized by many musical

⁵⁰ Ying Fen, "Ye tan Zhongguo yinyue sanshi nian [Some more discussion on thirty years of Chinese music]," *Guanchajia* 22 (1979): 63.

⁵¹ Andrew G. Walder, *Fractured Rebellion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 3.

⁵² Liang Heng and Judith Shapiro, *Son of the Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), 115-6.

⁵³ Gloria Jung Eian Tham, "The Influence of Socialist Realism on the *Yellow River Piano Concerto*" (DMA diss., The University of Alabama, 2009).

⁵⁴ Kraus, *Pianos*, 133.

scholars. In 1964, Hsu Tsang-Houei, a Taiwanese composer, commented:

What on earth is this music called People's Music or the Nation's Music? Does this music use the old Chinese scales, folk melody, or the folk-tune formula worthy of being named "National?" Or do these compositions merely pay homage to the People's Government and the proletariat? Does stressing the significance of hard-work, reform, and going to the rural communities to work, really constitute national music? Can music be defined as "National" merely by giving an instrumental composition mass appeal and a grand title? Or by composing songs about the oppression of people who succeeded in fighting capitalism?⁵⁵

Despite whether the *Yellow River Cantata* is a work worthy of the title of the "Nation's Music," it provided the historical opportunity for the composition of the *Yellow River Piano Concerto*. As the piano concerto became more popular in China, it would have a profound impact on the spread of Western classical music in China as well as the popularity of the piano as the PRC became more open and prosperous.

FORTUNATE SURVIVAL OF WESTERN INSTRUMENTS

After these darkest moments of the piano in Chinese history, Yin decided to resurrect the piano not only as an important instrument but also as a visible representation of his musical faith. The pianist worked with other members of the Central Philharmonic's Mao Zedong Thought Propaganda Team and transported a piano to Tiananmen Square on May 12, 1967, where he gave several performances. The works played by Yin included the most famous Chinese modern ballet, *The White-Haired Girl*, as well as current revolutionary songs such as "The Peasant Congress has Convened" and "Long Life to Chairman Mao!" Although this campaign put Yin's life in danger due to the previous Red Guard ban on all pianos, the bravery behind it persuaded

⁵⁵ Hsu Tsang-Houei, *Zhongguo yinyue wang nali qu* [Where is the future of Chinese music]? (Taipei: Wenxin shudian, 1964), 82.

the Red Guards and the Cultural Revolution committee that even a Western bourgeois instrument like the piano could be reformed to serve the Communist Party and the revolution.⁵⁶

Another aspect that actually helped protect Western instruments under the Cultural Revolution is related to the difference between the features of Chinese and Western musical instruments. As new works were being composed, the limitations of conventional folk instruments started to be revealed.⁵⁷ Jiang Qing and her committee gradually realized that Chinese folk instruments were much less dynamic and powerful because of their ranges and timbres. Particularly, conventional Chinese instruments, such as the Chinese suona and zither, are much less resonant and insufficient to express fervent revolutionary themes. Therefore, she was essentially forced to consider including some Western instruments into the musical works. However, the choice of instruments was still largely contingent upon her personal reasoning and tastes. For example, the trombone was ordered to be removed from all performances simply because Jiang Qing disliked its sound.⁵⁸

To balance between the urgent need of using Western instruments and preserving nationalistic themes and socialist characteristics, Jiang's musical committee selected several instruments, such as the piano and the French horn, for the composition of revolutionary works. In fact, Jiang believed that Western instruments do not make themselves anti-revolutionary and bourgeois representatives of capitalism.⁵⁹ It is the contents and ideology conveyed through the musical compositions. Adapting the performing skills of those instruments and composing music following the idea of socialist realism would make the Western instruments serve the Cultural

⁵⁶ Yin, *Yellow River*, 96.

⁵⁷ Meng Bian, *Zhongguo gangqin wenhua zhi xingcheng yu fazhan* [The formation and development of Chinese piano music culture] (Beijing: Huayue Publishing Co., 1996), 142.

⁵⁸ James Barron, "Andrew Davis, the Model of a Jet-age Conductor," *New York Times* (April 1978): 17.

⁵⁹ Jiang, *Jiang*, 63.

Revolution. In addition, many Chinese musicians were educated in Western countries and mostly played Western instruments. Strictly prohibiting playing Western instruments would cause a shortage of musical talent for Jiang Qing's musical revolution which played an important propaganda role in the Cultural Revolution. As one of the most recognized Western instruments in China, the piano was chosen for revolutionary music due to its broad timbral range and power. After 1970, the legitimacy of some Western instruments, including piano, had been re-established, although the Western musical repertory allowed to be played was still limited.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Kraus, *Pianos*, 152.

CHAPTER TWO BIRTH OF THE *YELLOW RIVER PIANO CONCERTO*

Early achievements in piano writing in modern China prior to Yin's piano concerto is presented in the first part of this chapter. Additionally, musical details about the composition of Xian Xinghai's cantata and Yin Chengzong's piano concerto are examined. Throughout this chapter, a clearer view of how the Cultural Revolution influenced the composition of the Yellow River Piano Concerto will be presented.

EARLY PIANO WORK

Due to China's isolation from the Western world, Chinese musical instruments evolved independently of Western classical instruments. As recently as the 1930s, for instance, the piano was still exotic and unfamiliar to the Chinese, including many Chinese musicians.⁶¹ A practical reason for this is that it was extremely expensive to make a quality piano, and most of the Chinese people could not afford it because the Chinese economy was still agriculture-centered. As a result, only wealthy Chinese had the chance to learn piano, and their musical education was gained in Western countries, such as France and Russia.⁶² Another reason is that while compositional skills and theories such as harmony and counterpoint were highly developed and applied in the Western musical world, it was challenging for them to fit within Chinese music because few Chinese musicians had the chance to study in a Western conservatory.

⁶¹ Meng, *Zhongguo*, 111.

⁶² Pu Fang, "The National Pursuit in Chinese Piano Concerto Composition," *Journal of Chinese Central Music Academy*, no. 4 (1991): 98-114.

Due to the lack of Western instruments and the oddity of Western music, it was not until 1934 that China had its very first successful and influential piano composition, *Buffalo Boy's Flute* by He Luting, who was then a student at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. Although a simple ABA form was employed, the most valuable essence of this composition is the synthesis of Chinese musical idioms and Western techniques. Specifically, the main body of the A section has a Western contrapuntal style with conventional Chinese pentatonic melodies. In the B section, the idiom of the Chinese flute, a conventional bamboo instrument, was used to form the main melody accompanied by a standard Western accompanying figure. At different octaves and pitches, the four-note motif repeats many times.

This work by He Luting is considered the first major Chinese piano composition with a successful synthesis of Chinese traditional idioms and Western classical styles. From He's composition to the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, musical nationalism became prevalent in Chinese society and was probably the only musical style existing in China for a while.⁶³

After 1949, several principles were advocated by the new Communist government including the limitation of programmatic styles to socialist realism, enforcement of rigorous performance training, and the combination of Western classical styles and Chinese traditions. The political constraints seemed to harm the promotion of Western music in China from the surface. However, if one recognizes that Western music had little recognition in China before the twentieth century, the encouragement of combining the Western and Chinese styles allowed an unprecedented opportunity to introduce Western music into China.

⁶³ Liu Jingzhi, *A Critical History of New Music in China* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2010), 7-10.

YELLOW RIVER CANTATA

Since the synthesis of Western and Chinese styles by He Luting, many Chinese musicians started to follow this new tradition to compose musical works. Among those compositions, arguably the most outstanding and influential one is the *Yellow River Great Chorus* or *Yellow River Cantata* by Xian Xinghai.⁶⁴ Born in 1905 as the son of a fisherman in the Guangdong province, which was of the lowest class in Chinese social hierarchy, the financial situation of this impoverished family could not support him to receive public education. Therefore, the young boy had to live with his mother's relatives in Singapore until 1918, where he had the chance to receive his early musical education in the primary school military band.

In 1926, he was admitted to the National Music Institute of Peking University, where he received formal musical training.⁶⁵ The young musician went to Paris in 1929 and gained greater exposure to Western music, and his outstanding compositions brought him awards in a university-wide competition. After winning the competition, he soon became the first Asian musician who was admitted to the Paris Conservatory, where he studied with Vincent d'Indy and Paul Dukas.⁶⁶

After his return to China in 1934, Xian lived a challenging life without much financial income until he joined the Communist Party in Yan'an in 1938, where he was appointed as the music director at Lu Xun Academy of Arts. The main goal of this Communist art academy was to serve the artistic movement advocated by Mao Zedong in his political base Yan'an. Having received his advanced musical education from both Peking University and the Paris

⁶⁴ Chen Lingqun and Qi Liuyi, "The Historical Background of the Birth and Communication of *The Yellow River Cantata*," *Look Back One Hundred Years* (December 1994): 115.

⁶⁵ Chen Lingqun and Qi Liuyi, "The Historical Background of the Birth and Communication of *The Yellow River Cantata*," *Look Back One Hundred Years* (December 1994): 137.

⁶⁶ Kraus, *Pianos*, 45.

Conservatory, Xian was the only candidate who had enough exposure to both Western and Chinese music to synthesize the revolutionary spirits of the masses of workers and peasants into a modern and well developed musical framework. Prior to the composition of the *Yellow River Cantata*, he also composed his first symphony, *The National Symphony*, and some other patriotic choral works.⁶⁷ After Xian left Yan'an and started working in Moscow in 1940, he rescored the cantata using five-line notation so it could be performed by European musicians.⁶⁸

In China, the *Yellow River Cantata* is considered a Chinese version of Beethoven's Symphony No. 9.⁶⁹ The essence of this composition is a grand evocation of patriotic and nationalistic emotions of the Chinese people during the Second Sino-Japan War.⁷⁰ The lyrics are adapted from "Yellow River," which is a poem by Guang Weiran (1913 – 2002), who created this poem when he saw the boatmen battle against the turbulent water of the Yellow River while he was crossing the river. To serve the political power, Xian gave programmatic names to the eight movements— "Yellow River Boatmen's Song," "Ode to the Yellow River," "The Yellow River Descends from Heaven," "Yellow River Ballad," "Conversational Song on the River Bank," "Lament of the Yellow River," "Defense of the Yellow River" and "Rave! Yellow River."⁷¹ The titles are already very descriptive of the contents expressed by the composer. In addition, the work embeds Chinese dialogue singing into the movement "Conversational Song on the River Bank." Another Chinese element incorporated in the Western forms is the chanting work song in the "Yellow River Boatmen's Song." As the successor of the cantata, the *Yellow River Piano Concerto* inherited the nationalistic Chinese folk idioms from Xian's work.

⁶⁷ Kraus, *Pianos*, 60.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 64. In early twentieth century, many Chinese musicians did not use five-line notation, due to the lack of exposure to Western music. Therefore, the cantata was originally scored in numbered musical notation.

⁶⁹ Xin, *Gangqin*, 75.

⁷⁰ Tham, "The Influence."

⁷¹ Chu Wanghua, "How was the *Yellow River Piano Concerto* created?" *People's Music*, no. 1 (1995): 8-15.

Another merit of the cantata is the use of Chinese folk instruments. While Xian applied many of his compositional skills learned from the Paris Conservatory, the impoverished academy⁷² was unable to provide a piano as well as many other Western instruments to accompany the chorus. In this circumstance, Xian had to limit his choices to Chinese traditional instruments such as the two-stringed fiddle and the three-stringed lute. He once said, “I am just now researching the characteristics of Chinese musical instruments, and am thinking of using their strong points to make up for the current lack of Western instruments.”⁷³

The seeming difficulty, however, provided the chance to preserve many of the Chinese musical idioms by using conventional Chinese instruments. Although most Chinese instruments were later replaced, they still supplied valuable musical elements to be inherited by the *Yellow River Piano Concerto*, which preserved Chinese musical idioms to a great extent by imitating these traditional Chinese instruments.

MUSICAL ELEMENTS OF THE *YELLOW RIVER PIANO CONCERTO*

This section will focus on the details of each movement. Specifically, the analysis will illustrate how the musical structures and timbres reveal the programmatic influence of Chinese contemporary history.⁷⁴ For example, the first movement adopts a strong yet steady rhythm to represent the vivid scene of the boatmen pulling boats along the Yellow River. The second movement is praising the Yellow River as the origin of ancient Chinese civilization and as a metaphor for the Chinese people’s spiritual merits, which is implied by its magnanimous deployment of instruments in the orchestration. The third movement, “The Wrath of the Yellow

⁷² Yan’an did not see its first piano before Xian’s departure to Russia in 1940.

⁷³ Kraus, *Pianos*, 57.

⁷⁴ Chen Li, “On Different Version of *The Yellow River Piano Concerto*,” *Sound Technology*, no. 2 (1994): 45-70.

River,” summarizes the anger of the nation and the determination of the Chinese people to defend their country. Therefore, the rhythms are more aggressive, and there are many changes of tempo and more extreme ranges of dynamics. The last movement depicts the actions of the Chinese people defending their country and the emergence of the hope of winning the war, which is revealed by the tempo which decelerates from presto to moderato. This chapter illustrates the development of the four movements along with the historical events that China experienced during the Second Sino-Japanese War.

The *Yellow River Piano Concerto* is comprised of four movements including “The Song of the Yellow River,” “Ode to the Yellow River,” “Wrath of the Yellow River,” and “Defend the Yellow River.” Some of the cantata movements were not considered to be included, such as “The Yellow River Descends from Heaven” and “Conversational Song on the River Bank.” On the other hand, some movements were merged into one, such as the “Yellow River Ballad” and the “Lament of the Yellow River;” these became the “Wrath of the Yellow River” in the piano concerto.⁷⁵ Due to the command from Jiang Qing, all the lyrics of the original cantata were removed,⁷⁶ but the titles of the movements still reflect the nationalistic themes of the work. However, the fondness for programmatic titles and concrete realism, such as praising the political leaders and mass workers, was not born in the political propaganda context. Actually, this derived from the programmatic tradition of Chinese music with thousands of years of history. Musicologist Han Kuo-Huang states:

It is uncommon to find Chinese instrumental pieces without some sort of descriptive or suggestive title. In a printed concert program or a book containing instrumental compositions, nine out of ten pieces are fully annotated, some even accompanied with poems.... The famous chin performer Ch’a Fu-hsi once wrote: “Every time when an old chin player is about to play a piece that is not familiar to

⁷⁵ Tham, “The Influence.”

⁷⁶ The author of the lyrics of the *Yellow River Cantata*, Guang Weiran, was under house arrest because his was claimed “anti-revolutionary” by Jiang Qing.

his audience, he would tell them grumblingly about the title and what it is supposed to express.”⁷⁷

Impacted by this musical tradition, each of the piano concerto’s movements were composed with very specific programmatic meanings instead of an absolute focus on musical development.

To be specific, the first two movements are commending the hard-working Chinese people with the “boatmen spirit” and the rich history of Chinese civilization that originated thousands of years ago from the Yellow River. The first movement, “Yellow River Boatmen’s Song,” is a characterization of the scene where the boatmen are battling the raging water as a metaphor for the Chinese people battling against the Japanese invasion into their motherland. To describe the action of calling the boatmen, the piano concerto opens with a falling tone from a grace note F-sharp to E, and the strings create the effect of the raging water of the river. Displayed by the Example 1, the piano arpeggios sweep upwards and downwards mimicking the furious waves of the Yellow River.

The compositional process had to comply with the revolutionary requirements, and the musical connotation was restricted to realistic meanings. For example, during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, enforced by the Party, the only officially allowed programmatic interpretation of the upward sweeping gesture is that:

Unexpected accents and high dynamic levels render images of aggressive waves dashing upon unexpected rocks. Mixed moods are stirred up: a combination of terror and courage with sacrifice. The music feels as overwhelming as the waters of the Yellow River. While boatmen gamble their lives upon the river, soldiers sacrifice their flesh in battle and never return.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Han Kuo-Huang, “The Chinese Concept of Program Music,” *Asian Music* 10, no. 1 (1978): 18.

⁷⁸ Chen Shing-Lih, “The *Yellow River Piano Concerto*: Politics, Culture, and Style” (DMA diss., University of British Columbia, 2009).

Example 1. *Yellow River Piano Concerto*, “Yellow River Boatmen’s Song,” m.16.⁷⁹



With the same design as the original cantata, the second movement of the concerto applies a Chinese binary form instead of the ternary form that is common in the slow movement of many Western piano concertos.⁸⁰ Another example of the revolutionary spirits is displayed by the inclusion of the “March of the Volunteers” by Nie Er, which later became the Chinese national anthem after 1949. Examples 2 and 3 depict how the piano concerto directly adapts the melodies from Nie Er’s work using the horns and trumpets in measures 61-64. The text expresses the slogan that “China has stood up among the world in the East,” and the heroic spirits that embody the Chinese army and the Chinese people are steadily marching forward.

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⁸⁰ Chen, *Yellow River*, 51.

The third movement of the concerto, the “Wrath of the Yellow River,” displays the employment of Chinese musical elements represented by Chinese instrumental idioms. Although the ensemble of Chinese instruments of Xian’s work was mostly replaced by Western instruments, such as clarinets, bassoons, and French horns, Chinese instrumental features of this work cannot be ignored. Special aspects of the orchestration are the scoring of a Chinese instrument – the Chinese flute – and the imitation of the sound of Chinese instruments, such as the pipa and the guzheng. Some details of these influences from Chinese folk instruments will be discussed in a later chapter.

Example 2. *March of the Volunteers* (Chinese National Anthem), mm. 1-7.⁸¹

Chinese National Anthem
(Yiyonggjun Jinxingqu) Nie Er

Another example conveyed by the third movement, which describes the political environment of China during the Second Sino-Japan War, is depicted in example 4. To accurately depict the

Example 3. *Yellow River Piano Concerto*, “Ode to the Yellow River,” mm. 61-64.⁸²

⁸¹ Chinese National Anthem, Piano Score. <http://www.sheetmusic365.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Chinese-National-Anthem-sheet-music-for-piano.gif> (accessed April 17, 2017).

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The image shows a musical score for three measures. The top staff is for Cor. I and II, the middle for Cor. III and IV, and the bottom for Trbc. I and II. The first measure starts with a dynamic marking of *mf*. The second measure has a first ending bracket. The third measure has a first ending bracket and a fermata over the final chord.

tension created by the brutal invasion by the Empire of Japan, dramatic harmonic and dynamic contrasts are used. For instance, the third movement begins with an E-flat major harmony which suddenly modulates to C minor, starting from measure 55, featured by a strong string tremolo in Example 4. Additionally, the *crescendo* in the piano part with the descending septuplet emphasized by the dramatic *crescendo* and *decrescendo* combination of the strings further magnifies the atmosphere with heightened emotional tension. Programmatically, the rest of the third movement depicts the Japanese invasion into a broken country and the relentlessness of the Chinese people when faced with the possible occupation of Japan.

The final movement of the concerto presents the climax of the entire work using the main melody of the song “*East is Red*” (Ex. 5). This part is played as a theme to praise Mao Zedong and the original lyrics of the song keep singing “Chairman Mao and the Central Party Committee launch a war appeal.” The quotation of *East is Red* serves as an ultimate glorification of Mao by

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comparing him to the sun. Similar to the way people praised their emperors in ancient China, Mao was treated as a godlike leader sent from heaven.⁸³

Example 4. The strings and piano parts. *Yellow River Piano Concerto*, “Wrath of the Yellow River,” mm. 55-58.⁸⁴

Also, example 6 illustrates that the *crescendo* leads to a peak presented by a *molto meno mosso*. This is a metaphor for the grand victory, led by the great savior Mao, of the war against the Japanese invasion. Thematically, the final movement provides the emotional climax of the entire concerto.

⁸³ Lu Xing, *Rhetoric of the Chinese Cultural Revolution* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2005), 101-102.

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Example 5. *East is Red*, mm.1-10.⁸⁵

东 方 红, 太 阳 升, 中 国
毛 主 席, 爱 人 民, 他 是
共 产 党, 像 太 阳, 照 到
出 了 个 毛 泽 东, 他 为 人 民
我 们 的 带 路 人, 为 了 建 设
哪 里 哪 里 亮, 哪 里 有 了

Example 6. Adoption the main melody of the *East is Red*. *Yellow River Piano Concerto*, “Defend the Yellow River,” mm. 303-308.⁸⁶

301 *allargando*

19 *molto meno mosso* ♩ = 56

ff

⁸⁵ *East is Red*, Vocal Score, from Chinese Music Sheet.

<http://www.qupu123.com/Public/Uploads/2014/04/20/2535388319bab7.jpg> (accessed April 17, 2017).

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305

Fl. I
Fl. II

Ob. I
Ob. II

Cl. I
Cl. II

Fag. I
Fag. II

305

Piano

VI. I
VI. II

Vle.

Vc.

Cb.

CHAPTER THREE COMPARISON TO THE SOVIET NATIONALIST KHACHATURIAN

In 1940, Xian left Yan'an for Moscow to compose music for a group of Soviet filmmakers.⁸⁷ During his stay in Moscow, he had the chance to meet several prominent Soviet composers, such as Dmitri Kabalevsky (1904 – 1987) and allegedly Sergei Prokofiev (1891 – 1953). Also, he re-orchestrated and re-scored the *Yellow River Cantata* so that it could be performed in Europe.⁸⁸ Yin also received strong musical influence from the Soviet Union during both his youth education at the Shanghai Conservatory coached by Tatulian and Krafchenko⁸⁹ and during his later training at the Leningrad Conservatory.⁹⁰ As a result, Yin and Xian shared similar Russian musical influences, and the *Yellow River Piano Concerto* shares many characteristics of musical nationalism from the cantata.

A comparison between the *Yellow River Piano Concerto* and works from the renowned Armenian composer Aram Khachaturian is valuable for a thorough contextual study of the most popular piano concerto in China. First of all, works from both Xian and Khachaturian have strong socialist backgrounds and patriotic motivations. Similar to the CCP, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union aggressively used musical compositions as propaganda tools. However, there are also some significant yet interesting differences originating from the composers' distinctive personal experiences and the unique political environment in both countries. This chapter will

⁸⁷ Xian, *Wo*, 37.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 43.

⁸⁹ Kraus, *Pianos*, 131.

⁹⁰ While Yin was studying in Leningrad Conservatory, there were nine Chinese students receiving musical training in the conservatory and several hundreds of Chinese students studying in the city.

compare the *Yellow River Piano Concerto* to some of the works of Khachaturian from several perspectives.

By comparing the concerto with Khachaturian's works, this chapter investigate the main musical influences on the *Yellow River Piano Concerto* from the perspectives of folk music and the political influences. To overlay the musical careers of the composers, one has to combine the discussion of Xian, who died in his late 30s, and Yin to align with Aram Khachaturian who was musically prolific in his early career and politically active into his late age.

GENERAL FOLK INFLUENCES

In his early life, Khachaturian received his education at the Tiflis Commercial School, which was commissioned to educate future merchants and businessmen. His early career goals were not musically related since he was deciding to either become a medical professional or an engineer.⁹¹ Before Aram Khachaturian started his musical career later in his life, he was heavily influenced by folk songs from a variety of countries such as Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia.

In a 1952 article, "My Idea of the Folk Element in Music," Khachaturian wrote:

I grew up in an atmosphere rich in folk music: popular festivities, rites, joyous and sad events in the life of the people always accompanied by music, the vivid tunes of Armenian, Azerbaijani and Georgian songs and dances performed by folk bards [ashugs] and musicians - such were the impressions that became deeply engraved on my memory, that determined my musical thinking. They shaped my musical consciousness and lay at the foundations of my artistic personality... Whatever the changes and improvements that took place in my musical taste in later years, their original substance, formed in early childhood in close communion with the people, has always remained the natural soil nourishing all my work [I prefer that] approach to folk melody.⁹²

Particularly, he was able and eager to blend musical influences he absorbed from a

⁹¹ Kiril Tomoff, *Creative Union: The Professional Organization of Soviet Composers, 1939-1953* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 35.

⁹² Christofakis, "Music."

variety of sources including Armenian peasant songs and the art of ashugh, which is an urban instrumental folk music.

With the profound impact of these folk music elements, Khachaturian was able to reconcile and integrate classical forms with Armenian folk idioms, which generated a versatility in his musical language that embraced improvisational passion and virtuosic skill. For example, Armenian folk music is reflected in his flamboyant lyrical patterns and use of ostinatos.⁹³

The most influential work from Khachaturian while he was still a student at the Moscow Conservatory is the Trio for Clarinet, Violin, and Piano, which was admired by Prokofiev and premiered in Paris. This early work established Khachaturian as an Armenian composer who was able to synthesize Armenian folk traditions such as peasant song and urban instrumental folk music into his musical achievements. The trio's three movements reverse the usual fast-slow-fast movement order, and very frequently, the clarinet and violin employ folk idioms. The most obvious reflection is in the *moderato* third movement (Ex. 7), which consists of nine variations on an Uzbek folk song.⁹⁴

After the *poco piu mosso* variation presented primarily by the piano (starting with the last two measures in Example 7), the intensity gradually increases and then undergoes a piercing outbreak led by a duet between the clarinet and violin in the following example. Then the motion becomes much faster, launched by the change of the rhythmic ostinato in piano part.

Finally, in the example 8, the entire movement gradually decelerates after the *meno mosso* and returns to the Uzbek folksong again, which is presented by the violin. Throughout the entire third movement of the Trio, Khachaturian reveals his ability to synthesize personal folk experiences into his musical compositions.

⁹³ James Bakst, *A History of Russian-Soviet Music* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1966), 132.

⁹⁴ Christofakis, "Music."

Example 7. The main theme starts with the clarinet. Trio for Clarinet, Violin, and Piano, 3rd movement, mm. 1-12.⁹⁵

Clarinetto solo
 Clarinetto (B) *p*
 Violino
 Moderato ♩ = 112
 Piano 1

7

Example 8. Trio for Clarinet, Violin, and Piano, 3rd movement, mm. 13-28.⁹⁶

13 Poco più mosso ♩ = 72
mf *sf*
 3

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19

Piano

25

Cl.

VI.

Piano

Compared with the Armenian folk-influenced classical musician, the composers of the *Yellow River Piano Concerto* and the original *Yellow River Cantata* were also influenced by Chinese folk songs and traditions. Although Yin, who was the leading composer of the *Yellow River Piano Concerto*, grew up in a very wealthy business family without much exposure to folk music in his early life, the original *Yellow River Cantata*'s composer Xian was heavily influenced by the Chinese folk music traditions, which were adopted by the *Yellow River Piano Concerto*.

Before Xian composed the cantata in 1939, he visited many farmlands and factories to meet with peasants and workers aiming at collecting first-hand Chinese folklores.⁹⁷ Combined with his Western compositional skills trained by the Paris Conservatory and his later experience

⁹⁷ Xian, *Wo*, 107-12.

in Soviet Russia after 1940, he was able to incorporate many forms of Chinese musical elements into a mainly Western musical body. For example, the fifth movement applies antiphonal singing by two men, which is an imitation of a popular Chinese style of folk singing in Shaanxi in northwestern China. Another incorporation of Chinese folk culture is the opening of the first movement, which is essentially a work song. It imitates the chants of the Yellow River boatmen who are singing the song to harmonize with their movements.

Example 9. Slow deceleration and return to the Uzbek folksong. Trio for Clarinet, Violin, and Piano, 3rd movement, mm. 219-227.⁹⁸

VI. *poco a poco ritard.*

(Viol.)

f *p*

44

Piano

222 (Clar.)

mf dim. *p*

f dim. *p* *f espress.*

Meno mosso ♩ = 88-92

p

Ped. *

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During the Cultural Revolution, Jiang Qing who commissioned Yin to recreate the piano concerto from the *Yellow River Cantata* had strong control of artistic works. Specifically, to follow Mao Zedong’s propaganda slogan “letting the old serve the new,” Jiang Qing suggested that the singing part and lyrics shall be removed from the cantata during public performance, but the themes and melodies can serve the political movement.⁹⁹ While the part for the piano and some instruments were kept, new political slogans were inserted into the *Yellow River Piano Concerto*. During this process, the rebirth of the piano concerto absorbed even more Chinese folk music elements due to its propagandistic motivation to be accepted by the masses of Chinese workers and folk people. In one of Jiang’s discussions on the piano part of the cantata, she commented:

[Liu Shikun] plays the piano very well, but he played Liszt, and the workers did not understand. The pianist should study Beijing opera and make use of the clapper. Then, the masses will be able to understand [the music].¹⁰⁰

For this reason, Jiang Qing, who was also in the audience of the cantata’s premier in 1936,

⁹⁹ Kraus, *Pianos*, 148.

¹⁰⁰ Kraus, *Pianos*, 136.

turned to Yin Chengzong who had completed several works transcribing Chinese folksongs and titling them with communist slogans. Therefore, with both the needs of political campaigns from the revolutionaries and the Russian-trained piano composers, the *Yellow River Piano Concerto* was conceived in an extreme fashion of socialist realism.

Both Khachaturian's works and the *Yellow River Piano Concerto* were heavily influenced by Armenian and Chinese folk music respectively, which were reflected in the adoption of folk elements such as Armenian folk bard performance and the Chinese Shaanxi antiphonal chorus. In addition, they were both created with a mind to express the most natural and common scenes and emotions from the folk people. However, a major difference is noteworthy to have a better understanding of their characteristics.

While they both enjoy a mixture of classical music forms and conventional folk elements, they were arguably originated from completely different motivations. Khachaturian's passion for using folk musical elements was cultivated by his experience in his childhood. This passion originally stemmed from his personal dedication to both classical music and to the people and his nation. As presented in previous paragraphs, his own article and many interviews directly convey his enthusiasm for creating innovative musical forms by combining Western classical music and folk music from Armenia and other neighboring countries. However, the folk elements in the *Yellow River Piano Concerto* were propelled into the work by the powerful Communist Party revolutionaries, who did not seem to be highly trained musicians. The main reason for the existence of folk elements in the *Yellow River Piano Concerto* is to promote their political movements and ideologies among the masses of Chinese workers.

FOLK INSTRUMENTS

To compare the folk influences in Khachaturian's compositions and the *Yellow River Piano Concerto*, another important aspect to consider is a fondness for traditional instruments and how the composers imitate them. Although the passive influences from conventional folklores such as hearing people singing folk songs may have great impact on composers' works, the imitation using conventional Western instruments directly reflects the passion of promoting traditional folk music.

One of the folk instruments that Khachaturian had deep fondness for is the duduk, a three-thousand-year-old Armenian or Caucasian wind instrument. The duduk is a double-reed instrument that is widely played in many Middle Eastern countries, such as Turkey, Georgia, and Azerbaijan, and it is strongly associated with Armenian national identity.¹⁰¹ Characterized by its single-octave range and the diatonic scale, the duduk is associated with sadness, especially after the Soviet regime, when the duduk was largely utilized at funerals. Djivan Gasparyan, who is known as the "Master of duduk,"¹⁰² once said, "In its tiny holes bears the cry of Armenia's bitter past."¹⁰³ The sadness depicted by this Armenian instrument is perhaps the reason why Khachaturian gave a special role to the duduk in his compositions. According to Khachaturian, "the duduk is the only instrument that can make me cry."¹⁰⁴

Another conventional folk instrument directly imitated in Khachaturian's work is the *zurna*. With a sound that is less melancholy, the *zurna* is perceived as appropriate for celebratory events such as weddings, anniversaries and baptisms. While the original sounds of the duduk and

¹⁰¹ Christofakis, "Music."

¹⁰² Fred Karlin and Rayburn Wright, *On the Track: A Guide to Contemporary Film Scoring* (London: Routledge, 2013), 87.

¹⁰³ Karlin, *Track*, 7.

¹⁰⁴ Andy Nercessian, *The Duduk and National Identity in Armenia* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press), 56-57.

zurna are preferred in Armenia, the clarinet is often used to fill their roles in contemporary music. Especially after the Sovietization of Armenia, Western music has been extensively promoted, and the clarinet is a standard alternative to the zurna in musical compositions.¹⁰⁵

An imitation of both the duduk and the zurna using the clarinet appears in the first movement of the Trio for Clarinet, Violin, and Piano (Ex. 10). The three eighth notes followed by the dotted half note or half note, imitates the grieving and mysterious sound of the Armenian duduk. The following example depicts a “poetic duet between the clarinet (imitating the duduk) and the violin.”¹⁰⁶ The conversation-like duet is depicted in Example 10, and it mimics a conversation between two people. Particularly, the repetitive patterns of the clarinet (duduk) is seemingly trying to repeatedly explain a story to the violin part. Another folk imitation using the clarinet is seen in example 11. The rapid descending figures with the triplets are reminiscent of the high-pitched vibrating sound of the Turkish zurna.

Additionally, Khachaturian himself had several comments on why he chose the clarinet as part of the orchestration in the trio:

I was strongly attracted to instrumental music at the time and decided to write an ensemble. Why did I choose a somewhat unusual combination? Why the clarinet? Because the material I had to work with suggested a wind instrument: they are in the themes of the folk style. In the third movement I used an Uzbek folk melody thoroughly transformed by my imagination (it is Khorasoch – Black Hair), which I had once heard performed... That is probably why I chose the clarinet, although the main reason was a desire to break the tradition.¹⁰⁷

Although this innovative combination of instruments seemed exotic and bizarre to his

¹⁰⁵ Christofakis, “Music.”

¹⁰⁶ Cynthia Kay Wolverson, “The Contributions of Armenian Composers to the Clarinet Repertoire: An Annotated Bibliography of Selected Works, a Lecture Recital, Together with Three Recitals of Selected Works by Khachaturian, Bax, Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Lutoslawski, Nielsen, Burgmüller, and Others” (DMA diss., University of North Texas, 2002).

¹⁰⁷ Aram Khachaturian, *Collected Works, Vol. 24* (Moscow: Muzyka Publishers, 1991), 59.

Example 10. Duet between clarinet and violin. Trio for Clarinet, Violin, and Piano, 1st movement, mm. 4-9.¹⁰⁸

The image displays a musical score for a duet between clarinet and violin, with piano accompaniment. The score is divided into two systems, measures 4-6 and 7-9. The Clarinet (Cl.) part begins with a rest, followed by a melodic line with a triplet and a 9th note. The Violin (VI.) part also starts with a rest, then plays a melodic line with triplets and a 9th note. The Piano part features a complex accompaniment with chords and arpeggios, marked 'dim.' and 'p'. The score includes various musical notations such as rests, notes, triplets, and dynamic markings.

contemporaries at the Moscow Conservatory, Khachaturian's *Trio* has become a standard work in the repertoire for not only its general audience appeal but also as a valuable guiding reference for contemporary musical compositions. Besides imitating the ancient Armenian instruments of the duduk and the zurna, Khachaturian's first published work, *Dance for Violin and Piano*, also presents his passion for relating his compositions to his Armenian roots. Not

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limited to simply imitating the sounds and performing skills of conventional folk instruments, he organically incorporates elements of folk music, such as improvisatory lines and timbral effects of Armenian instrumental music, to create his distinctive musical sonorities. Particularly, the “Khachaturian’s seconds,” a type of rhythmic ostinato, is shaped by his deep folk instrumental influences. Khachaturian said:

These seconds come from the numerous sounds of folk instruments which I heard as a child: sazandartar, qyamancha and drum. My organ-point predilection comes from the music.¹⁰⁹

Example 11. Clarinet mimicking zurna. Trio for Clarinet, Violin, and Piano, 1st movement, mm.

37.¹¹⁰

The image shows a musical score for a Trio for Clarinet, Violin, and Piano. The score is divided into three staves: Clarinet (Cl.), Violin (VI.), and Piano. The Clarinet part begins at measure 36 with a piano (*p*) dynamic and features a rhythmic ostinato pattern. The Violin part begins at measure 37 with a fortissimo (*ff*) dynamic. The Piano part begins at measure 37 with a piano (*p*) dynamic and features a rhythmic ostinato pattern. The score includes various musical notations such as dynamics, articulation marks, and fingerings.

The piano part of the beginning of the Dance is an imitation of the dhol, which is an Armenian drum. Also, the violin part is a close imitation to the kamancha, which is an Armenian string

¹⁰⁹ Christofakis, “Music.”

¹¹⁰ **TRIO**

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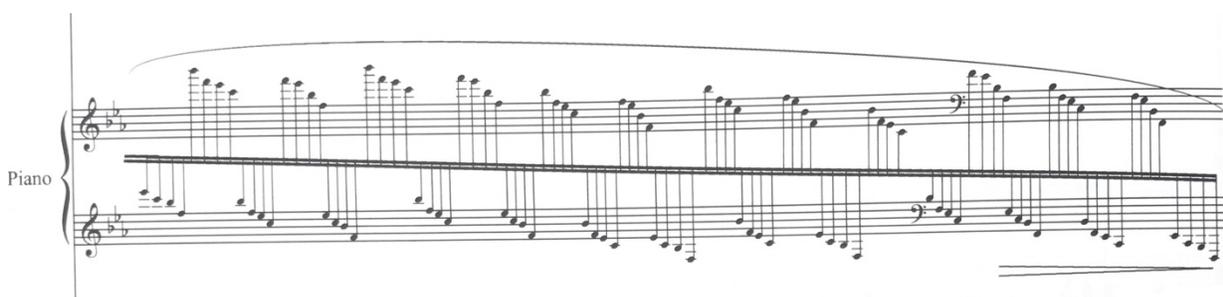
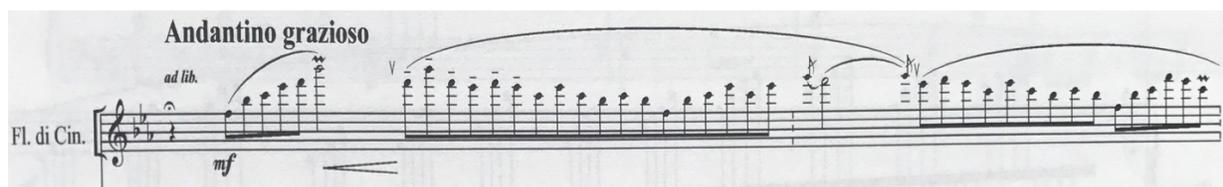
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instrument. It mimics the dancing steps. The Dance commences with a slow introduction by piano solo leading to a slow-quick-quick dancing timbre played by the piano imitating the dhol.

Example 12. Introduction of the third movement starts with the Chinese flute followed by the piano imitating the guzheng. *Yellow River Piano Concerto*, “Wrath of the Yellow River,” m.

1.¹¹¹



Similar to Khachaturian’s works, the *Yellow River Piano Concerto* also contains various elements inspired by Chinese folk music of which the imitation of traditional instruments is of

¹¹¹ YELLOW RIVER, Concerto for Piano and Orchestra Arranged on basis of the Cantata Yellow River By Yin Chengzong, Sheng Lihong, Chu Wanghua, Liu Zhuang All Rights Reserved. Used by permission of the publishers People’s Music Publishing House, Beijing, and Schott Music GmbH & Co. KG, Mainz, Germany.

particular importance. Ironically, Chinese folk music was suppressed at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution since it was claimed reminiscent of the old regime and dynasties.¹¹²

However, the piano concerto grew out of the *Yellow River Cantata*, which was originally scored for Chinese instruments, was able to preserve many of the Chinese characteristics of the Chinese instruments by translating them into the virtuosic piano part.

For instance, the imitation of the guzheng, an ancient Chinese plucked string instrument, appears several times throughout the piano concerto. In the example 12, the first several measures feature the Chinese flute, which is preserved from the original cantata score, as an introduction followed by the piano which is imitating the guzheng. Often in Chinese music, the glissando of the guzheng is used to portray flowing water, which is depicted by the extremely rapid broken chords on the piano.¹¹³

Another idiomatic gesture reminiscent of the Chinese guzheng, which frequently appears in the beginning of the third movement, is illustrated by example 13. This conventional melody would be plucked on the Chinese guzheng with some strummed decorations, which is imitated by the piano.

Besides the guzheng, the following example presents a doleful melody typically played by the pipa in China distinguished by its hasty repeated notes. While repeated notes are relatively easy on the pipa using rotating fingers, greatly virtuosic performance on the piano is required to reflect the clear articulating vibration and resonance of the pipa. The measures here portray the sadness and sorrow of the Chinese people after the Japanese invasion into their motherland.

¹¹² Wagner, *The Contemporary Chinese Historical Drama: Four Studies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 236.

¹¹³ Zhao Xiaosheng, *The Essence of Piano Performance* (Beijing: Huayue Publishing Co., 1999), 129-130.

Example 13. Imitation of the Chinese idiomatic guzheng gesture. *Yellow River Piano Concerto*, “Wrath of the Yellow River,” mm. 6-15.¹¹⁴

This chapter has identified imitations of conventional folk instruments both in representative works by Khachaturian and the *Yellow River Piano Concerto*, which reflect the nationalistic interests of the respective composers. However, several interesting observations can be made to compare the subtle differences of their imitations. First, Khachaturian chose the clarinet to recall the sound of the zurna and duduk, and the clarinet has become a standard Western instrument to mimic the sound of many Armenian string instruments including the Armenian zurna as its timbre closely resembles the folk instrument. However, while the Chinese flute is preserved in the *Yellow River Piano Concerto*, no closely-related Western instruments are chosen to represent the sound of the guzheng and pipa. Instead, the imitations are achieved through placing virtuosic demands on the pianist.

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Example 14. Imitation of the pipa. *Yellow River Piano Concerto*, “Wrath of the Yellow River,”
mm. 64-68.¹¹⁵

The image displays a musical score for Example 14, spanning measures 64 to 68. The score is arranged in six staves. The top staff is for the Piano, with a tempo marking of quarter note = 56. The Piano part features a complex, rhythmic texture with many beamed notes and rests, starting at a piano (*p*) dynamic and increasing to a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. The string parts (VI. I, VI. II, Vlc., Vc., Cb.) are arranged in a block below the piano. The string parts are primarily harmonic, with some rhythmic patterns in the lower strings (Vc. and Cb.) marked *pizz.* (pizzicato). The dynamics for the strings range from piano (*p*) to mezzo-forte (*mf*).

Underneath this surface difference exists the more profound decisive reason for the divergent imitation styles. Khachaturian’s instrumental imitations largely originate from his affection for the folklore that he overheard while he was young. Therefore, his incorporation of Armenian instruments in the Western-styled works is mainly motivated by his desire to break the tradition and create innovative musical forms with the heavy influence from Armenian folk music. Conversely, the instrumental imitations in the *Yellow River Piano Concerto* are attempting to preserve the Chinese instruments originally scored in the *Yellow River Cantata*.

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Therefore the main difference between Khachaturian and Yin lies in their motivation of applying folk music in musical composition. Specifically, for Khachaturian, Armenian folk music and instruments are the foundation and passion for his compositions. However, Yin's imitation of the guzheng and the pipa using piano virtuosic skills in the concerto aims to preserve the special timbres of the Chinese instruments.

THE SOVIET AND CHINESE SOCIALIST REALISM

Initially created by the Soviet Union, socialist realism became an extremely prevalent artistic style amongst socialist countries including the newly born Communist China. The main idea of this form of socialist realism in the arts is to promote and glorify communist concepts and values such as common ownership of natural and social resources and the disappearance of social classes and the state.¹¹⁶ The most enthusiastic advocates were two of the largest countries in the world – the Soviet Union and Communist China. This study will not discuss the socialist ideology from the political perspective. Instead, it will examine the impact on Khachaturian and the group of composers that conceived of the *Yellow River Piano Concerto*.

The most apparent similarity between Aram Khachaturian and the Chinese composing group is the fact that they were highly favored by the political powers in control – Stalin of the Soviet Union and Mao and his wife Jiang Qing of Communist China. Under the control of Stalin, Soviet music was undergoing great difficulties since musical works would only be approved by the government for propaganda purposes. There were four specific guidelines established by the Congress of 1934 to promote Soviet socialist realism and “pan-Sovietism.” The four guidelines were 1) the work must be understandable to the masses; 2) the work should depict scenes of

¹¹⁶ Pavel Korin, *Socialist Realism in Literature and Art* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1971), 95.

daily life; 3) the work should be realistic; 4) the work should support the goals of the political party.¹¹⁷ The most powerful governance committee, who executed those guidelines, was the Union of Soviet Composers which only granted permission based on the political contents of the musical works.

Besides being partisan, musical works must relate closely to workers and be easily understandable to the less-educated classes. Fortunately, Aram Khachaturian and his peers, such as Prokofiev and Shostakovich, were fully aware of the fact that musical composition and publication were only possible if they complied with the government requirements.¹¹⁸ Therefore, their musical compositions carefully followed the political restrictions, which made it possible to promote their artistic works under the political regime. In fact, Khachaturian held the secretary position of the Union of Soviet Composers until his death, which possibly gave him political advantages to the success of his artistic works.¹¹⁹ Additionally, while the four guidelines had largely suppressed the compositions of many musicians, the explicit political order that music ought to be familiar to less-educated workers and peasants naturally encouraged the consideration of more folk elements, such as folk songs and conventional instruments. This happened to be an advantage to the Armenian composer who was heavily influenced by Armenian folk music and was passionate about creating innovative musical forms based upon his folk music experiences. It is not unreasonable to think that this characteristic of Khachaturian gained him favor from Stalin and politically promoted his recognition as an Armenian composer.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Juraga, *Socialist*, 176.

¹¹⁸ Korin, *Socialist*, 32.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, 104.

¹²⁰ Christofakis, "Music."

Similar to what the Soviet Union did a few decades ago, Communist China largely suppressed artistic creation during the Cultural Revolution and the piano was banned as a symbolic representative of Western capitalism and the bourgeois class in 1966 and early 1967.¹²¹ Even the performance of the original *Yellow River Cantata* was banned by Mao Zedong. Additionally, the Central Philharmonic Orchestra, of which Yin Chengzong was a member, had little music to perform since the majority of existing compositions were prohibited by the government. Fortunately, Madame Mao's attention was caught by his great piano performance in 1967, and she began thinking of using Yin to compose national music to serve the political revolution.¹²² Not long after Yin's musical protest in Tiananmen Square, Jiang Qing commissioned a composing group to recreate a piano concerto from Xian Xinghai's *Yellow River Cantata*. With this dramatic story between the Chinese composer and the political figure in power, piano performance was possible for the first time since the beginning of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. The concerto was later added to the list of the "Eight Model Plays," which consisted of only six Beijing operas and two modern ballets, and they were broadcast frequently by radio to the general audience.¹²³ While the purpose was to promote socialist realism art in China and to praise Chairman Mao and his Communist Party, Yin was given a chance to develop his musical works for the young country, and the *Yellow River Piano Concerto* gradually became the most popular piano concerto in China.

According to the discussion above, Khachaturian and Yin shared several commonalities and so do their musical compositions. First, both the composers were composing under intense

¹²¹ Kraus, *Pianos*, 140.

¹²² Before starting his work on the *Yellow River Piano Concerto*, Yin also composed the piano version of arias from the famous model opera – *The Red Lantern* in 1967 and 1968.

¹²³ Barbara Mittler, "Eight Stage Works for 800 Million People: The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in Music – A View from Revolutionary Opera," *The Opera Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (2010): 377.

political suppression, which inevitably brings strong characteristics of socialist realism to their works. Secondly, the works from both musicians gained popularity largely due to their obedience to the communist political demands on musical composition. Lastly, Khachaturian and Yin gained much of their reputation during political turbulence in their representative countries.

However, there are several distinctions caused by their specific social and political environments. For example, the suppression from the Chinese socialist government on musical performance and composition is much more desperate than its Soviet Union counterpart, which did not impose a mass elimination of specific musical styles. Specifically, Western music was completely banned in China at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, which made composing the *Yellow River Piano Concerto* in China considerably more difficult than composing musical works in the Soviet Union. Additionally, except for the political advocacy from the government, Yin's success was largely related to his dramatic protest performance on Tiananmen Square. It was politically dangerous for him yet effective for his musical pursuit. On the other hand, the Armenian composer cleverly adhered to Stalin's orders on the acceptable characteristics of musical compositions, which cleared his pathway to become one of the iconic figures of Russian classical music. Also, Yin's success was incidental to some extent, and he could have been eradicated from Chinese musical history if Jiang Qing and the contemporary influential Party leaders were irritated by his protest.

In conclusion, both Khachaturian and Yin successfully promoted their musical works under political powers who favored socialist realism yet through very distinctive manners.

MUSICAL RECOGNITION AND CONTRIBUTION

Aram Khachaturian and Yin Chengzong are prominent composers from the Soviet Union and socialist China respectively. Both of the composers enjoyed their most productive period

during the historical times of the strongest political suppression in their countries.

Khachaturian's works and Yin's *Yellow River Piano Concerto* had a wide impact on Soviet and Chinese music.

When Armenia became part of the USSR in 1920, Khachaturian was starting his musical career and later was considered as one of the leading composers of the Soviet Union, along with Shostakovich and Prokofiev. Although he studied and became famous at the Moscow Conservatory and later held several high positions in the Union of Soviet Composers, he was most renowned as an Armenian composer and musician from a standpoint of Armenian cultural recognition. In fact, he was coined the "Armenian Tchaikovsky" by critic Richard Ginell.¹²⁴

There are several reasons the Armenian composer achieved such a prestigious appreciation from both the USSR and Armenia. First, his successful musical career closely followed the political needs of the Soviet Union, which gained him large favor from Stalin. This political advantage paved the foundation for him to obtain a higher social status and further promote his musical works as a Soviet Union composer in power. Therefore, it is natural that he became one of the most prolific and influential Soviet Union composers. In addition, this musical passion and motivation were heavily influenced by his experiences with traditional Armenian folk music, which was reflected in his works. Even though Armenia was absorbed into the USSR, Khachaturian always identified himself as Armenian. This was an emotional and cultural bond that he was unable to forge with Russia. An example to support this argument is his Trio for Clarinet, Violin, and Piano. As discussed before, this work imitates Armenian instruments and incorporates music inspired by Armenian folklore, and it was consequently considered bizarre by his peer musicians. However, his Armenian sentiment was deeply ingrained in this

¹²⁴ "Making sure Khachaturian gets his due," last modified October 01, 2003. <http://articles.latimes.com/2003/oct/01/entertainment/et-ginell1>.

work which became one of his early masterpieces that established his international reputation as a composer.

Compared to Khachaturian, Yin's musical works did not bring Chinese folk music elements into a comparable level of international exposure. There are several reasons to explain this difference. First, modern musical compositions were rapidly developing in Western countries. Russia and later the Soviet Union, which produced many renowned musicians, such as the Mighty Five, was a critical component of Western classical music.¹²⁵ Therefore, the musical influence from a prolific musician such as Khachaturian who had vast political advantages is naturally spread more quickly throughout the Western musical world. On the contrary, China's isolationism in foreign policy undoubtedly resulted in a disconnect from the mainstream Western musical world.¹²⁶ Therefore, Yin's works did not receive similar international recognition due to a less energetic musical environment in China.

Secondly, Yin Chengzong was forbidden to compose any music after the downfall of Jiang Qing and her Gang of Four. Because Yin was commissioned by Jiang Qing to compose the *Yellow River Piano Concerto* and later other revolutionary works, he was therefore considered politically aligned, at least to some extent, with the Gang of Four who were accused of being responsible for the 10-year political turmoil of China. As a result, Yin was under house arrest for four years followed by his immigration to the United States in 1983.¹²⁷ Also, Yin's works including the *Yellow River Piano Concerto* were muted in China as people celebrated the collapse of Jiang Qing's political group.

¹²⁵ Gerald Abraham, *Essays on Russian and East European Music: Vladimir Stasov, Man and Critic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 112.

¹²⁶ The Qing dynasty's isolationism in foreign relations did not soften until the First Opium War between China and the United Kingdom.

¹²⁷ Kraus, *Pianos*, 158.

Despite the controversial suppression of the *Yellow River Piano Concerto* shortly after the Cultural Revolution during 1976 and 1980, Yin and his composition gained unprecedented appreciation from both the Chinese professional musical world and the average Chinese audience. Particularly, there were many Chinese piano concertos composed following the *Yellow River Piano Concerto*, which served as a model for combining Western musical forms with Chinese traditional musical features.¹²⁸ Arguably, the biggest and most imperative performance in Yin's life is the performance on Tiananmen Square. What it took was the ultimate courage of a musician to defend his musical pursuit risking the possibility of being putting in jail. Without his brave action, the piano would have not been introduced into China especially during the political turbulence. In fact, the *Yellow River Piano Concerto* would not have existed. Yin's composition has been inspiring generations of Chinese musicians to create artistic works and making Western classical music accessible to the broad audience for the first time of Chinese history.

In summary, both Khachaturian and Yin have been influential in the modern musical world yet in different scopes and in unique ways. The Armenian composer became an iconic figure with his enthusiasm for folk music and obedience to the government. But Yin endured a much tougher course to strive for the survival of Western music and the piano in China. As far as the direct impact of the concerto, it significantly promoted the acceptance of Western classical music in China by blending into the work many Chinese factors that were already well appreciated by Chinese people. Additionally, the *Yellow River Piano Concerto* serves as a pioneer for the advancement of Western classical music in China as well as an encouragement to Chinese composers to create a new form of "Chinese Western classical music."

¹²⁸ One of the outstanding works is Piano Concerto in B-flat major, "The Mountain Forest," by Dunnan Liu et al.

CONCLUSION

The introduction and development of modern classical music in China have experienced a challenging evolution in the past century. Political ideology and poverty held China back for several decades in the area of musical development since the beginning of the twentieth century. Regardless of the cultivation derived from the entertainment needs of the merchants from Western countries or the Jewish refugees from Europe, the Chinese community had little interest in developing a modern system for classical music, especially in the composition of large musical forms or in systematically educating virtuosic pianists.

The Chinese Proletarian Cultural Revolution is typically considered as being disastrous to China's society. However, the very radical political environment cultivated Yin Chengzong, who is still one of the most recognized Chinese pianists and composers in the world. His work *Yellow River Piano Concerto* has been a classic masterpiece in the Chinese musical community and is considered the most representative musical work of patriotism of Chinese people.

It has been nearly a half century since the composition of the *Yellow River Piano Concerto*. Western classical music has been widely accepted in China. Moreover, China has an increasing influence on piano learning, especially for the youngsters. According to research by *Asian Times* and *The Independence*, the number of children studying piano had reached thirty-six million by 2004, while this number for United States was six million.¹²⁹ This favor has rapidly

¹²⁹ Hao Huang, "Why Chinese people play Western classical music: Transcultural roots of music philosophy," *International Journal of Music Education* 30, no. 2 (2012): 161-176.

increased the piano performance skills of the new Chinese generation, among which are internationally recognized young pianists such as Lang Lang and Yundi Li. For these outstanding young Chinese pianists, the *Yellow River Piano Concerto* is a necessity in their repertoire, not only as a symbol of Chinese cultural pride but also as a musical salute to the pioneer Chinese pianist Yin Chengzong.

Although research about the *Yellow River Concerto* has been done by many scholars, especially Chinese musicians, the socio-political connections between Chinese modern music and Soviet classical music are rarely found in literature. This paper has investigated these connections by comparing the *Yellow River Concerto* by Yin Chengzong with several works by the renowned Armenian classical composer – Aram Khachaturian. While the link between Yin and Khachaturian seems unanticipated at first glance, the musical, historical, and political background behind the development of their musical careers are closely related. The most obvious similarity between the two is the historical and political background of the Soviet Union and Communist China. In both countries, the socialist governments were established not long ago, and socialist music was highly demanded as a propaganda tool to fortify socialist ideologies. On the other hand, they are also comparable from several musical perspectives, such as the imitation of special instruments of their own nations and the application of musical idioms of their cultures.

It is necessary for both Yin and Khachaturian to possess extraordinary compositional capabilities and musical skills to be successful. However, the decisive factor of their popularity is their alignment with the political requirements and socialist values held by the governments. In conclusion, the socio-political context of both composers had a profound impact on their

compositions and musical careers, and under the socialist environment, the advocacy from the government is essential to their success.

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APPENDICES



April 24, 2017

Ms. Tracy (Chun-ya) Chang
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