

DEVELOPMENT AND APPLICATION OF ALTERNATE AND NON-TRADITIONAL  
FRENCH CONSERVATORY OBOE TECHNIQUES IN THE PERFORMANCE  
OF TRADITIONAL CHINESE MUSIC

by

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A MANUSCRIPT

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

TUSCALOOSA, ALABAMA

2020

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## ABSTRACT

Scholarship in using the modern French Conservatory oboe for the performance of traditional Chinese music is limited. While many modern techniques have been developed for the performance of contemporary oboe music, most do not address the unique performance practice required to perform traditional Chinese music, and are therefore not applicable. New approaches and new techniques are required in order to realize the potential for effectively presenting Chinese music on the oboe. Recorded performances of traditional Chinese instruments, in particular the *dizi*, *erhu*, and *suona*, and written instructions on performance practice by noted masters of these instruments have been examined. Through careful study of these sources, new methods for producing sounds on the oboe related to these traditional instruments have been developed. These new performance techniques for the modern oboe were applied in a recording of ten traditional and folk Chinese melodies, in arrangements for solo oboe, oboe and piano, and oboe with mixed ensemble. The work represented here in no way claims to match the sensitivity of style and cultural authenticity demonstrated by masters of Chinese music. Rather, it is intended as a starting point for Western oboists to begin respectfully exploring China's millenniums of musical heritage.

## DEDICATION

To my wife Emily, and daughters Elise and Emery, for your tireless patience, understanding, and encouragement. Without your partnership, none of this would even have been imaginable. Thank you.

To my mother, Wilma Larson, and the memory of my late father, Hjalmar Larson. Thank you for always believing in me. Always.

To the memory of Xi Yang, who was a blazing star in the musical heavens. The world was diminished in countless ways by his untimely passing. His encouragement of this project, his generosity in granting me access to numerous orchestral scores, and his frequent calls to China in order to secure permission for reductions and arrangements, made much of this work possible.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Mary Lindsey Bailey for her steadfast advice and support, semester after semester, and for her willingness to embrace this atypical recording project (and my atypical DMA program in general). My committee's enthusiastic support of this project was both energizing and enheartening. It was, and continues to be, very much appreciated.

From the very beginning, if The University of West Alabama's administration had not granted me the flexibility to pursue this degree, none of this would have been possible. I would also like to acknowledge Ms. Sharon Harwell for keeping the Fine Arts Department running just as well when I was away as when I was on campus.

I would like to thank Mr. Mark Turner, but where to begin? This project simply would not have happened without his talent, knowledge, generous spirit, enthusiasm, copyright expertise, and countless hours of sound engineering. I would like to thank Dr. Manley Blackwell for his patience, adaptability, willingness to travel at all hours, and giving spirit. The Carolina International Orchestra, the China National Orchestra, and Ms. Deanne Alenick were instrumental: without our collaboration in 2013, I would have never envisioned such a project. I would also like to thank Mr. Shuwen Zhang for the use of his arrangements, and especially for his clear, practical explanations of Chinese modal theory.

I would like to acknowledge the late Mr. Ralph Gomberg, for imparting the belief that "you can always find a way" [to play it], and thank Mr. Keith Stump, my first oboe teacher, who was the first person to open up the door of alternate fingerings for me.

Northport Baptist Church graciously allowed the use of their sanctuary for the recording sessions. Thank you.

Finally, I would like to thank Mr. Michael Carlyle for his eternal friendship, and specifically, for transporting the *sko daey* from halfway around the world.

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## INTRODUCTION

With the emergence of China as a global cultural power, the Western world is experiencing ever increasing exposure to that country's nearly 4000-year-old functional musical heritage. According to Xi Yang, founder of the Carolina International Orchestra (Raleigh, North Carolina), China's interest in hosting Western art music ensembles within their country is being supplanted by a strong desire to showcase its own ensembles to the world through global tours.<sup>1</sup> One only has to note the frequent Western tours of the China National Orchestra,<sup>2</sup> China Philharmonic Orchestra,<sup>3</sup> Shanghai Symphony Orchestra,<sup>4</sup> and the China National Peking Opera Company,<sup>5</sup> along with the popularity of Western-based Chinese cultural organizations such as Shen Yun Performing Arts, to see the effect of this endeavor.

As these professional ensembles from China are featured with increasing frequency in American venues, thousands of years of musical performance practice is on display. While there were efforts to formally present Chinese music to Western audiences as early as the Nineteenth Century (Austrian composer Louise Haenel de Cronenthal's efforts are a notable example<sup>6</sup>), due to its recent – and broadening – exposure, this massive body of traditional and folk music is finding its way into Western violin, flute, and piano repertoire with increasing frequency. Flute players in particular have demonstrated an adroit ability to develop performance practice

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<sup>1</sup> Xi Yang, conversation with the author, April, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Western tours in 1997, 1998, 1999, 2006, 2010, 2013, and 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Western tours in 2005, 2008, 2014, and 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Western tours in 2003, 2004, and 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Western tour in 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Sheila Melvin, "How China Influenced Western Classical Music," Caixin, Caixin Global Limited, published May 7, 2016, <https://www.caixinglobal.com/2016-05-07/how-china-influenced-western-classical-music-101052970.html>.

compatible with the music of their Chinese counterparts. Yet, the presentation of traditional Chinese music on most other Western instruments, such as the oboe, is encountered with much less frequency.

Scholarship in the area of using the modern French Conservatory oboe in performance of traditional Chinese music is quite limited. Works exist which address extended techniques and alternate/enhanced fingerings, such as *The Oboe Unbound*,<sup>7</sup> an extensive compendium by Libby Van Cleve. However, the intention of these compilations is to address the challenges the oboist will encounter in modern Western compositions. Due to the nature of Chinese traditional music and the non-Western performance practice and ornamentation required for its proper presentation, these publications fall short in providing effective guidance. In most cases, they are irrelevant to the performance of this body of music. A combination of new approaches and new techniques is required to realize the potential of Chinese musical performance on Western instruments, specifically for the purpose of this project, performance on the French Conservatory oboe. The paper addresses the development of this new performance practice and applies it through multiple arrangements of Chinese folk melodies and traditional music featured on this document's companion recording.

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<sup>7</sup> Libby Van Cleve, *The Oboe Unbound: Contemporary Techniques* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers), 2014.

## MILLENNIA OF HISTORY

China is a land of unimaginable, and unquantifiable, diversity. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the music of the Chinese people. For millennia,<sup>8</sup> there has been both functional music<sup>9</sup> – music for ceremonies, rituals, and festivals – and also a type of absolute music<sup>10</sup> that exists primarily for entertainment. Throughout the country, musicians have abounded: itinerant street musicians, Daoist ritualists, specialists in Chinese opera, *xian sang* entertainers (*xian sheng*<sup>11</sup>), and servant performers employed by the upper classes. Amateur musicians have come from all strata of Chinese society: village residents performing in local music societies, cosmopolitan women gathering to sing songs telling of the beauty of nature and of romance, and celebrated scholars (such as Xiao Youmei and Wang Guangqi<sup>12</sup>) studying the performance practice, folklore, and legend associated with revivals of the music of various eras and locales.

During the periods known as “Spring,” “Autumn,” and “Warring States” (approximately 770 - 221 B.C.), the Chinese musical arts advanced rapidly.<sup>13</sup> Diverse families of instruments appeared, including some proto-Mongol examples that ultimately developed into the current *huqin* family of bowed string instruments, featuring the popular *erhu*. The Han Dynasty (206 BC - 220 A.D.), considered a “golden age” in Chinese history,<sup>14 15</sup> witnessed the development of early *qupai*. *Qupai* were stock tunes utilized by musicians from the Han Dynasty to the present

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<sup>8</sup> Jie Jin, *Chinese Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 1.

<sup>9</sup> “Yayue” is a type of ceremonial music.

<sup>10</sup> “Yanyue” is a type of music for entertainment.

<sup>11</sup> Bangqing Han, *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*, trans. Eileen Chang (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), xi.

<sup>12</sup> Jin, 139.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>14</sup> Jinghao Zhou, *Remaking China's Public Philosophy for the Twenty-First Century* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2003), 34.

<sup>15</sup> This era saw Confucianism officially established, the development of papermaking, the introduction of negative numbers in mathematics, and the establishment of the far-reaching Silk Road trade network, among other developments.

time, and most often range from 20 to 60 measures in length utilizing duple meter.<sup>16</sup> The *pipa* was introduced in China during this era, imported from Central Asia along the Silk Road trade route.<sup>17</sup> The Imperial Music Bureau, an organization which had been in existence for decades prior to the rise of the Han, was dramatically expanded. It attempted to unite musical practices across China by collecting and editing folk music,<sup>18</sup> which was then utilized for court and military purposes. By the time of the T'ang Dynasty (618-907 A.D.), formal music education had been established through one of four<sup>19</sup> national performance organizations.<sup>20</sup> Key features of *qupai* were developed during this era, particularly a specific style of three-part theme and variations that utilized progressive ornamentation and metrical shifts.<sup>21</sup> *Qupai* from this era are still performed today, such as in the commonly heard *Wannian Huan* ("Thousand Years of Joy").<sup>22</sup> The extensive development of *qupai* practices by the T'ang contributed to the maturation of traditional Chinese opera by the time of the Song Dynasty (960 AD - 1279 AD). Perhaps not coincidentally, *qupai* music, widely used in Chinese opera, came to full prominence at this time. Through successive dynasties, particularly during the extensive period of the Ming and Qing (1368 AD - 1911 AD collectively), the Chinese people developed new instruments,

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<sup>16</sup> Bell Yung and Evelyn Sakakida Rawski, *Harmony and Counterpoint: Ritual Music in Chinese Context*, Vol. 10 (Redwood City, California: Stanford University Press, 1996), 30.

<sup>17</sup> John Myers, *The Way of the Pipa* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1992), 1.

<sup>18</sup> Zhenggang Fei, Tianyou Wang, and Lang Ye, *China: Five Thousand Years of History and Civilization* (Hong Kong: City University of Hong Kong Press, 2007), 459.

<sup>19</sup> Yinliu Yang, *Manuscript of Ancient Chinese Music History* (Beijing: People's Music Publication House, 1981), 233.

<sup>20</sup> *Dayueshu* may best be understood as a conservatory, where the program of study and examinations took place over a period of ten to fifteen years. *Guchuishe* provided ceremonial marches with percussion and winds; membership totaled over 10,000 musicians. *Jiaofang* provided music, dance, and theater for the royal court. *Liyuan* was located inside the palace where the *Fa Qu* style was practiced; *Fa Qu* was music exclusively for the Emperor.

<sup>21</sup> John Witzleben, *"Silk and Bamboo" Music in Shanghai: The Jiangnan Sizhu Instrumental Ensemble Tradition* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1995), 71.

<sup>22</sup> Alan Thrasher, *Qupai in Chinese Music: Melodic Models in Form and Practice* (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 2016), 19.

refined the instruments already in use (such as tripling the number of frets on the pipa, expanding its range<sup>23</sup>), and musical styles and practice evolved. It was during these centuries that the prominence and visibility of vernacular music came to match that of state-sponsored music.<sup>24</sup>

While state music bureaus and institutions still existed and even expanded, the ethnic diversity of China spawned numerous regional styles of music. One author refers to these as musical “regional dialects.”<sup>25</sup> Categorized today by eleven geographic regions or identifiable people groups, they include *Guangxi*, *Han*, *Hua'er*, Inner Mongolian, Korean, *Kuaiban*, *Northeastern China*, *Sichuan*, *Tibetan*, *Xinjiang*, and *Yunnan*.<sup>26</sup> It should also be noted that there is a style of traditional music known as *Sizhu* (literally, “Silk and Bamboo”) that is found in multiple regions across the country, such as Fujian, Guangdong, Yunnan, and Mongolia, in addition to Taiwan and its original source in Jiangnan.<sup>27</sup> Owing to its source, it is often referred to as *Jiangnan Sizhu*. Highly improvisatory, it operates in similar fashion to American Jazz, though pre-dating that musical style by centuries.<sup>28</sup> In addition, dozens of folk styles abound,<sup>29</sup> including some not easily categorized by the eleven general types previously listed.

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<sup>23</sup> Myers, 18.

<sup>24</sup> Jin, 29.

<sup>25</sup> Myers, 32.

<sup>26</sup> *Guangxi* music contains symbolic language and references to ancient Chinese folklore; *Han* music is similar to *Guangxi*; *Hua'er* is a form of a cappella singing from the northwestern mountainous region; Inner Mongolian folk songs feature extension of vowel sounds and multiphonic vocal technique; brilliant rhythms and melodies are heard in Korean music from ethnic Korean areas throughout China; *Kuaiban* is a rhythmic hybrid of speech and song; Northeastern Chinese music is highly diverse, and the *youyouzha*-type lullaby originated there; Sichuan is known for its style of opera and also the Taoist *Yayue* music; Tibetan consists of vocal and instrumental forms of Buddhist music; *Xinjiang* is known for an intricate twelve-section compositional formula; *Yunnan* is highly diverse, and includes antiphonal and microtonal vocal music.

<sup>27</sup> Witzleben, 9.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 1, 6.

<sup>29</sup> Gavin Van Hinsbergh, “Traditional Classical Chinese Music,” updated May 23, 2018. <https://www.chinahighlights.com/travelguide/culture/traditional-music.htm>.

## EXPRESSION AND PHILOSOPHY

The concept of repetition, or recurrence, is foundational to expression in the Chinese fine arts.<sup>30</sup> Nowhere is this seen more clearly than in Chinese traditional music.<sup>31</sup> Two types of recurrence exist: standard melodies, the *qupai* previously discussed, and standard subjects, called *timu* (topoi). These standard subjects may be shared among the fine arts disciplines. Robert H. van Gulik writes, “A *timu*, such as for instance, a waterfall descending from pine-clad rocks, may inspire alike poets, painters, and musicians.”<sup>32</sup> Even a cursory examination of the titles contained in this document’s accompanying reference recording would reveal the presence of recurring *timu*. Elements of nature, especially idealized natural imagery (e.g., “Listen to the Gentle Wind,” “Golden Breaks the Dawn,” or, “Beautiful Night”) are commonplace. Even the most well-known and frequently played Chinese traditional/folk piece, “Dance of the Yao Tribe,” has the alternate title of “Red Sun.” Within the pieces themselves, *qupai* and related motives may return (or, “recur,” reinforcing the concept of recurrence) more frequently than the main theme and primary motives of a typical Western work. However, this is not to say that melodic and motivic development is lacking. Various compositional techniques are used, including augmentation and diminution, with augmentation featuring multiple added and passing tones between principal melodic notes as the preferred technique.<sup>33</sup> This particular type of augmentation is known as *fangman jiahua*, or, “making slow and adding flowers.”<sup>34 35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Myers, 34.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>32</sup> Robert H. van Gulik, *The Lore of the Chinese Lute* (Bangkok: Orchid Press, 2010), 88.

<sup>33</sup> Isabel Wong, “The Music of China” (lecture transcript), 23, accessed December 19, 2019, <http://cabrillo.edu/~mstrunk/Lectures/China.pdf>.

<sup>34</sup> Thrasher, 31.

<sup>35</sup> Wong, 23.

For millennia, the five notes of the pentatonic scale and the eight categories of traditional Chinese instruments<sup>36</sup> have been associated with cardinal points, seasons, numbers, and various natural occurrences.<sup>37</sup> Regarding the imagery of individual pieces of music, Kuo-Huang Han wrote, “Since ancient times, the Chinese people seem to favor ‘non-musical’ or ‘extra-musical’ ideas in musical subjects.”<sup>38</sup> While this may superficially sound like a description of Western “program music,” there are conceptual and philosophical differences between, for example, the traditional *Three Variations on Plum Blossom*, and Berlioz’s *Symphonie Fantastique*.

In *Beyond Culture*,<sup>39</sup> anthropologist Edward T. Hall notes that in a high-context culture<sup>40</sup> such as China, music (and other art) may often be presented in such a way that the listener must contribute their own knowledge of a subject in order to complete the intended experience. Consequently, a listener may perceive no musical representation of water in *High Mountains and Flowing Water*, and discern no impression of birds in *Wild Geese Landing on the Sandbank*. In *qupai*, for example, the historical association of the stock melody with its subject matter connects the listener to its extra-musical association. It is this collaboration between musician and audience which Han describes as “Psychological Program Music.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Wood, stone, silk, bamboo, metal, clay, gourd, leather.

<sup>37</sup> Kuo-Huang Han, "The Chinese Concept of Program Music," in *Asian Music 10, no. 1* (1978): 17. Accessed January 10, 2020. doi:10.2307/834123. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/834123>.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Edward T. Hall, *Beyond Culture* (New York: Anchor Books, 1976), 105.

<sup>40</sup> According to Hall, a high-context culture relies heavily on unspoken communication; a deep understanding of history and community is necessary for perspective on most interactions; there is meaning in what is not said.

<sup>41</sup> Han, 25.

## ORNAMENTATION OF QUPAI-STYLE MELODIES

The challenge for the modern performer of traditional and folk Chinese music is to determine where the original melody came from, what ornaments are part of accepted convention, which are stylistically appropriate, and whether to “cross-pollinate” a performance with other regional ornamentation.<sup>42</sup> For example, the Northern Flute Style<sup>43</sup> relies heavily on various tonguing techniques, while the previously mentioned *Jiangnan Sizhu* uses ensemble improvisation as its defining element. No matter what the style, it is traditional for the performer to apply the ornaments in an improvisatorial fashion during the actual performance.<sup>44</sup>

An approach featuring three sections is common in a performance of traditional Chinese music.<sup>45</sup> In the first section, the original melody, often a *qupai*, is presented with little or no ornamentation. In the second section, the melody receives a moderate application of ornaments, with the final section utilizing extensive ornamentation. Each of these three sections may feature an *accelerando*, the change in tempo acting as a comprehensive ornament applied over the entire section. If the final section’s ornamentation is particularly extensive, such that a fast or accelerating tempo is technically not feasible, the tempo is reduced to what is either manageable for the performer, or musically pleasing with regard to the chosen ornamentation. In such a case, an *accelerando* is generally not utilized.

Many ornaments typically performed on the *dizi*,<sup>46</sup> *erhu*<sup>47</sup>, and *suona*<sup>48</sup> have been used as models for the techniques developed in this project. In his book series, *How to Play the Dizi*,

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<sup>42</sup> Jonathan Stock, *Chinese Flute Solos* (Mainz: Schott, 1994), v.

<sup>43</sup> H. H. Lee, *How to Play the Dizi, the Chinese Bamboo Flute the Advanced Skills* (Columbia, South Carolina: H. H. Lee, 2019), 5.

<sup>44</sup> Penyeh Tsao, *Tradition and Change in the Performance of Chinese Music* (Netherlands: Routledge, 1998), 22.

<sup>45</sup> Thrasher, 176.

<sup>46</sup> The Chinese transverse flute, constructed from bamboo.

expert in Chinese performance practice H. H. Lee lists the majority of techniques employed by the modern *dizi* artist. As each ornament may be varied, sometimes to an astonishing degree, the given marking may represent a wide spectrum of effects. The following indications, common to *dizi* ornamentation, are applicable to oboe technique:

*Flying fingers*



**Figure 1.**

Suggested marking for “flying fingers” ornament.

The fingers of the player travel laterally back and forth over the keyholes of the instrument in a brushing motion. The action of a single finger has limited effect on the plateau system oboe, with the exception of the open ring utilized in D-E motion. In notes that find their complete fingering in the left hand, this ornament may be executed more successfully if all fingers of the right hand engage in the brushing motion. Motion of the finger over the F# key will obviously have no effect as that key is not vented. Despite this, however, the technique is more easily facilitated when all fingers of a hand move in concert. Care must be taken not to actually depress keys that are being “brushed,” as it is a technique that modifies airflow only.

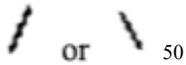
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<sup>47</sup> A bowed Chinese instrument with two strings.

<sup>48</sup> A Chinese double-reed sorna.

<sup>49</sup> Lee, 4.

### *Linyin*



**Figure 2.**

Suggested marking for “linyin” ornament.

Like a western glissando, the player moves from one note to the note one octave above (or below). Normally, notes within the pentatonic scale in use at the time are utilized. Spanning intervals other than the octave is rare, and speed of motion may vary depending on the expressive effect desired.

### *Duoyin*



**Figure 3.**

Suggested marking for “duoyin” ornament.

Move aggressively from one note to the next, creating a percussive resonance. Intervals of a seventh, sixth, and fourth are common.<sup>52</sup> Individual notes should not be heard – this is a gesture ornament. The *duoyin* is only effective on oboe where the arrival note has more tone holes covered than the initial note of the ornament (such as when moving from G4 downward to C4):

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Changning Chai, “The Dizi (Chinese Bamboo Flute) Its Representative Repertoires in the Years from 1949 to 1985,” (DMA Thesis, University of Sydney, 2013), 91, <https://ses.library.usyd.edu.au/handle/2123/10771?show=full>.

the arrival note lengthens the sounding part of the instrument. This ornament is used frequently in Northern Chinese Style.

*Dieyin*



**Figure 4.**

Suggested marking for “dieyin” ornament.

Quickly and lightly sound the notes contained within the interval between a grace note and its primary note – generally the intervals of a seventh, sixth, or second are featured. A type of very fast glissando, the player must decide whether to stay within the pentatonic scale or to introduce added notes. While *dieyin* is similar to descending *linyiu*, *dieyin* is played rapidly enough that individual notes are not heard.

*Dayin*



**Figure 5.**

Suggested marking for “dayin” ornament.

The *dayin* requires the player to hit the key of the next lower note repeatedly and percussively, dividing the primary note into a series of segmented tones. For example, a sustained F# may be

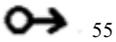
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<sup>53</sup> Lee, 4.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

segmented by a series of percussive Es; tone production stops after each staccato E is sounded and begins again with the return to F#. *Dayin* is only used in Southern Chinese Style.

### *Rouyin*



### **Figure 6.**

Suggested marking for “rouyin” ornament.

Repeatedly move the finger in the vertical plane before engaging the key; on a plateau oboe, this has the greatest effect with E-D motion due to the open ring; care must be taken to only touch the key at the bottom of each stroke, so that the key itself does not move. This has the effect of altering the tone color of the upper note, while subtly modifying the pitch.

### *Harmonic*



### **Figure 7.**

Suggested marking for harmonic tones.

The production of an overtone through over-blowing; typically used for a short grace note preceding a note which is more sustained. This may sound a note that may otherwise be technically inaccessible or change the tone color of the grace note. For example, a B5 grace note

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

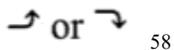
<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

moving to D5 may be more effectively (and colorfully) performed by fingering G5, overblowing, and utilizing a relatively hard articulation.

### *Zengyin*

Due to the complexity of the graphic, Lee's symbol for *Zengyin* is not practical for the Western musician when marking a part. The technique, adding a short note that is lower or higher by several steps after the primary note has sounded, can instead be easily indicated by a grace note. It is widely used in many types of Chinese music. Additionally, there are ornaments and effects that are not indicated in Lee's list, or the marking Lee provides is not practical for the oboist.<sup>57</sup> Also, a number of ornaments and expressive techniques encountered in traditional *erhu* and *suona* performances may be applied to oboe. These require a system of markings, with the following symbols applied for this project.

### *Pitch bends, up or down*



### **Figure 8.**

Suggested marking for pitch bends, up or down.

Curved arrows suffice for pitch bends. A pitch alteration of 30 cents<sup>59</sup> or more is required for full effect. This may be one of the most difficult ornaments for the modern oboist to successfully

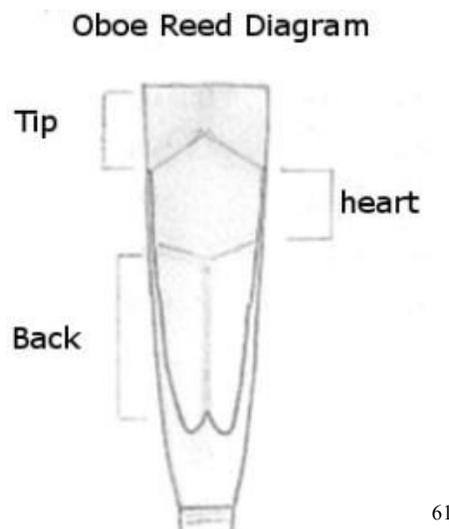
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<sup>57</sup> Lee's mark for finger-vibrato is a common marking to indicate a half-hole fingering, and could easily be misinterpreted by the modern oboist. Related issues exist with other markings.

<sup>58</sup> Lee, 4.

<sup>59</sup> Approximately one-third of a semitone.

perform, as control of the instrument's pitch is a skill that is strived for through many years of study. The reed chosen for a performance that includes pitch bends may need to be modified, or even made specifically with this capability. To achieve sufficient flexibility, a thinner tip, greater blend/less concavity between the tip and heart/plateau, and thin or possibly even no rails on the side of the heart may be necessary.<sup>60</sup>



**Figure 9.**

Reed diagram with tip, heart, and back regions marked.

If the reed is specifically being made for pitch flexibility, choosing a staple with a small diameter opening (the opening where the air enters the staple) may allow the oboist to vary pitch to a greater degree, particularly in upper ranges.<sup>62</sup> In addition, a reed balanced more toward the tip should more readily respond to the player's embouchure manipulation. Embouchure

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<sup>60</sup> Terminology for the American-scrape reed is used here.

<sup>61</sup> "Oboe Reed Diagram," Midwest Musical Imports, accessed January 14, 2020.

<http://mmimports.com/wp-content/uploads/old-website/2013/03/reeddiagram-246x300.jpg>

<sup>62</sup> Elaine Douvas, conversation with the author, February, 2013.

manipulation itself may be the greatest factor in successfully accomplishing appropriately wide pitch bends. Multiple components will operate in tandem; most, if not all may not be part of the oboist's standard performance practice, as controlled pitch variation of 30 cents or more is not called for when playing the standard repertoire:

*Rolling in or out on the reed.* In other words, varying the amount of reed held in the player's embouchure and inside of the mouth. In general, the less reed in the mouth, the lower the pitch.

*Favoring the tip.* If a reed naturally possesses a degree of flexibility, playing "more on the tip" (less reed in the mouth) will offer greater opportunity to vary the pitch.

*Compression.* A "biting" style of pressure may be required to control a flexible reed, or to bring the instrument up to pitch if the oboist is playing on the tip.

*Rounded, open embouchure with variable downward pressure of the left hand.* In general, these two components work together. A rounded embouchure (the opposite of smiling, where the corners of the mouth are pulled in toward the reed) allows the reed to vibrate more freely, and may also slightly open the aperture of the reed. These outcomes, however, may cause the pitch to sag unintentionally. Gently pressing the reed into the lower lip via left hand downward pressure on the oboe (without changing the angle of the instrument itself in relation to the player), will recover the pitch center, and give the player another option to adjust pitch for expressive purposes.

*Variable support of the air column, variation of air speed.* A flexible approach to the air travelling through the instrument will aid in modification of the pitch center. For some styles of American oboe playing where the player has learned to inhale and establish internal air pressure before beginning the actual tone production, this may be a difficult

concession. However, reducing air support and consequently allowing the pitch to drop may aid in pitch bends, and if the player typically increases airspeed entering the reed by raising the back of the tongue, relaxing the tongue and lowering it to the bed of the mouth may also be useful.

A discussion of equipment used in the accompanying recording may be found in this document's "Performance Materials" section, with particular attention paid to reed choice. The terminology for the following three terms is original to this document:

*Troncare*

Ⓓ<sup>63</sup>

**Figure 10.**

Suggested marking for "troncare" ornament.

Meaning "to cut off" or "truncate" in Italian, *troncare* is the term I have applied to a variation of the *zengyin* ornament, indicated by a circled capital "T." In some flute styles such as the Northern style,<sup>64</sup> in addition to the trailing "grace note" of the *zengyin*, there is a resonant pop that clearly sounds. In order to replicate this effect, as the trailing grace note begins to sound, the oboist aggressively stops the vibration of the reed and also the airflow by applying the tongue to the reed in such a way as to block the aperture. The tongue should remain on the reed for an instant longer than what is needed to silence the instrument, to prevent any extraneous sounds. An "open" reed (one with a large aperture) will likely be more successful in producing a noticeable "pop."

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<sup>63</sup> Unicode circled Latin capital letter "T" U+24c9, public domain.

<sup>64</sup> Stock, v.

*Phantom note*

Ⓟ<sup>65</sup>

**Figure 11.**

Suggested marking for “phantom note” ornament.

Similar to *troncare*, in a phantom note the primary note is followed by a trailing grace note. However, in this case the grace note is stopped almost simultaneously as it begins to sound. It is not allowed to achieve full resonance. In addition, the desired “pop” of *troncare* is avoided. Unlike *troncare*, this is a subtle ornament which is unlikely to be heard at all in an ensemble setting, therefore its use must generally be relegated to unaccompanied music. I indicate it with a circled capital “P.”

*Un quarto*

Ⓠ<sup>66</sup>

**Figure 12.**

Suggested marking for “un quarto” ornament.

This is a quarter-step trill. Like a resonance trill, a large body of literature from the 1950s onward calls for such techniques. Microtonal fingering charts for the oboe, such as those found in the previously mentioned *The Oboe Unbound*,<sup>67</sup> and also *The Techniques of Oboe Playing*,<sup>68</sup> provide options for most notes.

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<sup>65</sup> Unicode circled Latin capital letter “P” U+24c5, public domain.

<sup>66</sup> Unicode circled Latin capital letter “Q” U+24c6, public domain.

<sup>67</sup> Van Cleve.

### *Trillo of the Air*

Chai Changning, in his extensive survey of *dizi* literature, references the *Trillo of the Air* technique.<sup>69</sup> This is a slow, exceptionally exaggerated vibrato. It is a special, heavy effect that is intended to be full of emotion.<sup>70</sup> I utilize the “vib” abbreviation for vibrato followed by an exclamation mark as the indication for this technique. Should another oboist find this marking too whimsical, any desired modification of “vib” would suffice. It may be necessary, especially on half-hole fingerings, to augment diaphragm vibrato using synchronized embouchure vibrato in order to achieve the necessary amplitude for this technique to be effective.

### *Huayin fuhuayin slide*

The *Huayin fuhuayin slide*<sup>71</sup> is a combination of the upward pitch bend followed immediately by a downward pitch bend, or downward followed by upward. This returns the player to the original note, and can be indicated with a combination of the previously noted pitch bend arrows (which instructed the player to change pitch in only one direction).

### *Timbral trill*

The timbral trill produces different timbres through rapid alternation of different fingerings for the same pitch. This technique is also known as a color trill, enharmonic trill, unison tremolo, or *bariolage*.<sup>72</sup> A timbral trill changes the character of sound more than it changes the actual pitch of a note, and is marked here using the letters “ttr.” Applied expressively, it may be executed

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<sup>68</sup> Peter Veale, *The Techniques of Oboe Playing: A Compendium with Additional Remarks on the Oboe d'Amore and the Cor Anglais* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1994).

<sup>69</sup> Chai, 99.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid

<sup>72</sup> Van Cleve, 270.

slowly, quickly, or with a change in velocity through its designated note value. Many available references notate fingerings that will alter the characteristic sound of a given note. Music from the middle of the twentieth century onward has often utilized such techniques. The specific timbral trills used in the accompanying recording will be noted later in this document. An open-style embouchure, one that applies less pressure to the reed, may allow the timbral trill to sound higher in pitch, outside of the established pitch center. Pressing upward on the oboe with the left thumb will move the reed against the upper lip of the embouchure, exaggerating the pitch-raise (or sharpness) of the technique. This may be desirable to more closely imitate a particular style or effect, especially if the original instrument utilizes a cross-fingering to accomplish the technique.

Beyond traditional ornamentation and other expressive techniques indigenous to Chinese traditional music, many Western musical markings both apply and are frequently used. These include tremolo, slur, crescendo-decrescendo, tempo-accelerando-decelerando, and trill. Note that when playing Chinese court music, and also Southern-style Chinese music such as *Jiannan sizhu*, trills must start from the note above.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

## ARRANGING THE ANCIENT

All traditional Chinese music is melodic rather than harmonic. Experiments with Western-style harmony did not appear in China until after Western music was introduced by Jesuit missionaries sometime between 1540 and 1582.<sup>74</sup> However, not until the efforts of the composer Xiao Youmei (1884-1940) and the New Culture Movement<sup>75</sup> did Western harmony and the Western-style classical orchestra<sup>76</sup> begin to be used to accompany performances of traditional Chinese music.<sup>77</sup> This practice grew in popularity through the twentieth century, although it was officially discouraged during the Cultural Revolution of 1966-1976. It reached the pinnacle of exposure with a performance of works for *pipa* and orchestra by Liu Dehai and the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 1979, and then on multiple concerts in the 1980s with Liu and the Berlin Philharmonic.<sup>78</sup>

The following works are the arrangements of traditional and folk Chinese melodies found on the recording which accompanies this document. They are grouped in three general categories: works for solo oboe, works accompanied by a single instrument, and works for mixed ensemble:

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<sup>74</sup> Kevin Knight, “Catholic Encyclopedia: The Church in China,” (accessed January 6, 2020). <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03669a.htm>.

<sup>75</sup> A movement of the 1910s and 20s calling for a new Chinese culture based on Western standards.

<sup>76</sup> Tsao, 24.

<sup>77</sup> Wong, 35.

<sup>78</sup> Chai, 17, 32.

## Piece for Solo Oboe

*Perpetual Spring* is a folksong from *Jiangsu*, the coastal province north of Shanghai. *Jiangsu* is renowned for its gardens, and since the time of the *Sui* and *T'ang* dynasties has been a major cultural and commercial center for China. The original melody, sixteen measures in length and processional in nature, is presented in the first section with minimal ornamentation. In this arrangement, the traditional three-part form is followed, where each section is progressively more ornamented. Ornaments follow the Northern flute style, including the use of *duoyin*, *zengyin*, *troncare*, and Western style grace notes. The techniques of *zengyin* and *troncare* are two of the most distinctive features of Northern flute style.

## Pieces for Oboe with Another Instrument

*Golden Cloud (Yun Qing)* is scored for oboe and Chinese “flowerpot” drum, Cambodian *sko daey* style. *Golden Cloud* is also commonly known as *Cloud Festival* and *Auspicious Cloud*. It is one of the *Jiangnan sizhu chuantong badaqu* (The Traditional Eight Great Pieces of *Jiangnan Sizhu*).<sup>79</sup> It is arranged here by Erik Larson in five sections, with each section featuring a progressively faster tempo. The last three sections are written with extensive melodic elaboration (“adding flowers”). Many ornaments and techniques are utilized throughout this arrangement: *duoyin*, *zengyin*, *troncare*, *phantom notes*, *pitch bends*, *harmonics*, *timbral trills*, and *un quarto*.

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<sup>79</sup> “Jiangnan sizhu,” *China Daily* online, March 8, 2012, [http://jiangsu.chinadaily.com.cn/taicang/2012-03/08/content\\_14790179.htm](http://jiangsu.chinadaily.com.cn/taicang/2012-03/08/content_14790179.htm).

*Butterfly Lovers* is scored for oboe and piano. It appears on this recording with the kind permission of the arranger, Shuwen Zhang. From the *ShaoXing* Opera about the lovers Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai who were ultimately turned into two butterflies, Zhang originally scored this arrangement for clarinet in A. It is written in traditional three-part Western form with codetta, and for facilitating performance of the ornaments on oboe, for this recording it is performed in the key of A-flat major. The composer has elaborated extensively on the original melody throughout. Ornaments used in the performance include *duoyin*, *troncare*, pitch bends, and timbral trills.

*Song of Four Seasons* is scored for oboe and piano. Like *Butterfly Lovers*, it is recorded here with the kind permission of the arranger, Shuwen Zhang. It begins with an improvised, suona-like section in the oboe part. After the introduction, a three-part Western form with a metrically contrasting middle section presents the two main melodic ideas. *Duoyin*, *dieyin*, *zengyin*, resonance trills, and *un quarto* are heard.

*Trail of Angels* is performed here on oboe and piano, and was originally scored for flute and piano by Chen Yue. This beautiful arrangement is available on Muscores, and is in the public domain.<sup>80</sup> *Zengyin*, pitch bends, timbral trills, and *un quarto* are heard in addition to standard Western grace notes and added notes.

*Jasmine Flower* is a *Jiangsu* folk song from the *Qing* dynasty. It is classified as a *xiaodiao*, a type of *qupai* that has specifically become popular in urban areas.<sup>81</sup> Based on an arrangement for violin and piano, it has been adapted here for oboe and used in this recording with the permission and enthusiastic support of the original arranger, Keith Terrett. It is in three-

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<sup>80</sup> Yue Chen, "Trail of Angels," Muscores, Muscores BVBA, published February 13, 2016, accessed November 11, 2019, <https://muscores.com/user/6539146/scores/1751176>.

<sup>81</sup> Alan T. Thrasher, *Sizhu Instrumental Music of South China: Ethos, Theory and Practice* (Brill: Leiden, The Netherlands, 2008), 116.

part form with slow introduction and codetta. This recording utilizes *duoyin*, phantom notes, timbral trills, and pitch bends.

*Beautiful Night* is a work for *erhu* composed early in the twentieth century by Liu Tianhua.<sup>82</sup> It is arranged here by Erik Larson for oboe and piano; ornaments commonly performed on *erhu*, in particular pitch bends and trills, are used. *Duoyin*, *zengyin*, and timbral trills also appear briefly.

### **Pieces for Mixed Ensemble**

*Women of Flowers* is scored for oboe, string quartet, flute, bass clarinet, piano, percussion I and percussion II. This chamber adaptation was made possible by Xi Yang,<sup>83</sup> graciously providing access to a fully orchestrated score and enthusiastically supporting this project. Solo oboe ornaments include *duoyin*, *zengyin*, pitch bends, timbral trills, *Huayin fuhuyayin slide*, and flying fingers. Due to the subtlety of the effect when realized on a plateau system oboe, the flying fingers technique (only used in the final sustained ensemble chord) is barely audible; high quality audio reproduction equipment is required when listening to the recording in order to discern the effect.

*Listen to the Gentle Wind* is scored for oboe, string quartet, flute, bass clarinet, piano, percussion I and percussion II, in a chamber adaptation made possible by Xi Yang. Passages of slow melodic lines alternate with passages of improvised percussion. Ornaments performed by the solo oboe include *dieyin*, *duoyin*, pitch bends, and timbral trills.

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<sup>82</sup> 1895–1932.

<sup>83</sup> Xi Yang is the rights owner for the orchestral arrangements of “Women of Flowers,” “Listen to the Gentle Wind,” and “Dance of the Yao Tribe.”

*Dance of the Yao Tribe* is scored for oboe, string quartet, flute, bass clarinet, piano, percussion I and percussion II. Like *Women of Flowers* and *Listen to the Gentle Wind*, this adaptation was made possible by Xi Yang. *Dance of the Yao Tribe* is one of the most popular pieces of Chinese folk music internationally,<sup>84</sup> and appears in many versions and arrangements.<sup>85</sup> Ornaments in the oboe part include pitch bend, *duoyin*, timbral trills, and *trillo of the air*.

*Golden Breaks the Dawn* is scored by Mark Turner for oboe, string quartet, flute, bass clarinet, and piano. It is a folk melody originally composed by Hu Te-an in 1934. Ornaments used by the solo oboe include *duoyin*, *troncare*, pitch bends, *Huayin fuhuayin slide*, and timbral trills.

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<sup>84</sup>Yaozu Wuqu, "Dance of the Yao People," in *The Teng Guide to the Chinese Orchestra*, ed. Chenwei Wang, Junyi Chow, and Samuel Wong (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Co. Pte. Ltd., 1988), 525.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

## PERFORMANCE MATERIALS

In an effort to provide the oboist with the most information possible regarding how these various techniques were created on the modern oboe, reed and instrument specifications used in the recording will be included. Four reeds were used during the recording sessions. They will be referred to as reeds A, B, C, and D. The measurements of one of the performer's typical reeds will also be included.

### **Reed A:** used for *Perpetual Spring* and *Golden Cloud*

Made in December, 2019

Cane: RDG (Gilbert), 2016 crop

Gouge: 0.58mm, Innoledy "High Speed" oboe gouger, John Mack model

Shape: Adam Shaper Tips, Caleb -1

Overall length: 68.75mm

Tip thickness: 0.07mm

Blend thickness: 0.22mm

Heart (plateau) thickness: 0.38-0.42mm

Windows thickness: 0.22mm

Staple: MCW Sierra, 47mm, nickel silver

### **Reed B:** used for *Women of Flowers*, *Listen to the Gentle Wind*, *Dance of the Yao Tribe*

Made in January, 2020

Cane: Rouche (Capitol Cane), purchased in 2018, crop unknown

Gouge: 0.57mm, Innoledy "High Speed" oboe gouger, John Mack model

Shape: Adam Shaper Tips, Caleb -1

Overall length: 69.00mm

Tip thickness: 0.09mm

Blend thickness: 0.22mm

Heart (plateau) thickness: 0.42-0.43mm

Windows thickness: 0.32-0.34mm

Staple: MCW Sierra, 47mm, nickel silver

**Reed C:** used for *Golden Breaks the Dawn*

Made in January, 2020

Cane: RDG (Gilbert), 2016 crop

Gouge: 0.59mm, Innoledy “High Speed” oboe gouger, John Mack model

Shape: Adam Shaper Tips, Caleb -1

Overall length: 69.25mm

Tip thickness: 0.09mm

Blend thickness: 0.20mm

Heart (plateau) thickness: 0.38-0.39mm

Windows thickness: 0.33-0.38mm

Staple: MCW Sierra, 47mm, nickel silver

**Reed D:** used for *Jasmine Flower*, *Trail of Angels*, *Song of Four Seasons*, and

*Butterfly Lovers*

Made in January, 2020

Cane: RDG (Gilbert), 2017 crop

Gouge: 0.58mm, Innoledy “High Speed” oboe gouger, John Mack model

Shape: Adam Shaper Tips, Caleb -1

Overall length: 68.75mm

Tip thickness: 0.08mm

Blend thickness: 0.21mm

Heart (plateau) thickness: 0.39-0.41mm

Windows thickness: 0.22mm

Staple: MCW Sierra, 47mm, nickel silver

### **Typical reed**

Made in April of 2018 (this reed is kept as a reference and is no longer in use)

Cane: RDG (Gilbert), 2016 crop

Gouge: 0.58mm, Innoledy “High Speed” oboe gouger, John Mack model

Shape: Adam Shaper Tips, Caleb -1

Overall length: 69.00mm

Tip thickness: 0.08mm

Blend thickness: 0.18-20mm

Heart (plateau) thickness: 0.43-0.44mm

Windows thickness: 0.18-0.21mm

Staple: MCW Sierra, 47mm, nickel silver

Comparing the recording reeds with the “typical” reed, the two measurements that seem to differ significantly enough to create differences in playing character are the blend thickness and the heart thickness. On the recording reeds, the heart is thinner. For reeds A and C, the difference

between them and the typical reed is as much as 0.06mm, which would result in noticeably more flexibility for the recording reeds. This should be expected, as many of the techniques, particularly pitch bends, require exceptional pitch variation in order to be effective. The other measurement, a thicker blend in the recording reeds, may possibly be explained by the need to recover tone quality lost through a thinner heart, or a desire for resistance that the thicker heart might otherwise provide.

Two different oboes were used for the recording. A Lorée cR+3 Royal, QV series standard bore, and another Lorée cR+3 Royal, standard bore, with top joint PC series and bottom joint/bell PA series.<sup>86</sup> The QV series oboe was used for *Jasmine Flower*, *Trail of Angels*, *Song of Four Seasons*, and *Butterfly Lovers*, and paired with reed D. The PC/PA oboe was used for *Perpetual Spring*, *Golden Cloud*, *Golden Breaks the Dawn*, *Women of Flowers*, *Listen to the Gentle Wind*, and *Dance of the Yao Tribe*, using reeds A, B, and C. As these two oboes have very similar scales, they are virtually interchangeable in regard to intonation. However, the QV series oboe has a bolder, more complex sound than the PC/PA instrument. Reed-oboe combinations were not planned ahead of time. Those decisions were made the day of each recording session due to wide variations being experienced in the local weather.

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<sup>86</sup> To clarify, this oboe has been assembled using sections from two different series of Lorée oboes. It therefore has two different serial numbers.

## FINAL REMARKS

As new techniques for the French Conservatory oboe are developed to allow for the effects of traditional Chinese ornamentation to be approximated, a vast body of new literature will be opened up for the modern performer. The remarkable diversity of sound which is present in this genre's performance practice is revelatory to the Western ear. Just as twentieth century composers envisioned new sounds and new possibilities for the oboe, the opportunity to explore the traditions and musical accomplishments of both the ancient and modern culture of China is being made available. While this project is concluding, a responsibility continues for learning, developing, and refining. The work represented here in no way claims to match the sensitivity of style and cultural authenticity demonstrated by masters of Chinese music. What is contained here is simply a starting point for Western oboists. In the forward to the *Hua Collection*,<sup>87</sup> Nan Peng writes, "Following the spirit of understanding and harmonious transformation, those that understand music teach each other, arising together."<sup>88</sup> As John Myers encourages his readers in *The Way of the Pipa*, "Let us enthusiastically accept this invitation by Hua Wenbin's friend, to explore and enjoy these alternate paths together!"<sup>89</sup> It is my hope that this project will aid oboists in exploring and enjoying the endless possibilities found in these alternate paths.

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<sup>87</sup> The first significant published collection of Pipa music, published by Hua Wenbin in 1819.

<sup>88</sup> Myers, 135.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

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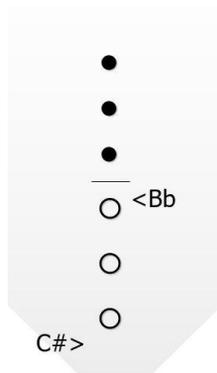
APPENDIX 1

“Fingerings for Applied Ornaments”

Selected Timbral Trills from Associated Reference Recording

*Listen to the Gentle Wind*

G4:

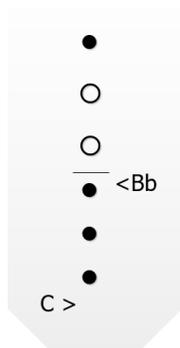


**Figure 13.**

G4 timbral trill.

*Women of Flowers*

C5:

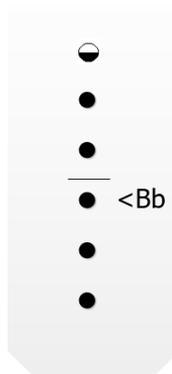


**Figure 14.**

C5 timbral trill.

*Golden Breaks the Dawn*

D5:

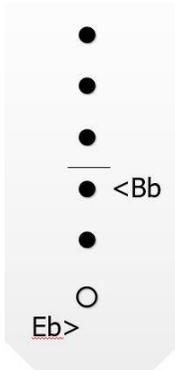


**Figure 15.**

D5 timbral trill.

*Golden Breaks the Dawn*

E4:

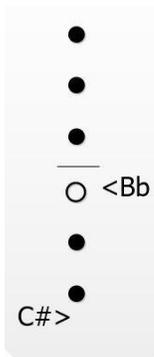


**Figure 16.**

E4 timbral trill.

*Golden Cloud*

B4



**Figure 17.**

B4 timbral trill.

## APPENDIX 2

### Recording Personnel

Erik Larson, oboe

Silvia Suarez, violin I

Jack Powell, violin II

Olivia Baker, viola

Sarah Vander Wal, cello

Brittney Patterson, flute (*Listen to the Gentle Wind and Women of Flowers*)

Amanda Joiner, flute (*Golden Breaks the Dawn and Dance of the Yao Tribe*)

Jordan Mccarver, bass clarinet

Manley Blackwell, piano

Mark Turner, percussion I

Benjamin Gould, percussion II

Joey Glaeser, conductor

Recording engineer: Mark Turner