TIBETAN AND WESTERN MUSICAL ELEMENTS IN THE PIANO SUITE *TIBETAN SKETCHES* BY BINGYUAN CUI

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As one of the few piano works with Tibetan folk characteristics, the piano suite *Tibetan Sketches* composed by Bingyuan Cui presents a vivid depiction of the Tibetan people with colorful sound and considerable imagination. As a Tibetan, I have been greatly honored to research and perform this work and incorporate my understanding into this dissertation. The composer took into account Western composition techniques as well as Eastern music, combining religious and folk musical elements of Chinese ethnic minorities with Western piano techniques to create a wonderful work. This dissertation introduces the characteristics of Tibetan music and analyzes the work, then explores the use of Tibetan elements and the varied styles in the three movements of *Tibetan Sketches*. Cui uses a large number of Tibetan elements in this work, closely related to the local Tibetan music style in melodies, decorations, harmonies, tone color changes, and performance techniques. Based on the historical background and influence of Western music on the development of Chinese music and some other aspects, a brief description is given of the Eastern and Western music styles in the work. This dissertation introduces my own performance and learning experience when I studied this work, communications and an interview with the composer are also taken into account.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the Tang Dynasty (AD 618–907), China's trade with foreign countries facilitated the vigorous development of various aspects of life, including music, which absorbed qualities from abroad.[1] Numerous music scores and poems with different styles and forms have survived in evidence.[2] As one of the famous minorities who love singing and dancing, Tibetans created music with distinctive melodies and tonalities, including many folk songs. At the same time, because of its unique geographical position, neighboring many countries to the west and south, Tibet began to have a great degree of influence on music not only of the Han (China's principal nationality) on the Chinese mainland, but also of other countries such as India, Bhutan, and Nepal. This influence continues even today, when we can find similar instruments or hear similar music styles and melodies from neighboring countries.[3]

Although little is known about the origins of Tibetan music, we have learned that Tibetan folk songs were passed down orally before words in the Tibetan language were written down in the seventh century.[4] According to many historical Tibetan documents, even as early as the

[1] Ke Tao, *论藏族文化对汉族文化的影响* [The influence of Tibetan culture on Han culture] (Beijing: Nationalities Cultural Publishing House, 2006), 108–9. All the translations from the Chinese in this dissertation are by the author.

[2] Hanjiang Yishi, "为何唐朝音乐如此繁荣,音乐风格多样，唐人偏向精神享受?" [Why was music so prosperous in the Tang Dynasty, with various musical styles and a preference for spiritual enjoyment?], *Wangyi*; available from https://www.163.com/dy/article/FUJVO7500543LPNW.html; accessed December 24, 2020.

[3] "西藏佛教寺院音乐的地域文化传统及特质" [Regional cultural traditions and characteristics of Tibetan Buddhist Temple music], *Tibetan Art Studies*, Tibet Net; available from http://www.tibet.cn/cn/cloud/xszqkk/xzysyj/2009/3/201712/t20171221_5280945.html; accessed November 4, 2021.

[4] Laurent Sagart, Guillaume Jacques, Yunfan Lai, Robin J. Ryder, Valentin Thouzeau, Simon J. Greenhill, and Johann-Mattis List, "Dated Language Phylogenies Shed Light on the Ancestry of Sino-Tibetan," *PNAS*, May 6, 2019; available from https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1817972116; accessed 21 April 2022.

second century folk songs and dances were popular, each with a specific use.[5] With the passage of time, the venues and forms used by song and dance music gradually became fixed in function, and then were more closely related to Tibetan life.

After the appearance of Tibetan Buddhist scriptures, Buddhist events, chanting, religious sacrifice, and other activities had a profound impact on Tibetan music.[6] Because of their religious beliefs and the high altitude where they live, Tibetan people have a simple nature and a pure life. After a long history of development, folk songs, dances, and Tibetan opera, each with its own characteristics, gradually formed today's unique Tibetan style.[7]

The work to be discussed in this dissertation was composed by Bingyuan Cui during his research and field trips in Tibet minority areas. Although Cui is of Han nationality, he is highly interested in ethnic minorities and their music. During his trips, he went into local temples and schools, collecting the sounds of local ethnic instruments and human voices. Because he has a detailed understanding and feeling for the unique religious music and culture of the Tibetan people, Cui's work vividly reflects the encounters he has had with the local conditions and customs.

In recent years, communication between China and the West has become increasingly close, as reflected in Chinese music. With the promotion and receptiveness of the increasing number of young people returning to China from overseas study, Western classical music has gradually come to occupy a place in the Chinese music market and is influencing many local composers. Chinese composers are no longer satisfied with simple compositions in national

[5] "透视音乐中的西藏历史" [Tibetan history in music perspective], *Tibetan Art Studies*, Tibet Net; available from http://www.tibet.cn/cn/cloud/xszqkk/xzysyj/2009/4/201712/t20171221_5280904.html; accessed November 4, 2021.

[6] Tibet Net, "Regional cultural traditions."

[7] Yun Zhou, *中国传统民歌艺术* [Chinese traditional folk art] (Wuhan: Wuhan Press, 2003), 396.

modes but have begun to actively seek breakthroughs and integration of styles. Especially in composing for Western musical instruments, Western musical structure and sounds have given fresh blood to Chinese compositions.[8]

In addition to inheriting the basic elements of Chinese folk music, Cui's *Tibetan Sketches* actively incorporates Western compositional techniques and ideas such as sonata form and functional harmony progressions, creating a vibrant mixture. The combination of Chinese, Tibetan, and Western ideas give the work a novel and unique sound. This suite was composed in 1984, eight years after Chinese Cultural Revolution. New ideas and techniques from the West were gradually being absorbed by Chinese composers, giving modern Chinese music a distinctive style.[9] This work was an early composition of him and also his first attempt at composing a solo piano work, yet it stood out enough to win second prize in the National Piano Works Competition in Kunming the following year.[10]

Tibetan Sketches consists of three short movements, titled in a clear and vivid way, *Xie—Pastoral and Antiphon, Qiao—Buddhist Activities in the Temple,* and *Zhuo—Villagers' Dance*. Each title is divided into two parts: a single word transliteration from Tibetan to Chinese, then an explanation of the word's meaning. Each movement has a distinctive style, the overall work has strong traditional national characteristics but also incorporates contemporary compositional techniques. As a rare piano work depicting Tibetan music, this piece is well worth researching. Yet most of the literature mentioned it focus on musical form analysis and suggestions for

[8] Keyu Yi, "五四运动'前后西方音乐对中国近代音乐的影响" [The influence of Western music on modern Chinese music before and after the May 4th Movement], xzbu.com; available from https://m.xzbu.com/7/view-4708213.htm; accessed November 4, 2021.

[9] Yanqin Xu, "文革时期中国钢琴改编曲的艺术特征"［The artistic characteristics of Chinese piano composition during the Cultural Revolution]," *Literature Education*, no. 3 (2007).

[10] "公益爱心大使崔炳元" [Bingyuan Cui, charity ambassador], Chinese Society Public Welfare; available from http://www.cpf.net.cn/article/show/125; accessed November 22, 2021.

performance, neglecting the distinctive Tibetan elements and musical significance. According to the research from CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure), an official website for searching academic papers, there has thirty papers about Tibetan piano music, the rare research on Tibetan piano music does mostly mention *Tibetan Sketches*. Nineteen papers about *Tibetan Sketches* by Bingyuan Cui, and nine papers about analysis and performance of *Tibetan Sketches*, but none of them exploring musical meaning of Tibetan elements in *Tibetan Sketches.*[11]

As a Tibetan who has been learning piano since childhood and studying in both China and the United States, having the rich experience of studying abroad, I have chosen to help performers learn how to perform this piece with deeper understanding. As far as possible, I have researched the work through music analysis from both Chinese and Western perspectives, taking advantage of my national strengths, combined with numerous writings I read and interviews with the composer himself. To help readers understand the work better, this dissertation also gives an overview of Tibetan people's life, customs, character, etc., to show their spiritual world and worldview.

[11] "Tibetan music", CNKI, available from https://kns.cnki.net/kns8/defaultresult/index; December 31, 2021.

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND OF THE WORK

Composer's Life and Career

Bingyuan Cui was born in Liaoning province in April 1956 and graduated from the Composition Department of the China Conservatory of Music in 1985. He is now one of the foremost national composers, associate chairman of the Musicians Association, and director of the Commission for Music Theory in Shaanxi province. He used to be the director of the Shaanxi Philharmonic Orchestra and associate dean of the Xi'an Conservatory of Music.[12]

Cui has composed more than three hundred pieces of music to date. His works generally have a distinct national temperament, pay attention to the characteristics of folk music, and are also based on the diversity of serious music using contemporary composition techniques, blend with both Eastern and Western and even ancient and modern music elements.

When Cui started his career, he was assigned to work as an electrician, but his deep love and desire for music kept him in pursuit of it. Finally, at the end of 1978 when Cui was 22, he was admitted to the Song and Dance Troupe of Lanzhou Military Region and became a violist in its orchestra.[13] The orchestra's scores at that time not only were limited in quantity but also had many errors. In order to enhance the troupe's performance quality, Cui volunteered to collect, copy, and revise those scores. This opportunity also gave him, unconsciously, the comprehensive outlook of a composer, and he gradually began to have a strong interest in composition.

[12] *Xinba*, "Cui, Bingyuan."

[13] Yue Zhang, "崔炳元:我生命中的'长安回响" [Cui Bingyuan: Chang-an echoes in my life], *China Art Daily*, June 5, 2013; available from https://www.cflac.org.cn/ys/xwy/201306/t20130605_195220.htm; accessed 20 April 2022.

In 1979, Cui was sent by the government to be the assistant of Luobin Wang (1913–1996), a famous ethnomusicologist in China, known as the Father of Northwest Folk Songs, to help Wang collect and copy his music scores (see Fig. 1). Wang, who graduated from Beijing Normal University in 1934, turned to collecting and composing folk music, especially minority music, after systematic training in Western music theory. Wang's numerous folk songs, such as the Tibetan folk song *In the Far Place* and the Uyghur *Half the Moon Climbs Up*, are widely known in China. During the years with Wang, Cui not only broadened his horizons but also laid a solid foundation for his understanding and creation of folk music. Under the influence of Wang and experience he gained during their field trips, Cui began to realize that a good national musician must take ordinary people as the foundation for his works and root in their lives. At the same time, Cui's idea of combining Chinese and Western music quietly sprouted.[14]

Figure 1. Luobin Wang (left) and Bingyuan Cui; photo provided by the composer

[14] "崔炳元：军旅出身 用音乐创作鞠躬陕西黄土地" [Cui Bingyuan: military background, with music creation salutes Shaanxi yellow land], *Department of Veterans Affairs of Shaanxi*, sin80.com; available from https://www.sin80.com/pub/cui-bingyuan-617f70fd; accessed January 7, 2020.

Cui began to compose music while playing the viola in the song and dance troupe. Three years of study and work passed until 1982, when Cui finally had the chance to formally study composition at the China Conservatory of Music in Beijing. His teacher was Xiang Jin, a famous composer and music educator in China. The major work of Jin's, *The Savage Land*, was the first Chinese opera to be performed at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington DC.[15] Jin's international vision and compositional styles with a Western perspective not only taught Cui a professional knowledge of music theory and composition, but made him break the inherent thinking that Chinese music must be monophonic and helped him develop a symphonic thinking.[16] While focusing on the characteristics of Chinese folk music, Cui now seamlessly blends in Western elements.[17]

The Process of Composition

The piano suite *Tibetan Sketches* not only introduces the musical characteristics of Tibet, but also describes the conditions of Tibetan life. The work was composed in the years after Cui left northwest China to study in the composition department of China Conservatory of Music. He had just returned from a trip to Tibet and was eager to inject his inspiration and passion into the fresh Tibetan materials he had just collected. Before this work, Cui was accustomed to the

[15] Spirit, "原野" [The Savage Land], *Meipian*, June 20, 2019; available from https://www.meipian.cn/27avepej; accessed April 21, 2022.

[16] Xueyun Shi, "崔炳元：让原创作品'活在音乐厅" [Cui, Bingyuan: Let original works 'live in concert hall'], *Wenhui Newspaper*, June 15, 2017; available from https://www.sin80.com/pub/cui-bingyuan-e59f1f0e; accessed 21 April 2022.

[17] Shi, "Cui, Bingyuan": "To develop Chinese symphonies, Chinese works must be performed."

homophonic thinking of folk music, the composition of *Tibetan Sketches* marked the establishment of Cui's multi-voice thinking.[18]

At the time when Cui went to Tibet, transportation was not well developed in China, especially in Tibet, which had less contact with outsiders because of the high altitude. During the trip, Cui was trapped and had to wait in a small town for about a month, because a landslide cut off the main road after a rainstorm. But it was a blessing in disguise, giving him an excellent opportunity to continue his research. He used this time to visit and record in detail the area where he was staying, instead of contacting the outside to get back to the conservatory immediately. Cui contacted the local head of Dege county, offered to teach music to all the middle and primary school students in the county for free, which he hoped could open up the literature of the county to him. With the consent of the county magistrate, Cui collected a lot of local music, as well as books with the help of local translators. He therefore gained an understanding of Tibetan music, culture, and history that paved the way for composition of *Tibetan Sketches*.

When Cui volunteered at the local schools, he recorded many nameless folk songs sung by the students. Their original flavor, full of wild emotion, became reflected in his works. Cui also went to Dege's Sutra Printing Temple (སྡེ་དགེ་པར་ཁང་ཆོས་མཛོད་ཆེན་མོ, *Dege Parkhang*),[19] one of the most famous holy places of Tibetan Buddhism in China, known as the Encyclopedia of Tibetan Culture, to visit eminent monks and study their ancient musical records. After returning to Beijing from Tibet, Cui combined the precious materials he collected with Western theoretical

[18] Hejie Gao, "居长安热土，谱华夏乐韵" [Live in Chang 'an and create Chinese music], *Music Life*, January 11, 2020; available from https://baike.baidu.com/tashuo/browse/content?id=9167c87c2c18f1c2f5d1c13f; accessed 22 April 2022.

[19] "Dege Parkhang," Official site of Dege Sutra Printing House; available from http://www.degeparkhang.org; accessed 18 April 2022.

knowledge from the conservatory. Eventually, he created *Tibetan Sketches*, based on his own perception and unique experience.

Introduction to the Work's Style

Cui named the first movement of *Tibetan Sketches Xie—Pastoral and Antiphon,* which, as the name implies, depicts the singing of pastoral people while grazing their animals and the antiphonal singing of other herdsmen. The movement is full of long and melodic phrases. Cui uses three staffs and marks the tempo at the beginning as *a bene placito,* suggesting the free and irregular labor of supervising grazing on the grasslands. The accelerated tempo in the middle section, irregular accents, and obvious compact structure all make the lively folk song duet come to life. Finally, the music becomes melodious and soothing again, echoing the beginning of the movement and ending with a tritone melody, creating a feeling of endless Tibetan singing.

The second movement, *Qiao—Buddhist Activities in the Temple,* depicts a scene in which Tibetan monks are worshiping Buddha. We can hear the piano imitating a *Tong-qin* (an instrument similar in sound to a French horn) in the bass register throughout the movement, helping to create the sense of a religious ritual. Still using three staffs, the higher register of the movement sounds far away, the middle register is thick and heavy, while the lower register feels deep. The whole movement has a serious, mysterious atmosphere. In the middle part, the music sounds more intense and busier, but words such as *Divoto* (faithful) remind performers that although the structure may have changed the style has not. The coda returns to the state at the beginning of the first movement. This second movement suggests religious music with its unique declamatory tone: a sacred and solemn style that stretches out, moves slowly into the distance, and gradually disappears.

The life of the Tibetan people is inseparable from song and dance. Most of their dance rhythms are cheerful and fast. In contrast with the slow and quiet emotions of the first two movements, the last movement, *Zhuo—Villagers' Dance*, vividly depicts a lively Tibetan dance, *Guo Zhuo*, shows the passion and freedom of the Tibetan people. The dance usually involves many people dancing together, forming a circle or dividing men and women into two sides, singing in unison or in turns.[20] The overall style of the third movement is cheerful and bright, with some lyrical passages. The melody, just like a Tibetan dance, is focused on repetition, entering the listener's mind like an earworm, but also has some changes in the repetition of each theme.

In this work, Cui depicts the environment, culture, and daily activities of Tibet in a wide-ranging and vivid way. Under the melody of typical Eastern folk music, we can hear Western structures, such as compound ternary form, rondo, and variation. The traditional pentatonic scale is mixed with the poly-tones and whole tone scales; Western harmony and Chinese modes are integrated. The composer also uses Western musical terminology, giving the work more international appeal.

[20] Gale, *Early Tibetan History and Culture*, 518.

CHAPTER III

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF TIBETAN TRADITIONAL MUSIC

In *Tibetan Sketches*, we can hear unique harmonies and melodies, some sounds are the simulation of Tibetan instruments, and other sounds help to create the atmosphere of typical traditional Tibetan scenes. In order to catch composer's elaborate design in the work and get a better understanding of performance, the present chapter will introduce Tibetan traditional music, mainly focusing on the musical characteristics of *Tibetan Sketches*.

Folk Music

There are various types of Tibetan music: folk music, religious music, court music, and opera. Among them, folk music is a very important part of Tibetan people's daily life. It records the customs and real-life portrayal of Tibetan people, passed down from generation to generation. Folk music includes folk songs, dance music, and instrumental music, among which folk songs are also divided into many categories.[21] Most folk songs are monophonic, sung in solo or choral style. But there are also a few in polyphonic style with combined melodies or multi-voice parts such as canon. The mountain folk song *Lei* is sung in the fields and mountains, with free rhythm, high and loud voices, and a very wide range, characteristic of the isolated areas. The love song *Layi* is similar to the style of mountain songs, but young people sing in pairs or solo, and the melody is more beautiful and affectionate. There are also many folk songs sung at local custom events, such as the lively wine song *Qiang Xie*, used for toasts. The grace notes are

[21] Jinhua Tong, *藏族传统文化概述* [Overview of Tibetan traditional culture] (Beijing: China Tibetology Publishing Press, 1990), 62–72.

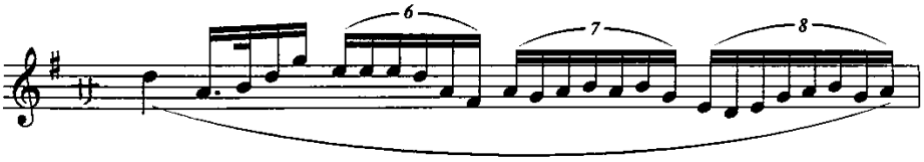
numerous and dense, and the rhythm is simple and regular. Besides these, there are wedding songs, farewell songs, and so on.

The *Mani* song is another folk song in Tibet, the name of which comes from a scripture, *Om Mani Padme Hum*. Han people always call this the six-syllable mantra (ॐमणिपद्मेहूँ). There has *Mani* in religious music, but *Mani* in folk songs is more frequently used by believers in their daily prayer or chanting in folk religious ceremonies. Moreover, the melody and rhythm of *Mani* sung by believers are more varied and wider in range than those sung by the monks in the temple. Improvisational lyrics are used in labor songs, with a slow and beautiful melody and long phrases. Sometimes a spoken-like tone is added, and the style becomes a little like recitative in Western music. This tone is more similar to the *Mani* melody of religious music, which is imitated in the second movement of *Tibetan Sketches*.

Xie in the title of the first movement of *Tibetan Sketches* is a general term for songs and dances in Tibet. The second part of the title, *pastoral*, refers to a kind of folk work song, *Lei Xie*. There are numerous kinds of work songs, easily recognized by differences among the different types of work. Because of the limitations imposed by the high altitude, most of the songs sung during labor are not intense or laborious. Some songs are used to match the movements of labor, such as threshing highland barley, sowing seeds, or digging soil, which are all repetitive. The rhythm of the songs is also regular, and the phrases are short. Other labor songs are sung during breaks in working, such as to soothe the animals while milking, or during hunting. These kinds of songs are free and often change tempo or style depending on the demands of the work. In addition, there are types of songs that do not need to coordinate with movements but mainly

express emotions, so the melody and phrases are freer and longer, creating the most lyrical type of labor song, such as the pastoral sung while herding sheep and cattle.[22]

As a nomadic people, Tibetans make their living mainly from herding on horseback, living close to nature. *Pastoral and Antiphon* makes use of this kind of work music; we can feel the natural scenery and optimistic mood. In addition to the type of long phrases sung by shepherds, the melody of the *Pastoral* has scenes of picture that the animals leisurely grazing. This movement even vividly describes a scene where several herders meet and sing in pairs on the vast grassland. The song and dance music of the pastoral area is simple and free, with a wide range and many overlapping intervals.[23] There are also many small grace notes and coloraturas, called *Angdie* in Tibetan (see Ex. 1). This kind of singing style usually follows or precedes a long note with much stronger improvisation, several phrases going up and down. The shape develops like a wave, a typical style of singing in the vast fields. This characteristic is particularly evident in the first part of *Xie—Pastoral and Antiphon*, which takes the listener instantly into the vast prairie from the first measure.



Example 1. Folk melody from Diqing area

In order to relieve the boredom of working for a long time, people also improvise long lyrics to describe their work or express their feelings in the manner of ballads. Like the first

[22] Jin, "Research on traditional music," 177–83.

[23] Minkang Yang, *中国民间舞曲* [Chinese folk song and dance music] (Beijing: People's Music Press, 1996), 229–48.

movement of *Tibetan Sketches*, Tibetan pastorals are mainly composed of melodies in progressive steps, third-degree skips, and pentatonic modes; the intervals are usually no more than an octave. The formal structure is usually composed of pairs of phrases, question and answer. Occasionally there will be variations with three or four phrases. The harmony is mainly characterized by the Chinese *Zhi* pentatonic tone, but because of the improvisational nature of this kind of music, there often occur A–C–D, E–G–A, which is *Yu* tone, or E–G–A, C–D–E, which is *Jue* tone, as embellishments.[24] Sometimes even D–E–G, A–C–D are added from *Shang* tone or some hexatonic and heptatonic modes, so that several modes mixing together make the tonality vague. This vagueness of tonality and freedom of content makes Tibetan folk songs sound elusive to students who have learned solfeggio and ear training in music colleges, and they are always feel that the songs are out of tune. However, the sense of freedom and atmosphere of the vocal improvisation are cultural characteristics that the Tibetan people have handed down for hundreds of years.[25]

The title of the first movement of *Tibetan Sketches* suggests its characteristics: a concentration on folk songs, following the pastoral form and the general direction of the melody, adding new elements at the same time. Compared with the flat individual folk songs, the melody of this piano music is more complex and stereoscopic. The harmony and accompaniment are richer, and the form of male and female question-and-answer in the antiphon part makes the music more interesting and livelier.

[24] Jin, "Research on traditional music," 177–84.

[25] "西藏民歌-起源" [Tibetan folk songs—origin], *Baidu*; available from https://baike.baidu.com/item/西藏民歌/1026079?fr=aladdin; accessed April 21, 2022.

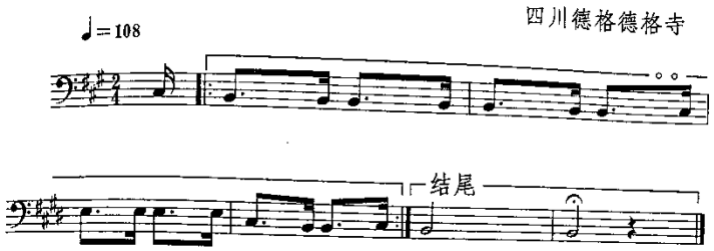
Religious Music

The word *Qiao* in Tibetan refers to something related to religion. The second movement of *Tibetan Sketches, Qiao—Buddhist Activities in the Temple*, describes a grand Buddhist scene. The overall tone is similar to that of the melodies of the previous movement, but more subdued and dignified. Buddhism in Tibet was introduced from the Chinese mainland and India in the seventh century, after a long period of development gradually forming its own system, Tibetan Buddhism (also called Lamaism). Since almost all Tibetans follow this religion, many Buddhist activities in the monastery are closely related to the local residents. During major celebrations, the temple allows people to watch Buddhist activities and chant sutras together with the monks for blessings. On some special Tibetan festivals, such as Tibetan New Year, people of every family gather around the temple, dressed in their holiday best, spin the handle of the prayer wheel, sing *Mani*, and watch Tibetan opera performed by the monastery. Religious music in monasteries is generally divided into three parts: chanting music, *Cham* music, and instrumental music. In contrast with the randomness and diversity of folk songs, religious music is performed by monks who need to abide by the strict rules of temples, so there is little difference between regions in occasions, musical characteristics and musical instruments.[26]

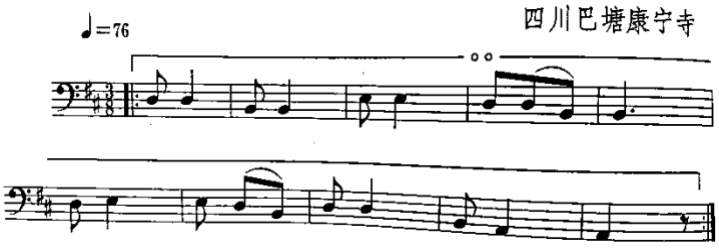
Chanting refers to the music sung by lamas (Tibetan Buddhism's name for monks) when they recite sutras, such as *Mani* mentioned above.[27] This kind of music has no exaggerated dynamic contrasts or range changes; the rhythm is mostly repeated and regular. Each phrase of the music may be slower or faster depending on the content and words, but the tempo within a passage must remain stable. As can be seen from two sutras chanted in Sichuan and Tibet areas, the overall rhythm is very regular and there are few intervals of more than a third (see Ex. 2).

[26] Tong, *Tibetan Traditional, Culture*, 65.
[27] Qing Tian, *中国宗教音乐* [Chinese religious music] (Beijing: Religious Culture Press, 1997), 42–53.

When chanting sutras, a lama usually holds a bell to lead, and the band is encouraged to play between sections or accompany them. The band consists mainly of brass instruments and small percussion. There is a three-meter-long tuba, which looks like a huge straight trumpet with a very low sound, called *Tongqin* in Tibetan, that needs to be played on the ground, as well as slightly curved small horns, bone flutes, conches, *suona* (a small brass instrument), long-handled drums, cymbals, bells, etc. In order to understand Tibetan religious music better, Cui during his field trip to Tibet recorded the sounds of some instruments commonly used in chanting music: *suona*, cymbals, medium-sized tubas, and a Tibetan long-handled drum (see Fig. 2 from left to right).



Example 2.1. Chanting music in Dege Temple, translated to staff



Example 2.2. Chanting music in Kangning Temple

Figure 2. Cui recording Tibetan instruments; photo provided by the composer

Cham music is more like dance music in being completely instrumental (see Fig. 3). The word *Cham* originally meant "jump," later evolving into a typical name for a religious dance. The *Cham* dance is the predecessor of Tibetan opera. It is a religious dance performed by lamas during important festivals and sacrifices; horns, drums and cymbals are the three main kinds of instruments.[28] There are no vocals, only the band accompaniment, and the band size is generally adjusted to the festival and the content of the dance. Because most of the instruments are large, the volume is low and strong, so the music has a powerful momentum. In addition, the smaller instruments, *suona* and Chinese cymbals, all make a penetrating, resonant sound on the vast grassland. Because chanting music needs to be chanted in accordance with the content of the scripture, it is orderly and rigorous without great fluctuation, whereas *Cham* music is more varied, because it involves dance and instruments. The content is also richer, as the character ranges from Buddhist stories to secular comedy.[29] In the second movement of *Tibetan Sketches*,

[28] Liantao Tian, *中国少数民族传统音乐* [Traditional music of Chinese ethnic minorities] (Beijing: Central University for Nationalities Press, 2001), 699–710.

[29] Tian, *Chinese religious music*, 42–53.

which describes activities in the temple, Cui shows the characteristics of this kind of dance music vividly. The deep tone of the *Tongqin* and the ethereal tone of the bell are depicted in the first and last sections of the movement, while the repetitions in the middle section show the regular rhythm and simple melody by imitating the chanting human voice and small bronze instruments, which evoke a strong primitive religious atmosphere.

Figure 3. *Cham* Dance; photo provided by Xinwei Yang

Local Chinese musical instruments are used frequently in religious music, and there are many large bands comprised of monks in temples. In addition to the accompaniment of chanting vocals and the *Cham* dance, these bands can also play functional music and ritual music for separate use (Fig. 4). The functional music usually uses flute, Tibetan drum, shell trumpet, and so on, to remind monks of their daily work, rest, and Buddhist activities.[30]

[30] Nova, *Chinese majority music culture*, 38.

Figure 4. Labrang Monastery; photo by Shenggui Li, from *Tibetan Traditional Music in Gannan*

The music scores used by monks when chanting sutras must be mentioned. The most famous Tibetan music, which is the most used in temples and is also the oldest Tibetan music, uses *Yangyi* notation (དབྱངས་ཡིག), unique to Tibetan religious music. Because it is so old, it notates only the direction of the music and the approximate pitches. The music surface is composed of many unique brightly colored patterns, lines, and obscure scriptures, which are recorded in the form of curves between parallel lines.[31]

In order to read and understand the *Yangyi* notation, face-to-face oral teaching between monks from the same temple is necessary. This also serves a religious purpose as the temple lamas' *Kou-chuan Xin-shou* (instruction by mouth and heart) creates spiritual self-expression.[32] Because this strict way of teaching is not spread to others outside the temple, each temple has its own way of reading *Yangyi* notation. In addition, everyone's experience and perception will be

[31] Gengdui Peijie, *西藏古乐谱研究* [Study of ancient music scores of Tibet] (Lhasa: Tibet People's Press, 2009), 116.

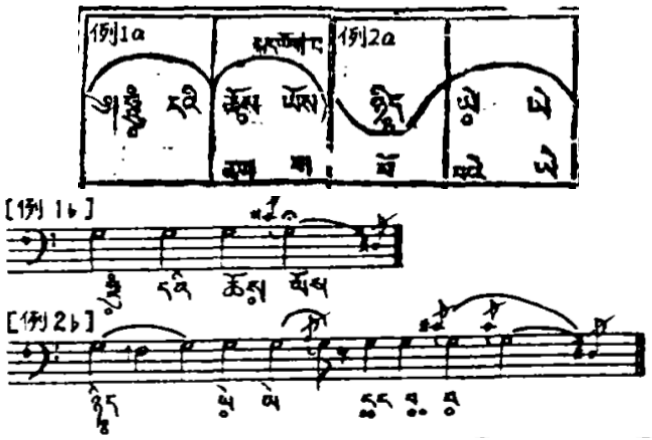
[32] Yi Hao and Xiaoying Zhang, "拉卜楞寺文化与艺术" [Labrang Temple culture and art] (Lanzhou: Gansu Culture Press, 2001), 144–45.

different in teaching and learning, so that even the same score will have different readings because of different people chanting, or even the same person chanting at different times of his life. Therefore, these musical scores have a lot of variation. If there were no temple monks dedicated to transforming them into modern musical scores so that others can do research, outsiders would think only that these scores are bright and novel, and the content completely obscure.

To have a better understanding of these scores, Cui visited the master monk in the famous Dege Scripture Printing Lamasery of Tibetan Buddhism, then studied and interpreted three copies of *Yangyi* (see Fig. 5).[33] They were pure vocal chanting pieces: *Chaba*, *Oyong* with the accompaniment, and the *Tongqin* part of a score for a sacrificial rite. After returning to school, the composer went several times to Beijing Central University of Nationalities to visit professors specializing in the study of ancient Tibetan music, and finally translated part of the scores into staff notation (see Ex. 3). In his article, Cui gives a detailed introduction to these three ancient music scores and an explanation of some special symbols.

Figure 5. Cui learning *Yangyi* with lamas; photo provided by the composer

[33] Bingyuan Cui, " 德格印经院的三份乐谱" [Three scores of Dege Scripture Printing Lamasery], *Chinese Music* 2 (1985): 67–68.



Example 3. *Yangyi* notation translated to staff notation; from *Three scores of Dege Scripture Printing Lamasery*

Song and Dance Music

Similar to the folk song described in connection with the first movement, song and dance music also belongs to folk music. Except for religious music, Tibetan music rarely uses large bands, and the instruments used are usually small and easy to handle. The last movement of *Tibetan Sketches*, *Zhuo—Villagers' Dance*, depicts a typical scene of Tibetans dancing and singing together. The composer uses the tempo marking *Allegro agevole* to imply the vivid picture of villagers happily dancing. This means that in addition to Tibetan-style music, the influence of dance on *Tibetan Sketches* cannot be ignored. Singing and dancing are essential to Tibetan daily life, used to express and enhance people's feelings and connections with each other.

While dancing, the villagers also sing some easy but beautiful melodies. Sometimes they hold percussion instruments, such as little Tibetan drums and small plucked instruments, to accompany their dance.[34] Villagers usually make several circles while dancing; people in the

[34] Yongcai He, *绚丽多彩的藏族民间舞* [Colorful Tibetan folk dance] Tibetan Academic Symposium Proceedings (Lhasa: Tibet People's Press, 1984), 494–96.

outer circle dance with long sleeves without playing instruments, and the people dancing in the inner circle with shorter sleeves hold plucked instruments. Different from the common brass or woodwind instruments in religious music, the plucked instruments and bowed string instruments—such as *Zhamu-Nia* (a Tibetan instrument, called *Xianzi qin* in Chinese, the same name as a kind of Tibetan dance) and *Zha-Ni* (Chinese: *Hu qin*) with an oxhead-like headstock—with smoother and more graceful melodic lines always appear in the accompaniment of song and dance music, because they are not affected by the player's movement. *Zhamu-Nia* is a plucked six-stringed or eight-stringed instrument unique to Tibet, while *Zha-Ni* is similar to the Chinese *Erhu*, with a shorter bow. The lowest part of the voice box is made of ox horns, while the top part is always beautifully carved in various shapes of cow heads. Both instruments are mostly used for *Xianzi* dance; people can wear the instrument on a rope and play their instrument while dancing.[35]

Zhuo is the general name for Tibetan dance, which Han people always translated as *Guozhuang*. It can be divided into many dances with different types and functions according to the different regions and scenes. Some *Zhuo* just express the excitement of the moment, while others add myths and historical stories. Among them, the circle dance *Guo Xie* is the most popular and beloved by people because of its simple music and structure as well as catchy lyrics, which can be freely adapted according to different moods.[36] The circle dance has distinct rhythm and smooth melody and is danced with long sleeves. Most of the dances imitate some auspicious and benign animal forms, closest to the last movement of *Tibetan Sketches*. It is easy to imagine that Cui was invited to dance with the enthusiastic local residents when he went to Tibet. He

[35] "藏族乐器" [Tibetan musical instruments], Nationalities net, July 7, 2019; available from http://www.kbcmw.com/html/zx/lyzx/yzkb/52661.html; accessed 22 April 2022.

[36] Yongcai, *Colorful Tibetan folk dance*, 500–6.

must have experienced the lively and joyful scene himself, given that portrayed the music so vividly.

The circle dance is a group dance, usually joined by the whole village in a free and easy form and not restricted by the number of people, location, age, sex, tempo, style, or time. Regardless of sex and age, everyone forms one circle or several circles together. There are even a lot of people who can be "trapped in a circle," which is very free and fun. The content of the dance is mostly gratitude, praise, or expression of love. Usually, one person leads the dance and decides the general style, then everyone joins in.[37] The dance leader will give other people hints and determine the tone of the song, the main dance moves, and so on. The tempo usually gradually increases from slow to fast during the repeated dance moves toward the climax, finally with a happy ending. The melodies of this kind of *Zhuo* are mostly cheerful and bright, but also have a very beautiful and emotional expression in the *adagio* part. They are mainly stepwise, with some skips of a third.

The *adagio* part of the circle dance is similar to another dance called *Dui Xie*, which is more a youth dance that reflects love than *Guo Xie*, which is performed by all people.[38] Because of its striking foot movements, it is also called a tap dance, but the overall dance part still has the characteristics of a circle. The structure of the song in the dance also has some similarity. The ternary form is mostly for lyrical and slow songs, and the dance is mostly graceful, performed in long sleeves. Because of more instrumental participation in *Dui Xie*, the structure of the song and tonality are more complex and rigorous as well as more regular. Because of the strong improvisation and participation, however, the circle dance *Guo Xie* is freer in style and more diversified in structure. The content often changes with the occasion and the music is quite

[37] Gale, *Early Tibetan history and culture*, 517–18.
[38] Minkang, *Chinese folk song and dance music*, 230–46.

irregular. The *adagio* parts of the two dances are very melodious and lyrical; their melody parts have more syncopation, with long dotted-note rhythms, and the allegro parts have strong rhythms and warm emotions. These characteristics of dance music are fully displayed in the third movement of Cui's work.

In general, Tibetan dances are spontaneous activities performed anytime and anywhere, because of the characteristics of singing and dancing that are ingrained in Tibetans' blood. The content of this song and dance music describes the broad scenery of nature, praising the country and the good life. Whether it is a festival celebration, devout worship of Buddha, everyday life, work, or making friends, singing and dancing have become an indispensable way of life for Tibetans. The third movement of *Tibetan Sketches* vividly expresses such a leisurely and free, unrestrained, and sensual life.

CHAPTER IV

GENERAL BACKGROUND OF CHINESE FOLK MUSIC AND WESTERN MUSIC IN CHINA

The Tibetan Spirit

If performers want to perform this work better and more authentically, they must have some understanding of Tibetan music. It is important to understand the inner spirit of the Tibetan people and grasp their unique style of music, because the way a nation treats life and the customs passed down from generation to generation will be deeply reflected in the music they create. Chinese people always mention that Tibetans are optimistic and enjoy singing and dancing. But what is the Tibetan spirit really?

First, the generosity of the Tibetan people is manifested in all aspects of life. They are comfortable and indifferent to fame and wealth, probably because of the nomadic lifestyle that has been passed down to the present. Tibet is known as the "roof of the world," because the average altitude is more than 4,000 meters (13,000 feet) above sea level. The altitude and cold ecological environment lead to sparse human habitation and inconvenient transportation, so herding has always been the main source of life. Except in Lhasa and other big cities, herdsmen have to carry their tents and follow the grasslands.[39] Growing highland barley, driving a group of cattle and sheep, having ample food and clothing, consuming liquor and meat— they are content enough with this life. In the Tibetan grassland, you can always hear the singing of the girls and boys with their herds, soaring through the clouds in voices that have not been "corrected" by the

[39] Guangyu Zhang, "藏族传统文化与生态环境" [Tibetan traditional culture and ecological environment], *Qing Zang Plateau Humanities and Social Sciences*; available from https://qzphs.swun.edu.cn/info/1007/1032.htm; accessed April 21, 2022.

conservatory of music. In every city or village, people hear native singing not only while they are working, but even while eating. Because every meal they eat and every cent they earn are their own reward, the people are fulfilled and satisfied.

When people talk about Tibet, they mention the unique Tibetan Buddhism (Lamaism) and temples (*Dgon Pa*). Thousands of temples, and tens of thousands of monks have lived on this plateau for millennia. In the monasteries, sutras have to be chanted frequently. If you are lucky, you may hear senior monks debating sutras, when the usually calm and inscrutable monks are unconvinced by one another. The two sides take turns to debate the Tibetan scriptures in a high-pitched and intense rhythmic singing, and the questions and answers are orderly, not out of order or rhetorical questions. After a monk has finished his turn, there will be a loud clap of hands; at the same time, other monks can make exaggerated dance movements according to the quality of the scripture, such as clapping hands or stamping feet: different gestures to express different meanings. This kind of debate is just like students taking exams— if they succeed, they can move up to a higher degree; if they lose the debate, they "fail" and are lowered one level until they can succeed in the next debate. At the end of the sutra debating, monks resume their previous polite and friendly condition, assess the harvest, and schedule the next debating date together.[40]

Tibetans are also extremely devout. Their beliefs have been passed down from generation to generation, making Tibetans remain pure, open-minded, sincere, and kind to each other. It is also this belief that makes them indifferent to fame and wealth but always respectful to the world. On the road to Lhasa, the holy city of Tibet, the faithful Buddhists make long kowtows

[40] Wenwen Yi, "辩经——唇枪舌战的秘密" [Sutra debate—the secret of verbal battle], *Tibet.cn*, May 20, 2019; available from http://www.tibet.cn/cn/religion/201905/t20190520_6585937.html; accessed 22 April 2022.

(བྱག་འཚལ) on their pilgrimage. In Tibetan Buddhism, kowtow is the highest way to express sincere belief in the Buddha. The believers on the road, who come from hometowns all over the world, walk all the way to Lhasa without stopping kowtowing, which requires physical exertion and training of their minds. When making long kowtows, they must put all their body on the ground— head, arms, and legs, an action that represents "bodily" respect; the chanting of Buddhist scripture at the same time means respect in the "mouth"; with Buddha in the heart, meaning respect in the "heart."[41] All three motions in one act of respect, every three steps with one long kowtow, to bring their highest worship. The faithful from all Tibetan areas see this pilgrimage as a life goal, chanting the six-syllabled mantra *Om Ma Ni Bä Mê Hum*. Even if their hands and knees are worn out, they desire to reach the heart of the purest holy land—Lhasa, to thank the Buddha and pray for family and friends. They scrimp and save along the way but are always willing to put all their money in the *dgon pa* to rebuild the temple or mount the Buddha's golden statues. Some pilgrims die before they reach their destination. His companions take out one of his teeth, take it with them, and carry it on to Lhasa, where it is placed in front of a Buddhist shrine to fulfill the man's last wish. Without seeing the spectacle of the journey, one may not be able to imagine their amazing piety.[42]

Western Music in China

Besides the influence of the Tibetan spirit, that of Western music on *Tibetan Sketches* cannot be ignored. Western influence on Chinese music can be traced back to 1601, when

[41] *Baidu Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Long Kowtow"; available from https://baike.baidu.com/item/磕长头/1353861; accessed October 26, 2021.

[42] People's Government of Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, "朝圣路上，磕着长头去远方" [Pilgrimage road, long kowtow to the distance], *Ganzi daily news*, April 20, 2018; available from http://www.gzz.gov.cn/gzzrmzf/c100391/201804/e89287280f834f4387ee06747c332518.shtml; accessed 22 April 2022.

Western missionaries brought the first harpsichord to the Emperor of the Ming Dynasty.[43] As more and more young people go abroad to study and return home with new knowledge of classical music, they gradually integrate Western musical ideas and instruments into Chinese traditional music. Western music has become widely accepted, and a new creative composing style combining Chinese and Western music has been formed.

In 1927, two famous educators, Yuanpei Cai (1868–1940) and Youmei Xiao (1884–1940), founded the Shanghai National Conservatory of Music, the first professional music college in China, which is now known as the Shanghai Conservatory of Music.[44] Cai studied abroad and lived in Japan and Europe in succession. His experiences in many countries gave him a long-term vision and novel teaching ideas, so he provided great support for the establishment of art colleges. Cai advocated a flexible learning style, which provided a broad perspective and open-minded attitude not only for the education system, but also for future Chinese music composition, especially piano music. The other founder, Xiao, was the father of modern music education in China. With the support of Cai, he also went to Japan and Germany to further his music studies and became the first person in China to obtain a doctoral degree from a foreign university. At the same time, as one of the earliest composers who used Western compositional techniques in modern Chinese history, Xiao composed many piano, vocal, and orchestral works, and also published numerous music textbooks and papers.

As he was influenced by Western music education, Xiao's instrumental music works not only use the Western orchestra, one can also hear the shadows of Beethoven and Chopin in

[43] Daiting Zhong, "西方乐器进入中国的历史"[The history of Western musical instruments in China], *360doc.com*, December 10, 2017; available from http://www.360doc.com/content/17/1210/09/9165926_711733730.shtml; accessed 21 April 2022.

[44] Zhihai Cui, *Biography of Cai Yuanpei* (Beijing: Hongqi Press, 2009), 186–203.

tonality and structure.[45] At the same time, his works still possess the inherent qualities of traditional Chinese music, such as national melody and pentatonic scale. Under the influence of Cai's education philosophy of openness and freedom, Xiao not only cultivated a large number of outstanding Chinese musical talents, but also laid a solid foundation for future Chinese music composers to create new music with Western characteristics. In addition to this, Xiao and Tianhua Liu (a national composer) founded the Orchestra Improvement Society together in 1927. They integrated equal temperament into instrumental music to improve intonation, added the concepts of chromatic scale and position change of Western string instruments, promoted the staff, created works with a knowledge of Western musical theory and rich Eastern elements, and made great contributions to the reform and development of Chinese traditional music.[46] Since then, instead of the traditional music notation in numbers and words, the composition of Chinese folk music on the staff has gradually become popular and widely used.

In 1928, Huang Zi (1904–1938), a famous educator and composer, arrived at Yale University and began his formal study of music theory and composition. His Symphonic Overture *in Memoriam*, composed in memory of his first lover, was completed and premiered at the graduation concert at Yale University[47]; it was also the first symphony written using Western instruments in China. Upon returning to China after graduation, Huang chose to stay at the Shanghai National Conservatory of Music as a teacher. During those years, he not only taught numerous students, but also established the first symphony orchestra in China composed entirely of Chinese people. In the late twentieth century, that development paid more dividends when

[45] Zheng Xie, "音樂家蕭友梅與孫中山" [Musician Xiao Youmei and Sun Zhongshan], *Associated Times*, August 6, 2021; available from https://kknews.cc/culture/eqo52zy.html; accessed 21 April 2022.

[46] "Liu Tianhua," *Baidu*; available from https://baike.baidu.com/item/刘天华/10555; accessed 22 April 2022.

[47] Renkang Qian, *黄自的生活与创作* [*Huang Zi's life and composition*] (Beijing: People's Music Publishing Press, 1997).

musicians brought back Western compositional techniques and integrated them into traditional Chinese music; folk music with Chinese characteristics also went abroad and had positive communication with and influence on world music. For example, in some works by Italian and French composers, such as Puccini's opera *Turandot* and Debussy's *Pagodes*, we can hear the shadow of Chinese music

Western musicians' exploration of and growing interest in Eastern music can also be seen in the article "Music in Modern China" by Alexander Tcherepnine, son of the Russian composer and educator Nikolai Tcherepnine.[48] Through Tcherepnine's descriptions from his time living in China we can see the acceptance of world culture on the wharf, the unique work song of Chinese laborers, and the mysterious ancient chanting of Buddhist scriptures in temples. Countless kinds of sounds make up the unique Chinese music, which is constantly developing and improving. As music educator Weikai Xing said, "Openness, communication and integration are the natural features of the development of human music culture. Chinese music culture is created and owned by the Chinese people, both traditional and new. It belongs to both the nation and the world. It has developed and will continue developing."[49] In the footprints of history, we can also see that the development of Chinese music is not accidental, but inevitable under the opening and mutual acceptance of the world.

In *Tibetan Sketches*, many characteristics of Western music are found under the melody of national modes— such as the overlay of Sergei Prokofiev's favorite tritone chords and endless repetition of dissonant intervals, Debussy's use of long pedals to create a hazy and almost

[48] Alexander Tcherepnine, "Music in Modern China," *Musical Quarterly* 21, no. 4 (1935): 391–400; http://www.jstor.org/stable/738658.

[49] Weikai Xing, "音乐审美经验的感性论原理" [Perceptual theory of musical aesthetic experience], *Central Conservatory of Music Newspaper* 1 (1993).

psychedelic sound, and Bartók's use of the piano as a percussion instrument. But national composers like Cui have not given up music with national characteristics.

Traditional Chinese Music

Chinese music has a long history. The pentatonic scale, always used in folk music, is the unique mode in Chinese traditional music. The five notes in the Chinese scale are named *Gong*, *Shang*, *Jue*, *Zhi*, and *Yu*, corresponding to the solfege names *do*, *re*, *mi*, *sol*, and *la* in Western classical music. The interval relationship between them is in the order major second, major second, minor third, and major second. There are no minor seconds or semitones in the basic Chinese pentatonic mode. Similar to Western major and minor keys, each of these five notes can also be used as a tonic to become a new mode, but the different interval relations result in a different tonality. Following are the five basic modes that use C as the *Gong* note, each with a different note as the tonic:

C-*Gong* mode: *do–re–mi–sol–la–do* (M2–M2–m3–M2–m3)

D-*Shang* mode: *re–mi–sol–la–do–re* (M2–m3–M2–m3–M2)

E-*Jue* mode: *mi–sol–la–do–re–mi* (m3–M2–m3–M2–M2)

G-*Zhi* mode: *sol–la–do–re–mi–sol* (M2–m3–M2–M2–m3)

A-*Yu* mode: *la–do–re–mi–sol–la* (m3–M2–M2–m3–M2)

The individual intervallic relationships are fixed, but they appear in a different order. Because there is no fixed pitch, it sounds like modulation to other keys. The tonic of *Gong* mode can be C; but if we want to start with D as the tonic, as long as we follow the same interval relationship, it can also be called *Gong* mode, with a change of name to D-*Gong* mode.

If two scales both start with C but the interval relationship changes, the mode also changes. Following are the five scales with C as the tonic, but with different notes and in different keys:

C-*Gong* mode: C–D–E–G–A–C (M2–M2–m3–M2–m3)

C-*Shang* mode: C–D–F–G–Bb–C (M2–m3–M2–m3–M2)

C-*Jue* mode: C–Eb–F–Ab–Bb–C (m3–M2–m3–M2–M2)

C-*Zhi* mode: C–D–F–G–A–C (M2–m3–M2–M2–m3)

C-*Yu* mode: C–Eb–F–G–Bb–C (m3–M2–M2–m3–M2)

Here the *Gong* notes are C, Bb, Ab, F, and Eb, which can be seen as parallel tonic scales with different *Gong* notes.

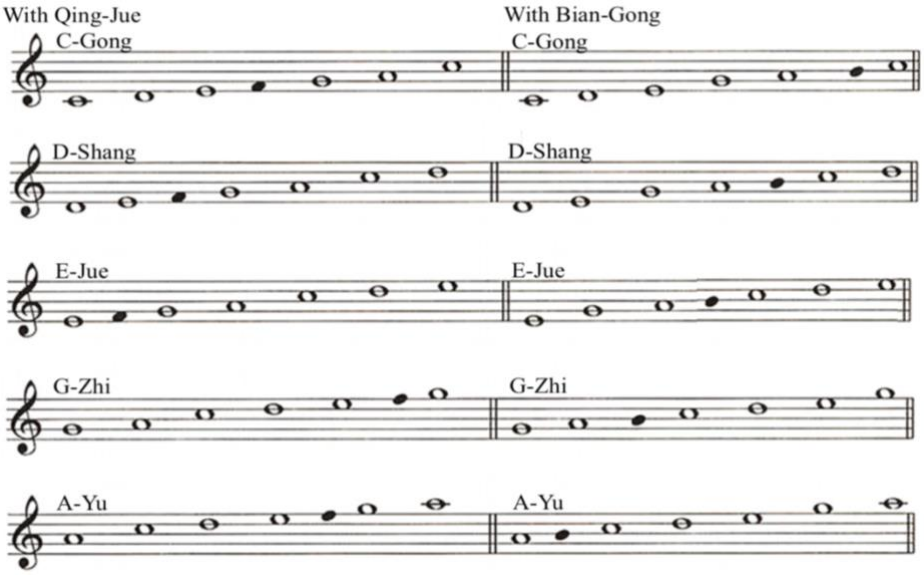
A certain pattern can be seen from the above ten different arrangements. To distinguish the tonality of a pentatonic mode, one only needs to find three contiguous notes in the basic pentatonic scale to easily and quickly find the *Gong* note, which is the first of the three. Then, by finding the first and last notes, one can determine the tonic and mode of the scale or piece.

At the same time, there are stable perfect fifths in the pentatonic scale. Because ancient Chinese music used the twelve-pitch scale (known as Pythagorean tuning in Western music theory), the parallel perfect fifth is a common and frequent harmonic progression in folk music. On the other hand, after avoiding the *Gong* note, the use of the fifth makes the tonality of the music become blurred, which is also a common way of expressing "fuzziness" in Chinese music. For example, G–D, D–A in C-*Gong* mode; F–C, C–G in C-*Shang*; Eb–Bb, Bb–F in C-*Jue*; C–G, C–D in C-*Zhi* and Bb–F, F–C, C–G in C-*Yu*.

The basic notes in the traditional Chinese pentatonic modes are known as *Zheng-Sheng*, which means "authentic tones." To have more variety, there are also some notes called *Pian-*

Sheng, "alternative tones." The addition of one to two *Pian-Sheng* tones creates more complex hexatonic or heptatonic scales. Among them, the authentic tones' upper half step to alternative tones becomes a *Qing* note, which is the same as a sharp in Western music theory; a lower half step is a *Bian* note, which means flat, and a lower whole step is a *Run* note, which is double flat. The four *Pian-Sheng* notes that appear the most are *Qing-Jue*, *Bian-Zhi*, *Bian-Gong*, and *Run*, which means adding notes around the first degree, third degree, and fourth degree. Take the C-*Gong* mode as an example: these four notes will be the B-*Bian-Gong* and Bb-*Run* of C-*Gong* (C lower half and whole step), F-*Qing-Jue* of E-*Jue* (E upper half step), and F#-*Bian-Zhi* of G-*Zhi* (G lower half step). So that if we take C as the *Gong* note, we need only to add the *Bian-Gong* note (B) and the *Qing-Jue* note (F), then have a complete modern heptatonic scale as typical in Western tonal music.

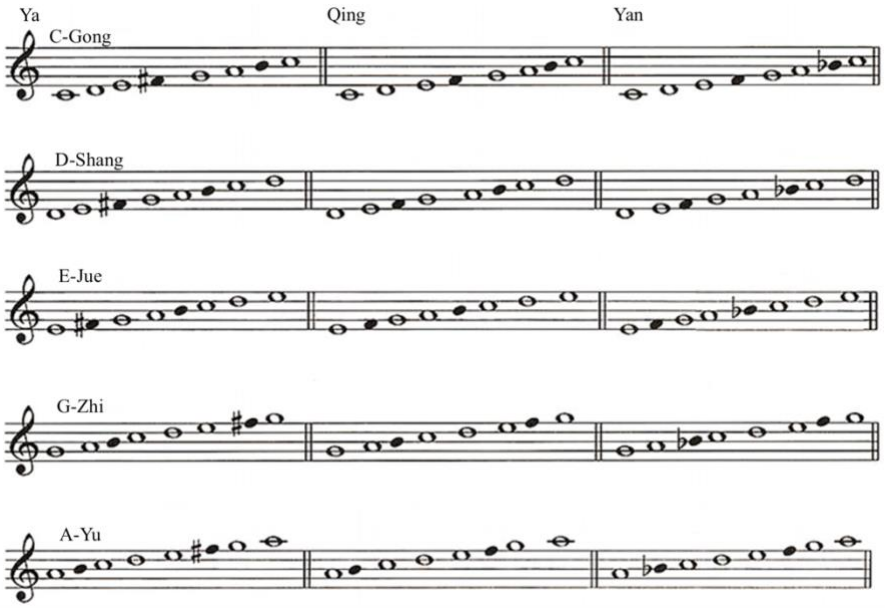
After adding these alternative notes, there are ten kinds of hexatonic scales, which are composed separately by adding *Qing-Jue* or *Bian-Gong* based on the five pentatonic modes. In Ex. 4, take C as *Gong* note, which means adding F or B to complete ten new scales in C-*Gong* mode.



Example 4. Adding *Qing-Jue* and *Bian-Gong* to five pentatonic scales

The heptatonic modes are divided into three scales with different names: *Ya*, *Qing*, and *Yan* modes. There are five variations in each mode, to make fifteen modes altogether. In Ex. 5 below, we still take C as *Gong* note, then add two alternative notes in turn to complete the fifteen new heptatonic scales in C-*Gong* mode. The addition of these accidentals brings more possibilities of modulation and transition, thus contributing to more interesting Chinese folk music.[50]

[50] "中国民族调式" [Chinese national modes], *Baidu*; available from https://baike.baidu.com/item/中国民族调式/10213235?fr=aladdin; accessed 21 April 2022.



Example 5. The fifteen heptatonic scales in C-*Gong* mode

CHAPTER V

MUSIC ANALYSIS

Analysis of *Tibetan Sketches*

Cui mentions in an interview that the composition of this suite marked the progression of his instrumental music from a flat monophonic melody to a complex, multidimensional, multi-voice composition.[51] He combined the Chinese pentatonic mode with Western music theory and sound system, and at the same time added Tibetan regional features, such as repetitions and frequent use of intervals of a second, tritone chords, overlapping, changeable rhythms, and onomatopoeia. Cui shows us not only the unique and charming sound effects of Tibetan music but his rich creative knowledge and clear compositional ideas. His use of the word "sketches" in the title of this work also expresses his intention to depict Tibet through his eyes.

Xie—Pastoral and Antiphon

This movement has a simple ternary form with recapitulation. Many folk songs in China use this form because of its contrast and repetition. The movement is based on the C-*Gong* (C–D–E–G–A), F-*Gong* (F–G–A–C–D), and G-*Gong* (G–A–B–D–E), which are all in the *Gong* system (in the order *Gong Shang Jue Zhi Yu*). There is also some unclear tonality, modulation, and bitonality. Figure 6 is a chart of the form analysis.

[51] Liu, "Just to pursue a drop."

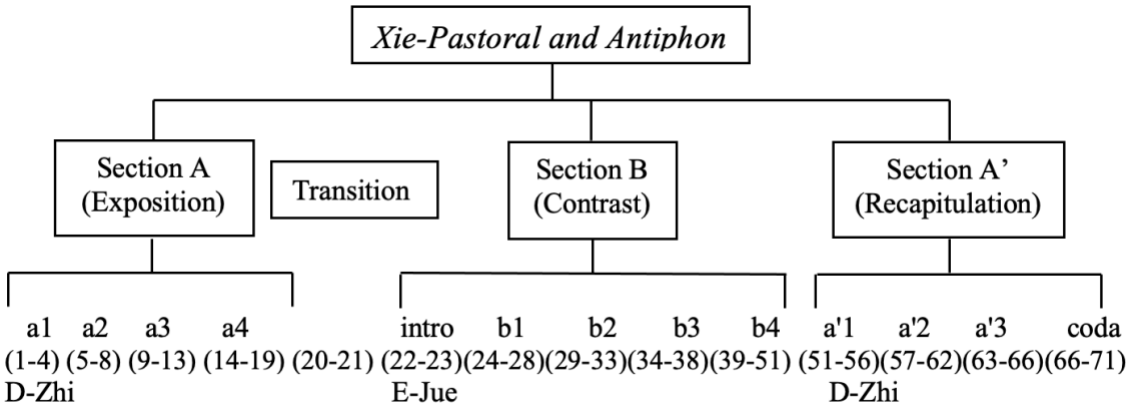
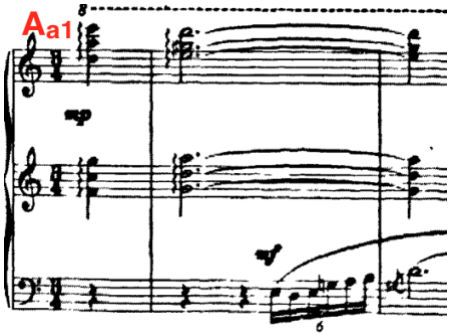


Figure 6. Form analysis of *Xie—Pastoral and Antiphon*

Section A, Exposition, in mm. 1–19, may be divided into four parts. The overall mode revolves around the *Zhi* note of G-Gong, which can be seen as a tonic in D-*Zhi* mode, D–E–G–A–B. These basic five notes of D-*Zhi* can also be found in each long note of the melodies in a1, a2, and a3. Measures 1–4 constitute the first section, a1, which is also the first theme of the movement, in three-staff notation. Arpeggios in the upper two lines (soprano and alto) are interwoven in the form of a fifth-degree overlap in the modes of C-*Gong* and F-*Gong*, imitating ethereal singing. At the same time, the bass in the G-*Gong* mode also has a fifth-interval relation to the C-*Gong* above (see Ex. 6). The *Angdie* style of typical Tibetan folk songs (see chapter 4) is clearly represented in the long notes and wavy phrases. It develops around the most frequently used pitch group in Tibetan music, E–G–A. The shadow of A minor also falls on it, and it ends on E-*Yu*, the dominant of A minor (see Ex. 7).

The following parts, a2, a3, and a4, all develop from the first theme and end on the tonic, D. The soprano part of a2 pushes the music forward through variations and syncopations while the scale of the bass part ascends quickly to g^1, then descends in triplets. The bass of a3 repeats the scale in D-*Zhi*, after pushing the music all the way up to g^2, then zigzagging down. The

accidentals accord a sense of transposition and also highlight the instability of the music (see Ex. 8). From m. 15, the long chords of the higher two voices are gradually shortened, and the bass part also changes from long coloraturas to beats of sixteenth notes. The overall framework is compact and prepares for the contrasting section B.



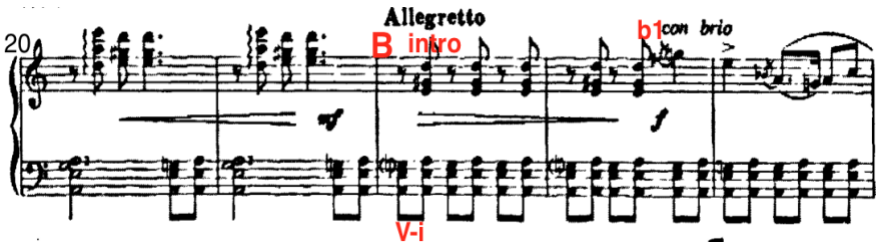
Example 6. *Tibetan Sketches*, I, mm. 1–2

Example 7. *Tibetan Sketches*, I, 1–4, bass line

Example 8. *Tibetan Sketches*, I, mm. 9–11, bass line

After the transition of mm. 20–21 with upbeat, the music enters section B. The three-staff notation becomes two lines as the tempo quickens to *Allegretto*, the mood changes from lyrical to cheerful under the term *con brio*, and the dynamic changes from *piano* to *forte* within five measures. Although Section B lasts from m. 22 to m. 51, the two measures before m. 24 can be regarded as a short introduction. The real melody of the second theme enters in m. 24 and the tonality changes to E-*Jue*. The whole section can be clearly seen as a vocal duet, imitating male

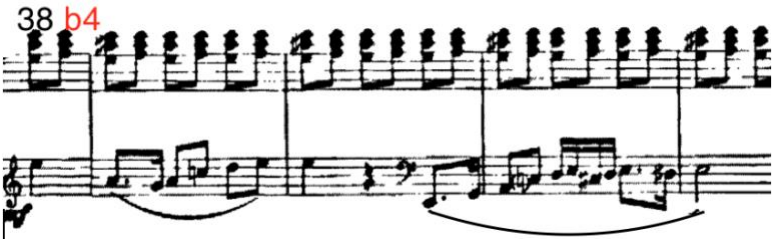
and female voices and echoing the title *Pastoral and Antiphon*, centering on the development of another characteristic pitch group in Tibetan music, A–C–D–E. The eighth-note accompaniment of the entire B section continues the ascending-second repetition of G–A, no matter how the musical register and tonality change. It can also be regarded as a dominant–tonic progression in A major. At the same time, the right hand repeats the dominant-seventh chord in A major without a fifth and falls together with the tonic chord on the last half beat in the left hand. The dotted notes and the alternation of hands promote the introduction of the second melody in section B. The soprano part of the accompaniment repetition echoes the melody repetition of section A in the descending second E–D of the soprano part and the ascending second G–A of the middle part. From the perspective of Western tonality, the whole section and section A are in parallel major and minor keys. Meanwhile, D–E and G–A also highlight the C-*Gong* mode, which is the same *Gong* mode with a tonic of E-*Jue* in section B (see Ex. 9).



Example 9. *Tibetan Sketches*, I, mm. 20–24

Measures 24–28 make up part b1, mm. 29–33 make up b2, and the melodies of these two parts are basically the same. The second part is an octave higher while adding ornamental notes, which can be seen as a variation of the first part. Measures 34–38 and a pickup constitute b3, the melody of which goes down to *c#*^{0} and new material is introduced. Part b4 begins at m. 39 and ends on the first eighth note of m. 51, when section A′ begins. As the music progresses, the

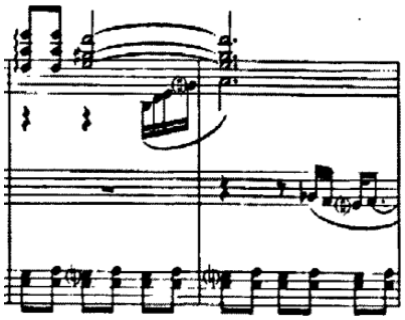
melody of b4 switches to the left hand. Variations of the main melody of section B can still be vaguely heard, but the pitch changes frequently (see Ex. 10). The right-hand accompaniment changes to the repetition of diminished-third and minor-third chords while maintaining the same whole step repetition, G–A, which simulates the sound of Tibetan percussion instruments and highlights the long contrasting melody. The melody of the whole of b4 contains fragments of the melody of the first three sections. Meanwhile, the number of phrases and their speed of change increases, reduced from five measures to two measures: that is, half a phrase changes register, making the duet sound interlinked and more natural.



Example 10. *Tibetan Sketches*, I, 39–42

The recapitulation A′ starts from the abrupt cadence of m. 51, then goes to the end of the movement. The notation goes back to three lines. The six measures, a4, make up a coda in one continuous melody line. Because the rolling broken chords of the two upper voices in section A give way to only one line in section A′, elements of the middle and bass lines are replaced by the similar melody of section B. So the continuous whole-step progression of the two eighth-note repetition in the bass, with the melody in the upper two voices blending sections A and B in the faster tempo, give the recapitulation the feeling of lightness and melodiousness (see Ex. 11). The frame and main theme of the recapitulation are still taken from the first section, but elements from section B are included. Measures 62–65 before the coda echo the transition section between

section A and B (mm. 20–23), with a ritenuto, returning to the original tempo and two-line notation. The coda in the last line with the continual repetition of A–G and E–D descends to the D-*Zhi* of the G-*Gong* mode (fourth note in the scale), forming a sound of diminished fifths with a feeling of the Tibetan style, and leaving the movement with an incomplete sense.



Example 11. *Tibetan Sketches*, I, 54–55

Throughout the first movement, the composer frequently uses the national pentatonic mode with modulation and transition. The movement uses folk-song techniques, onomatopoeia, and imitative antiphonal singing, as well as Western musical markings. It skillfully expresses the open and melodious parts with three voices, then a compact and lively character with two voices. The sharp contrast between first theme and second theme, the integration of block chords and linear melodies, and the flexible use of rhythm and tonality combine to create a vivid pastoral picture of the grasslands.

Qiao—Buddhist Activities in the Temple

The second movement is still a simple ternary form with recapitulation, but the recapitulation is reduced in length. Given the overall structure of the movement, the recapitulation part looks in fact more like a coda that repeats the thematic material. The overall

style is more solemn than the previous movement, and the feeling of the *Andantino divoto* part (Section B) is like the rigorous and busy movements used in religious ceremonies. Compared with *Xie*, this movement has few ornaments and cadenza fragments, so the style is more solemn. Section A (mm. 1–26) slowly unfolds the solemn temple scene for us at the tempo of *Adagio*, then the tempo of section B (mm. 27–66) slightly increases to *Andantino divoto*, where the music sounds busy but not hurried. After the four-measure bridge, the movement reaches the climax, b3. Finally, section A′ (mm. 67–74) returns to the main theme, and the piece fades away on an extremely distant dissonant fermata across five octaves on the piano. Figure 7 is a chart of the form analysis.

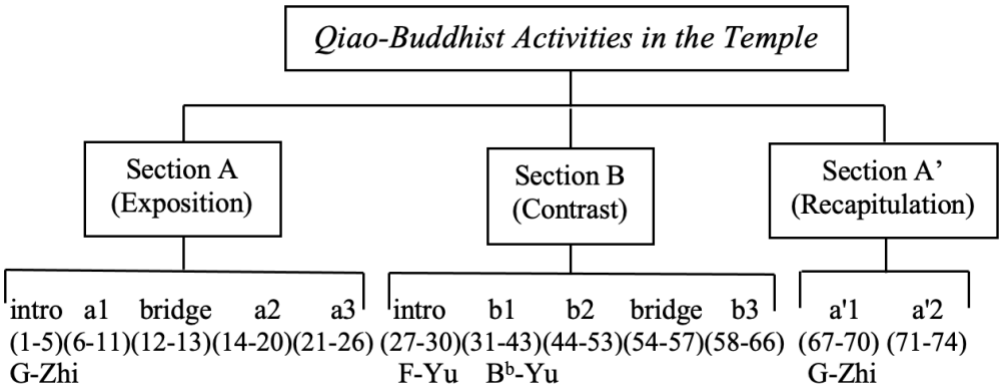
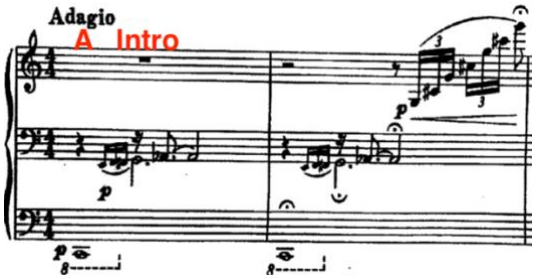


Figure 7. Form analysis of *Qiao—Buddhist Activities in the Temple*

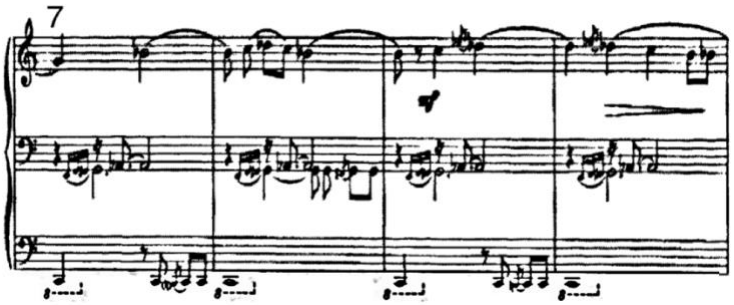
Section A can be divided into four parts, among which the introduction (mm. 1–5) is the basis of the development of the main theme of the movement, and its materials, music ideas, and tonalities have an important influence on that development. Although the tonality of this movement is more varied than the first movement and is sometimes deliberately blurred, the movement revolves around the main notes in the C-*Gong* mode. So, even though it as if the tonality is changing a lot, there are many repeated notes such as C and G, so the music does not

sound strange to listen to. The first note at the beginning of the movement, C^1, runs through the whole piece, laying a steady, solemn tone. The melody of the higher part is based on ascending tritones, imitating the clear sound of small religious instruments, such as bell, bone flute, and chord harmonica (see Ex. 12), until a new melody appears at a1 in the soprano part.

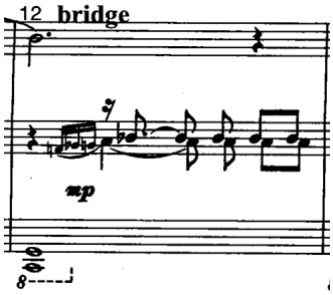


Example 12. *Tibetan Sketches*, II, mm. 1–2

Part a1 in mm. 6–11 has changed from G-*Zhi* to a melody dominated by the hexatonic mode C-*Yu* (C–Eb–F–G–Ab–Bb) while maintaining the original middle and bass voices. The higher voice is in B-flat-*Yu* mode, which is the same tonality as C-*Yu* with a different tonic, forming a simultaneous mixture of modes. In addition, there is an interval of second between the modes of these two parts, just like the second-interval harmony that can be seen throughout the work (see Ex. 13). Although the bridge of the next two measures lacks the melody in the soprano, the interval of a fifth in the first beat and ascending interval of a fourth of the middle part in m. 12 all push the music forward (see Ex. 14), before a2 begins (mm. 14–21).



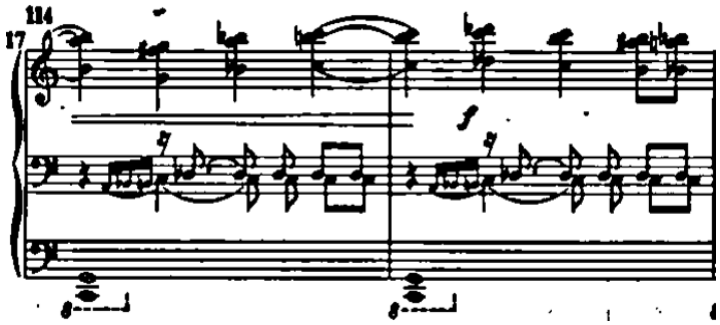
Example 13. *Tibetan Sketches*, II, mm. 7–10



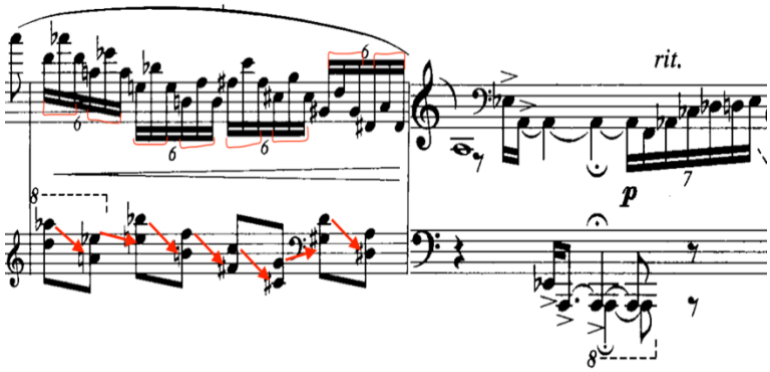
Example 14. *Tibetan Sketches*, II, m. 12

The whole a2 section can be seen as a variation and development of a1. Bass is a steady interval of a fifth, while the middle voice keeps repeating the ascending fourth. The rhythm of the main melody is twice as long at the higher octave and consists of octaves and major sevenths, reaching the first *forte* of the whole movement in m. 18 (see Ex. 15). Then section a3 returns to *pianissimo* from *forte,* and the melody of soprano returns to the triplet tritones at the beginning. The tonality also matches the main tonality of the whole section A and returns to G-*Zhi* mode. In the next two measures, the original fixed structure is destroyed, and the music prepares for the contrasting section. The material changes from the triplet bell sound in the soprano at the beginning to a zigzag descending sextuplet and stops on a fermata (see Ex. 16). After the broken tritone chords and the descending sequence of fourths between the hands and the end of the interval of a fifth, a D-flat-*Gong* scale (Db–Eb–F–Ab–Bb) with *Run* note (a major second below

the tonic, C-flat) slowly ascends into the B section. So, the last two measures can also be seen as a little connection between the two sections.



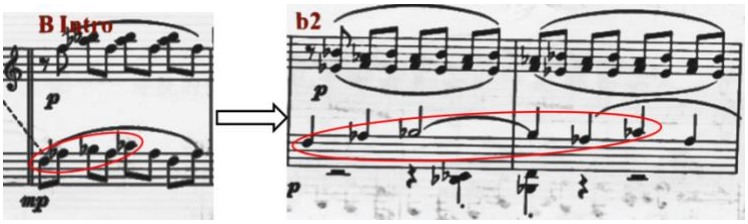
Example 15. *Tibetan Sketches*, II, mm. 17–18



Example 16. *Tibetan Sketches*, II, mm. 25–26

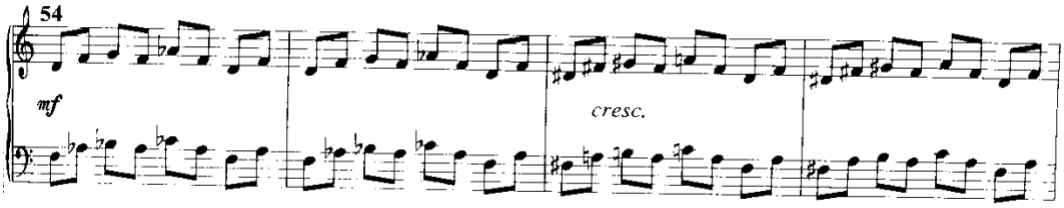
As with the structure of section A, section B can be divided into four parts with introduction and bridge. However, in contrast with section A, section B has a clearly different character and two new melodies. The contrasting section is same as in the first movement, where the notation also changes from three lines to two, indicating the change of the character and materials. After the introduction of the first four measures in F-*Yu* (F–Ab–Bb–C–Eb), parts b1 and b2 composed in the B-flat-*Yu* mode (Bb–Db–Eb–F–Ab) move forward with interval of a second again. The four phrases of b1 and the three phrases of b2 each have several more notes at

the end of the phrase than the previous one, which gradually expands the content. The melody moves to the left hand in mm. 44–53 of b2, which is same melody as the left-hand soprano at the beginning of section B. The interval of a second accompaniment originally repeated by the left hand, changes to the more stable interval of fifth and third of the right hand (see Ex. 17).

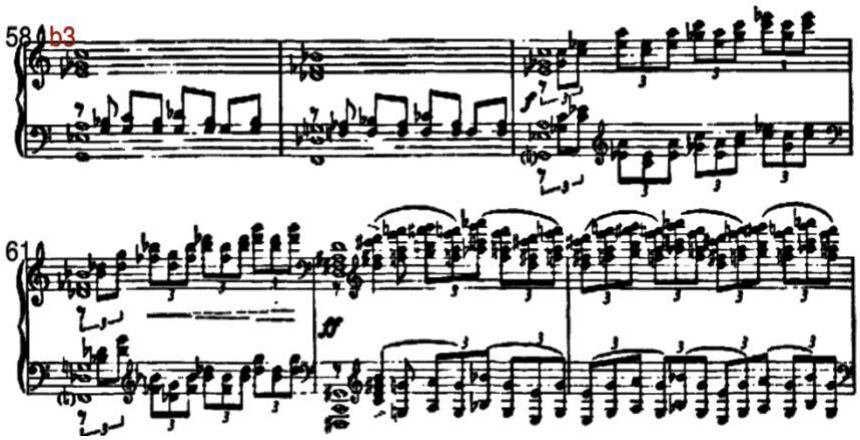


Example 17. *Tibetan Sketches*, II, mm. 27, 48–49

The following four measures, mm. 54–57, are a transition to b3 with an ascending semitone sequence in parallel major sixths between soprano and bass. The materials in these four measures use the introductory part of section B (see Ex. 18). The melody in the first two measures of b3 also follows same material, but the diminished-seventh chord at the beginning of each measure and the large number of unstable dissonant intervals begin to move the music forward, all the way to the second *forte* of the movement at m. 60. Then the continuous crescendo pushes the music forward and finally leads to the climax of the monks' "sutra debating" (see chapter 4). The climax uses whole notes and triplets that appear at the beginning of the movement; the triplets of the unstable intervals formed by the overlapping of octave, third, and minor second; and long notes of the augmented triad, which constitute the unique sound of Tibetan religious instrumental music (see Ex. 19).



Example 18. *Tibetan Sketches*, II, mm. 54–57



Example 19. *Tibetan Sketches*, II, mm. 58–63

The recapitulation in last section, A′, has only two short phrases (mm. 67–70, 71–74)—a shortened section A in the overall form—and sounds more like a coda. The harmony surrounds C and G notes to return the tonality to the G-*Zhi*. After the climax of section b3, both the tempo and strength return to the feeling of the beginning, as well as the three lines notation. In this recapitulation, the soprano melody is added with little change after the end of the first phrase and repeated lower octave in the second phrase. The middle and bass parts remain the same, except for the added grace notes, which can be seen as the repetition of the first phrase. Finally, as the music slows down and makes a diminuendo, the whole movement ends on a *pianissisimo* (*ppp*) dissonant chord that stretches across five and a half octaves, as if all is back to peace and quiet again with the last sound from a distant religious bell.

Zhuo—Villagers' Dance

Unlike first two movements, this movement uses only two-line notation. According to the composer's previous pattern of composition, this also means that the contrast between the internal characters of this movement is obviously less than in the previous two movements. The music displays a cheerful and lively mood from the beginning; and the coda not only reaches the greatest climax of the movement, but also sets off the biggest climax of the whole suite. This creates an obvious contrast with the style of first two movements as well bringing out the theme of a happy dance. This movement has more complex harmony and greater length than the first two movements. It is a compound ternary form with a brief recapitulation and coda. Sections A (mm. 1–72) and B (mm. 75–128) are in simple ternary form with their own recapitulations. After the Transition (mm. 129–56), the music moves to a short recapitulation section A′ (mm. 157–70), and finally at the end of the whole piece the coda starts from m. 171. Figure 8 is a chart of the form analysis.

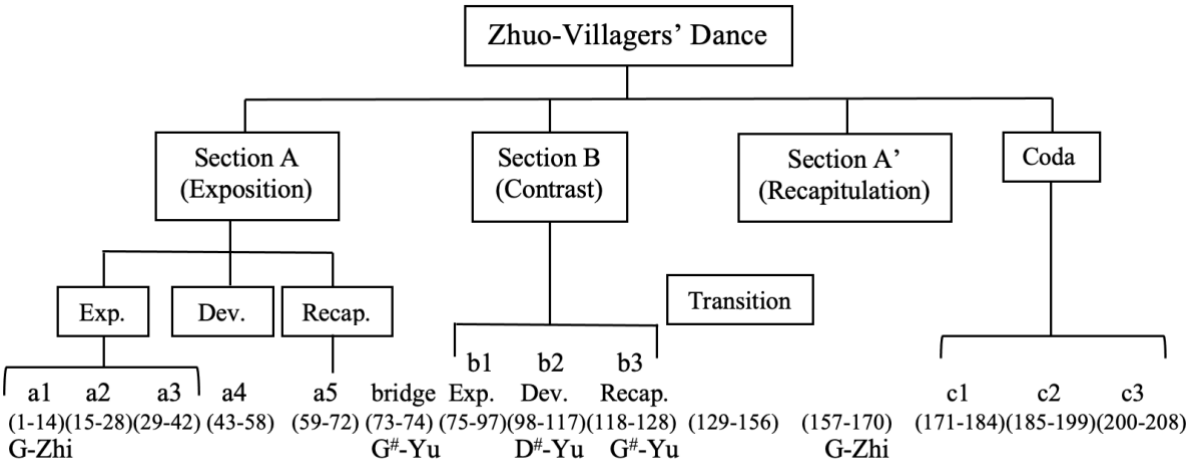
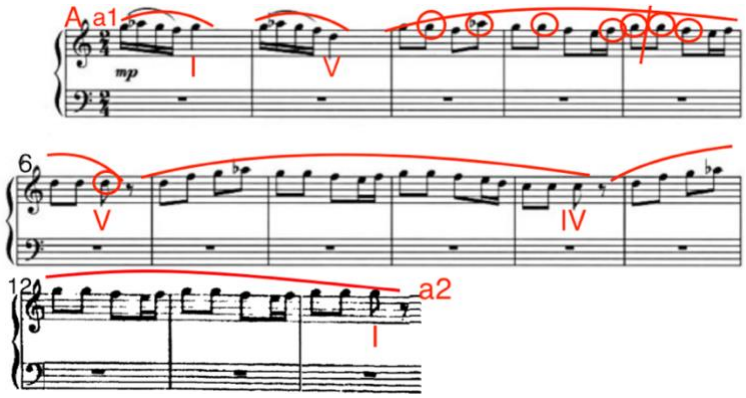


Figure 8. Form analysis of *Zhuo—Villagers' Dance*

In the overall structure, except for the recapitulation, the sections are all ternary. The exposition section A is in a simple ternary form with recapitulation. It develops in hexatonic G-*Zhi* mode with *Qing Jue* (a minor second above *Jue*, F), G–A–C–D–E–F. The section can be viewed as five segments, in which a2 and a3 are variations of a1. Compared with the multi-tonality and more complex polyphonic harmony of the previous two movements, this movement focuses on homophonic melody. The theme melody of section A is undulating, vividly depicting the unique movement of feet kicking and stepping back and forth in Tibetan dance.

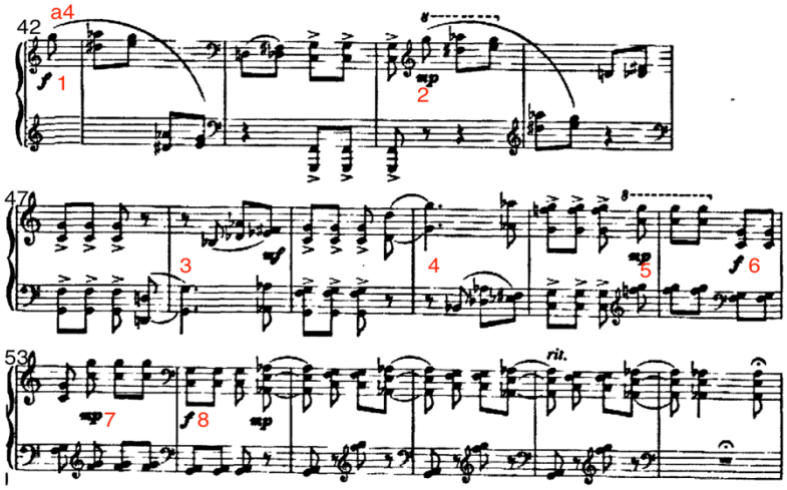
The part a1 can be divided into two short and three long phrases. Two short phrases end on tonic G and dominant D; three long phrases on dominant, subdominant, and tonic; circled notes are extended melody of the first two measures. Although the progression of subdominant to tonic is contrary to usual order in Western classical music, it is commonly used in Tibetan music (see Ex. 20). While maintaining the original material, a2 adds a left-hand part two octaves lower. After a glissando, a3 two octaves lower than a1 with same melody but new dissonant chords accompaniment appears. So far, in the exposition of section A, the melody appears in four different octaves and the interval of a second always shows up in the music, constituting a unique Tibetan characteristic sound.



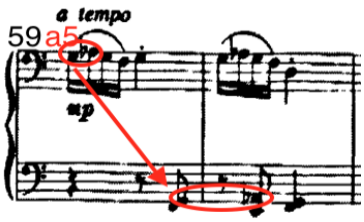
Example 20. *Tibetan Sketches*, III, mm. 1–14

The development part of section A, a4, which starts from m. 43, is a little more relaxed than before but still uses the motivic material of the theme and reaches the first *forte* of the movement. The harmonic material consists of fourths and fifths, the minor seventh continued from the previous part, and its inversion the major second, as well as augmented second and third. Through the change of motive material, the accents of the theme in a4 are changed from the first note of the first beat of each measure to the weak beat or every half beat. Moreover, the three accents at the end of each phrase change the feel from one measure to two measures, and finally the feeling of ending is gradually blurred.

Numerous dissonant intervals, frequent changes in dynamic, and the weak-beat accent at the end of each phrase all make the new melodies fill every register and stimulate the listener's senses (see Ex. 21). Both the register and dynamic change eight times during a4, and finally, slowing down to section B. The melody and rhythm of a5 (mm. 59–72) are the same as that of a3, with the difference that accompaniment syncopation changes to repetition of F–G and E–Ab. The soprano of the left hand is the repetition of first two notes of the right hand (see Ex. 22).

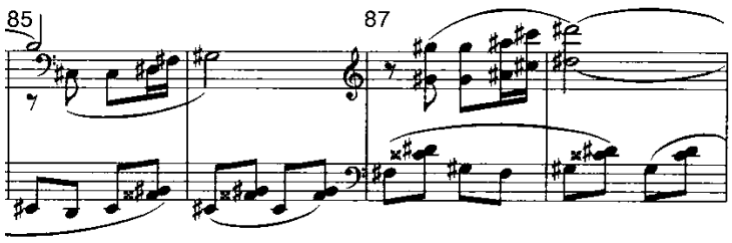


Example 21. *Tibetan Sketches*, III, mm. 43–58



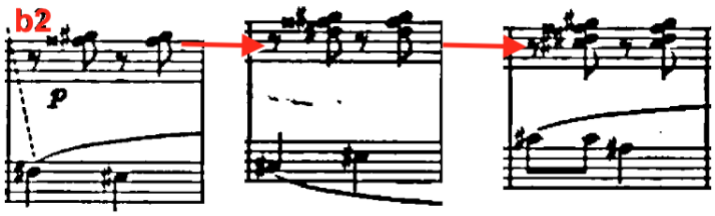
Example 22. *Tibetan Sketches*, III, mm. 59–60

In the two measures of bridge before section B, the left hand continues the note G, but moves up from major second F–G to minor second G–G#, and the mode changes to G-sharp-*Yu* (G#–B–C#–D#–F). Section B is also in an independent simple ternary form with a recapitulation; but compared with section A, it forms an obvious internal contrast in both melody and the texture of the accompaniment. The phrases of the exposition section b1 are clearly lengthened and the mood changes from *agevole* to *sweetly*, but *Yu* mode still makes this section feel wild and lively. In this part, mm. 75–86 can be viewed as a period, the beginning of mm. 87–97 as a new period. The beginning material of the second period is not the same as that of the first, instead, it borrows from the end of the first period and adds an octave to modulate to D-sharp-*Yu* (D#–F#–G#–A#–C#), creating a sense of both transition and convergence (see Ex. 23). The b2 is the development of section B, in same mode but new melody, the melody and accompaniment parts are reversed, the left hand now having the melody. Although the melodies of b1 and b2 are not the same, melodies of b2 are lower in pitch, forming a mirror image of the ascending b1.



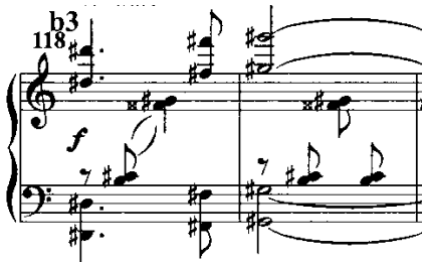
Example 23. *Tibetan Sketches*, III, mm. 85–88

The accompaniment is gradually introduced, from the minor-second interval of b1 to the tonic note D# to the superposition of the fourth and interval of a seconds, then adding C# as the overlapping of the two intervals of a second, and finally pushing the music forward along with the melody of the left hand to the recapitulation part b3 (see Ex. 24). The rhythmic units of the overall part b2 are consistently in eighth notes and quarter notes. Although there are no dotted notes, the accompaniment always starts from the second half of each beat. The dissonant interval superposition gradually added to the accompaniment actively drives the music forward.



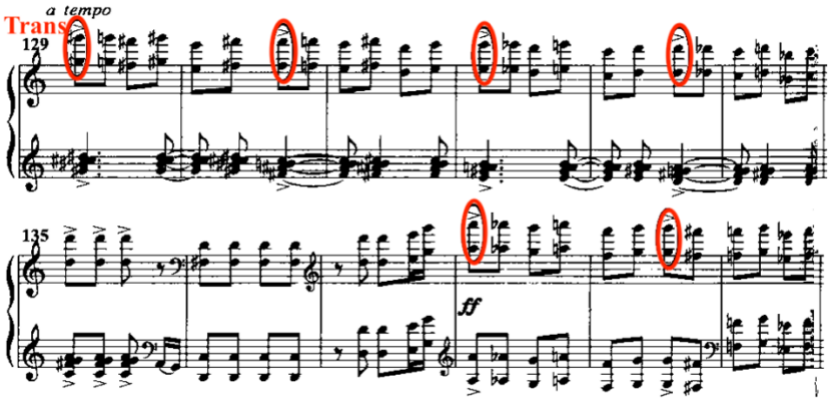
Example 24. *Tibetan Sketches*, III, mm. 98, 104, and 123

The melody of the recapitulation part b3 is the same as that of the exposition part b1, and the tonality changes back from D-sharp-*Yu* to G-sharp-*Yu* mode. The whole recapitulation has three voices, among which the bass and soprano parts are the theme melody *tutti* of section B, and the middle part is the accompaniment. Both hands have the main melody and are played together in four octaves. The accompaniment moves to the middle part, with some hints of melodic variations of b1 (see Ex. 25). The composer here uses the term *tardato*, which means slowing. The whole section imitates the sound and wide range of a chorus and string ensemble, creating an atmosphere of a lively and warm group dance.



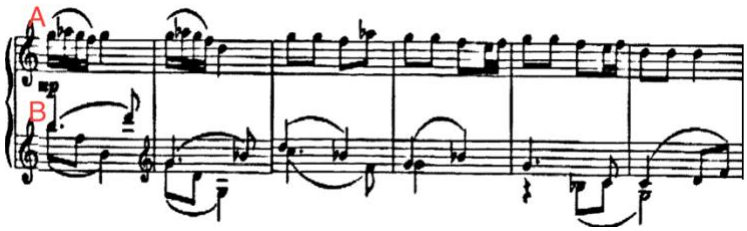
Example 25. *Tibetan Sketches*, III, mm. 118–19

The transition section occurs in mm. 129–56, tempo going back to the beginning (*a tempo*). The section can be divided into two parts, of which mm. 129–45 is the first. The right hand continues the parallel octaves from the previous part, while the left hand changes back to a syncopated dissonance. The melody and rhythmic texture connecting each phrase use the material at the end of each sentence in section B: that is, the weak ascending eighth note, eighth note, and two sixteenth notes. In addition, the melody of the first part has a descending major second, G#–F#–E–D and A–G–F–E, in parallel octaves in each phrase, and also an ascending minor-second interval, G#–A, between phrases (see Ex. 26). The sense of urgency brought about by the continuous accents in mm. 135 and 144 and the repetition of eighth notes gradually changes the triple meter to quadruple meter, and eventually even obscures the meter, until the recapitulation A′ brings back duple meter. The continuous rhythm changes and rich texture of the whole transition part display a lively feeling of singing and dancing. Starting from m. 146 is the second part of the transition section. As the tonality changes each period, the material makes use of the connecting part between the two phrases in the first part. In this section, the material gradually shrinks, and with the change of dynamic and the push forward of rhythm, the music arrives at the recapitulation of the movement.



Example 26. *Tibetan Sketches*, III, mm. 129–40

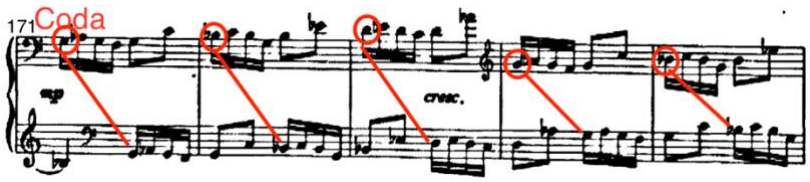
Although the recapitulation A′ is very short, it perfectly integrates the main melodies of the A and B sections. The right hand reproduces the melody of section A, while the left-hand material forms a clear contrast with the right hand. The higher part of the left hand introduces variations on the lyrical melody of section B, and the bass part is responsible for filling and enriching the overall harmony, in contrast with the previous part (see Ex. 27).



Example 27. *Tibetan Sketches*, III, mm. 157–62

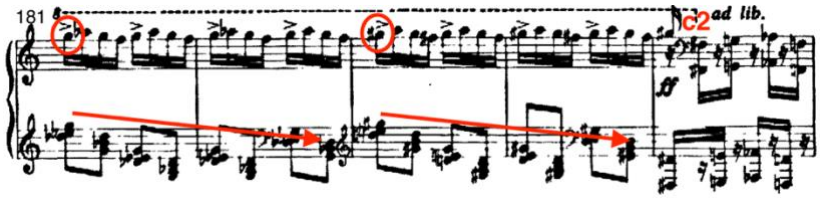
After the reappearance of the main and secondary theme in the recapitulation, the music finally arrives at the coda of the movement, also the climax of the whole work in the unchanged mode of G-*Zhi*. The coda can be divided into three parts. The first part, c1 (mm. 171–84), is in the form of canon, where the bass part enters one beat later and one octave lower than the soprano part and repeats the melody of the soprano. The overall melody progresses upward,

forming an ascending sequence of a minor triad, G–Bb–D, and finally stopping at the note G, three octaves higher than the first G in m. 171 (see Ex. 28).



Example 28. *Tibetan Sketches*, III, mm. 171–75

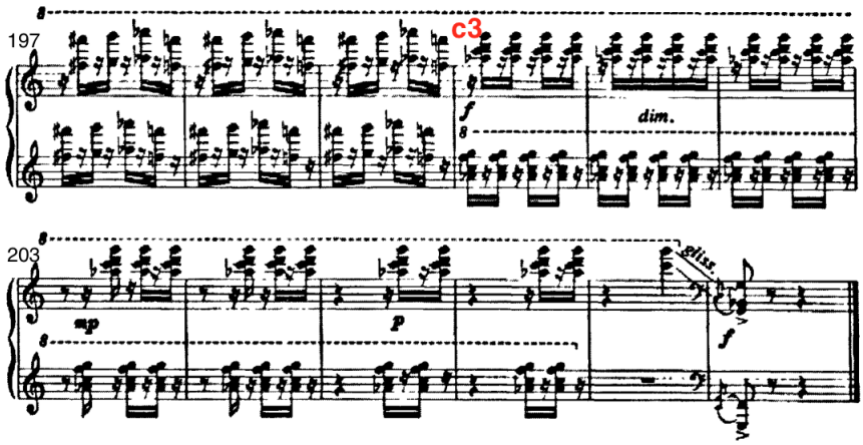
As the dynamic develops from *mezzo piano* to *fortissimo* in the three short lines in a rapid progression, the quickly introduced crescendo indicates a larger climax to come. In the last four measures of c1, the soprano voice is stable in the surrounding sound pattern dominated by the tonic G, echoing with the motive. The bass part has dissonant chords of the major second overlapping with the interval of a minor-third that appeared previously, and minor triads appear alternately. Starting from m. 181, the descending bass part within the phrase and the ascending minor second, G–G#, at the beginning of the two phrases form an outward-expanding tension. The regular accent in the soprano eventually pushes the music to the c2 part, which is also the strongest part of the whole piece (see Ex. 29).



Example 29. *Tibetan Sketches*, III, mm. 181–85

The second part of the coda, c2 (mm. 185–99), continues the ascending canon from c1. The melody changes from horizontal linear to vertical parallel octaves and chord progressions.

The octave sixteenth notes alternating between the hands gradually accelerate upward around the tonic G and forcefully push the music to c3 (mm. 200–8). The left hand in c3 overlaps the intervals of a third and a second, right hand overlaps intervals of a second and a seventh. The two hands alternate, forming the sharp and intense G-*Zhi* hexatonic. The dynamic of the last line has a remarkable change, with the alternation of dissonant chords repeated in different rhythms. It took three lines from *fortissimo* in c2 to get to *forte* here, but only one line decrescendo to *piano*, and then suddenly go back to *forte* again. With longer and longer rests, when people think that everything is done, the perfect fifth glissando all the way down from g^4 to g^0, ending abruptly with a clean accented chord, forms an atmosphere at once warm and shocking (see Ex. 30).



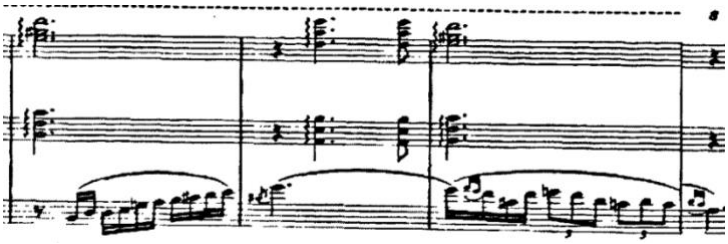
Example 30. *Tibetan Sketches*, III, 197–208

The Use of Tibetan Elements

The tonality of this work is complex, rich in compositional techniques from both East and West. It is easy to see its uniqueness from the above analysis. At the same time, Tibetan characteristics are plentiful in the work, in both structure and style. In addition to the frequent occurrence of the interval of a second in Tibetan folk music, there is another point related to the beliefs of the Tibetan people: the use of the number three, which is a mysterious and solemn

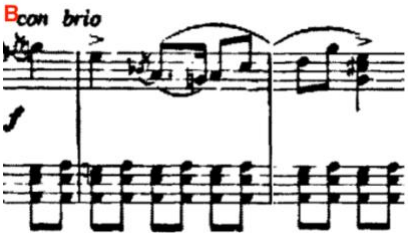
number in Tibetan religion, representing the auspicious. It can be seen from the overall structure that the whole suite contains three movements, and each movement includes three parts. There is also the composer's technique of expression in three voices, which presents the wide range of Tibetan music in all aspects, from visual (the notation) to auditory. Within the three-part structure, almost every A and B sections can be divided into three smaller units. The extensive use of the *Yu* mode, interval of a second, tritone chords, and the register changes corresponding to different themes—all demonstrate composer's familiarity with Tibetan customs and elements.

Moreover, there are many other aspects show striking Tibetan elements, as we will now explore. In the first movement, *Xie—Pastoral and Antiphon*, the most prominent Tibetan element is the *Angdie* style of Tibetan folk songs. This kind of coloratura singing is usually dominated by sixteenth notes in the music, several groups of which are linked together to form phrases throughout. The melodic direction often goes up then down, two phrases are integrated, and there is inevitably a long note before or after a phrase. In general, the phrases of *Angdie* are long, fast, and unhesitatingly straight to the top notes of the song, dominated by steps, while the descent of the song is usually arched or wavy with many decorations, circling back up and down, as shown in the first movement (see Ex. 31). Where the middle section notes are short, many, and fast, they often revolve around the main notes E–G–A, which can be often found in Tibetan songs. They appear as melodic lines in the Exposition and can be heard even in the accompaniment chords of the contrasting sections until the end of the movement. The *Jue*, *Zhi*, and *Yu* modes are frequently used in Tibetan music, especially the *Yu* mode, which can be heard almost throughout *Tibetan Sketches*. The notes E, G, and A are the most basic notes, *Jue–Zhi–Yu*, in C-*Gong* mode, so the composer repeats these notes in a subtle way.



Example 31. *Tibetan Sketches*, I, mm. 2–4

In addition to the meticulous imitation of *Angdie,* the whole piece has a large number of ornamental notes, which have their own characteristics. In the exposition of *Xie,* triplets, quintuplets, and sextuplets, an essential element in Tibetan songs and dance music, appear in almost every melody. These rhythmic patterns and grace notes increase the sense of swing and the uncertainty of the melody, imparting strong freedom and great variability, corresponding to the impromptu singing of pastoral songs according to the mood of the Tibetan herdsmen. Within the rhythm of three-four meter in the overall structure, the concept of tempo is blurred, and the free transformation of wild singing is felt, contrasted with section B in regular rhythm. In addition, most of the appoggiaturas in Tibetan music are the second or third degree above or below a main note, and especially in the contrasting section B, these appoggiaturas are generally found before long notes. In addition to embellishing the main note, the rhythm is modified to highlight another feature of Tibetan music, irregular accents (see Ex. 32). The grace notes add vitality to the regular rhythm, as if we can see a shepherds' duet with heads wagging. The composer imitates the different sound of male and female voices by exchanging the melodies in different registers, corresponding to the antiphonal pastoral in the title.

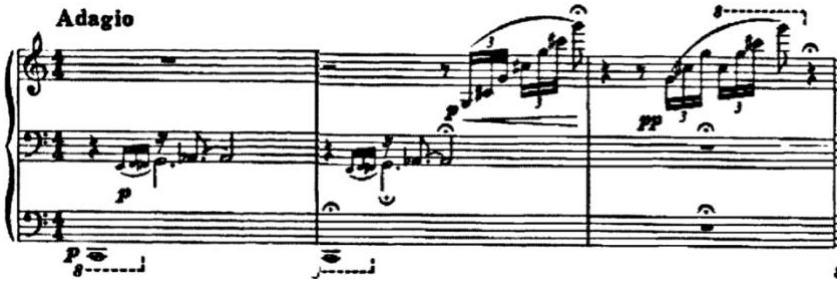


Example 32. *Tibetan Sketches*, I, mm. 24–25

The recapitulation of *Xie* uses a comprehensive range of materials. As is often found in a style of Tibetan mountain folk song, there are scenes of simulated vibrato, bright singing of the herdsmen, and people singing in pairs on vast stretches of grassland. At the end of the last line, there is once again a triplet to weaken the meter, and a return to the single line *Angdie*. The first movement depicts both leisurely and carefree fields, the cold and empty snow plateau, but also the loud and undecorated original singing. The music flowing from the composer's hands constitutes a picture of nature that can appear in the mind of the listener.

The second movement, *Qiao—Buddhist Activities in the Temple*, successfully brings the listener into the Tibetan religious atmosphere from the first note. This movement imitates many Tibetan sounds, from the human voice to instruments to dance. In the previous chapter introducing the religious music of Tibetan Buddhism, it was mentioned that a monk would lead the chanting music in the temple and usually chant the sutras in a low and solemn voice. The first note C^1 running throughout the movement is modeled on this feature. The repetition of this note determines the tonality, deepens the listener's impression, and also plays the important role of leading the whole piece. Moreover, the low and slow sound is reminiscent of the *Tongqin*, an indispensable instrument in Tibetan religious music. The motivic material of this movement, in both range and melody, is typical of chanting music and religious instrumental music (see Ex.

33). In the three-line music, *Tongqin* in the bass is as low and stable as the temple bell, smaller wind instruments such as the Tibetan suona, the conch *Donggar*, and the Tibetan rattle-drum are responsible for filling the timbre in the middle part. The soprano part, which is light and quick, has the sound of small high-pitched percussion instruments such as the bell played by a master lama or the monk leading the sutra.

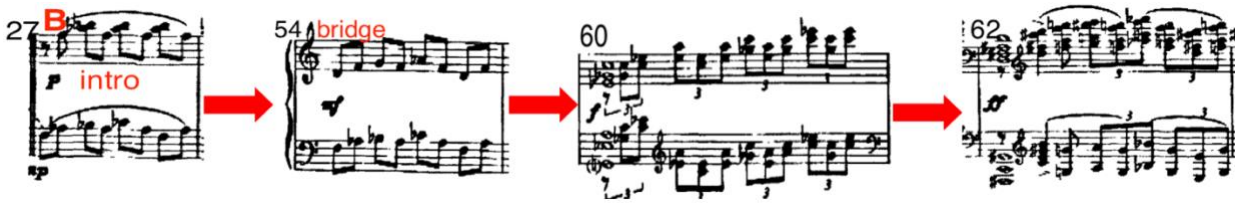


Example 33. *Tibetan Sketches*, II, mm. 1–3

During the ritual, with the sound of the religious instruments and the chanting, a group of tritone sextuplets busily ascends with crescendo, bringing the ethereal music closer and connecting with the coming contrasting section. Compared with the Exposition, section B is more compact and busier. Whereas section A mainly simulates the unique timbre of various ritual instruments, section B depicts the scene of many monks chanting sutras together. This section is still in the usual *Yu* mode of Tibetan music, the main material of the accompaniment uses the interval of a second preferred in Tibetan music, and the melody part develops around the tonic F of *Yu* mode. After the expansion of the traditional pentatonic mode, the use of two *Pian* notes F and B in Tibetan music is frequent. Two quarter notes in the bass and soprano voices are added at the end of each melody (mm. 35, 39, 44, 47, etc.), as a reflection of the end of the phrase, like an echo in chanting, also like bells and *Tongqin* as accompaniment. Compared with

the exposition, the melody of this section is more prominent and smoother, and the accompaniment and melody are clearly divided into two parts.

In the four-measure bridge from m. 54, the twisting texture is full of urgency, we can feel the music becoming more and more tense, pushing it to a climax. The climax is more like a heated sutra debate from Tibetan scriptures than a daily chant. From the *piano* of the introduction of section B to the *mezzo forte* of the transition, the music gradually makes a crescendo to *forte* at b3 and finally stops at *fortissimo* (see Ex. 34). Based on the huge dynamic range from one *piano* to two *fortes*, we can clearly recognize the different characters between chanting and sutra debating.



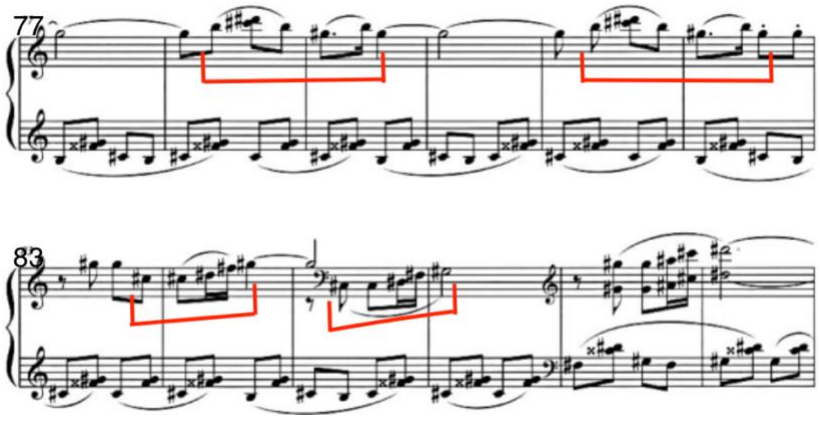
Example 34. *Tibetan Sketches*, II, mm. 27, 54, 60, and 62

During the climax, the accents and long notes mimic the solemnity of ringing the tempo bell during the ritual, the familiar melodic patterns of the octaves represent the monks chanting in dissonant overlapping seconds and thirds. In the lively and chaotic *Cham* dance, a sudden group of septuplets brings the music back to the calm of the beginning, exactly corresponding with the septuplets from section A to section B. The eight measures of the recapitulation section are the same as the exposition section, the soprano part represents the chanting of the scriptures, and seven measures of the middle and bass voices are repeated and accompanied as instrumental music. The last measure contains only one dissonant chord marked *ppp* that spans six octaves, with a sharp contrast in both range and intensity. This chord brings everything to the end but

lingers in an open-ended fermata. In only four pages, from object to humans, both religious and secular, the comprehensive treatment of everything makes us admire the composer's imagination and expressive ability.

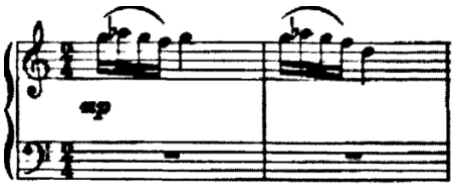
The last movement, *Zhuo—Villagers' Dance*, leaves the magnificence of nature and the sacredness of the temple, dragging the listener back to the life of the ordinary people. Tibetans cannot live without singing and dancing. They joke that "There are as many tones of *Zhuo* as there are stars in the sky, there are as many words of *Zhuo* as there are trees on the mountain, and as many dancing positions in *Zhuo* as hairs on a yak", which shows the variety of *Zhuo*.

Then there is a contrast between the *adagio* and *allegro* in Tibetan dance music, ending with a lively allegro. One person leads the dance alone at the beginning, and then everyone joins in. The rhythm of the fast part is dominated by eighth and sixteenth notes, as in the melody of section A and the accompaniment of section B in *Tibetan Sketches*, and rhythm of the slow part is dominated by dotted notes and syncopations. The phrases are the same as the *Angdie* in the first movement: most of them have two periods that are formed of ascending and descending phrases, and the second half of the phrase is always repeated once (see Ex. 35).



Example 35. *Tibetan Sketches*, III, mm. 77–88

In the main melody of section A, the whole section circles around G as the principal note. The first part imitates the movements of three steps and one kick in Tibetan dance, while the latter part is more like the hand movements made while wearing a long-sleeved Tibetan costume. In the first measure, the melody whirls upward, simulating what happens in the dance after the foot moves three steps to the right, with the other foot kicking to the right. In the second measure, the whirling downward melody is a step in the opposite direction (see Ex. 36). The two short measures show the unique dance posture of Tibetan dance. Each following phrase ends with a repetition of three eighth notes, one of the D, C, or G notes, either staccato or accented. This repetition is similar to the suffixes (meaningless modal particles) that appear in Tibetan songs and dances. These kinds of notes are modal or interjection words in Tibetans, such as "Ya La So." In Tibetan dances, the music of a dance is often repeated dozens of times, gradually accelerating to the climax at the end. Like the dance form, the motive in this movement repeats endlessly from beginning to end, so that the melody can remain in our minds afterwards.



Example 36. *Tibetan Sketches*, III, mm. 1–2

The adagio melody of the *Guo Zho* dance is somewhat similar to a pastoral, with a slow and melodious rhythm and a relaxed dance posture. The music moves from lots of people to a single person, like a Tibetan girl stretching her arms to imitate a peacock in graceful circles. In the next transition part, by changing the accents, the duple meter commonly used at the beginning of *Guo Zho* is changed into triple meter. The stable music is no longer calm, and it can

be imagined that the dance has been replaced by one for men here. If the music in recapitulation is a dance with a mixture of lively *allegro* and graceful *adagio*, the coda is a carnival of all the villagers around the bonfire, corresponding to a Tibetan dance ending with a climax.

In general, the three movements paint a picture of Tibetan's lives, and each piece is unified in theme and content. We sense the laborers' praise of nature on the plateau, mountain, and stream, the devout believers' reverence in the temple, and the common people's love of life in the villages. The composer vividly transforms colorful and diverse Tibetan customs, such as folk songs, scriptures, instrumental music, and dances, into piano music through onomatopoeia and imitation. Even if listeners know nothing about Tibet, they can feel something after listening to this suite and understand a free and fascinating nation completely different from busy city life.

CHAPTER VI

EASTERN AND WESTERN ELEMENTS IN *TIBETAN SKETCHES*[52]

Harmony and Tone

To help performers understand the music, I would also introduce the Tibetan elements combine with Western elements. This work belongs to typical contemporary Chinese instrumental works, based on traditional Chinese style as expressed by contemporary technique. Instead of the basic elements of Western classical music, such as major and minor keys and cadences, the work focuses on the development and variation of the pentatonic mode of *Gong Shang Jue Zhi Yu* and the hexatonic and heptatonic modes with *Pian-sheng* F and B. According to the composer, as in western music theory, each tone in the Chinese national "keys" has its own unique emotional characteristic. The *Gong* mode is as bright as a major key, the *Shang* mode is comfortable and delicate, the *Jue* mode is soft in color and has a sense of being unfinished, and the major-like *Zhi* mode is most used in folk music with rich emotions, expressing not only loud and clear justice but also a sense of pain and suffering. Tibetan music has always preferred to use the *Yu* mode, the only ethnic tone with a tone color similar to Western minor. It can not only express solemnity and heroism, but also the fresh and sweet love of youth as well as warm and passionate Tibetan dance music. Most Chinese folk music expresses the heart in broad major tones. Except for *Yu* mode, the other modes are similar to the Western major, and only subtle differences among the modes guide the myriad differences in the music. The *Yu* mode, similar to minor, can meet the needs of Tibetan music by adding *Pian-sheng*.

[52] The research for and information in this chapter are based on my interview with Bingyuan Cui, and study of Chinese folk instruments and music.

The *Zhi* and *Yu* modes used most in *Tibetan Sketches* are similar to the contrast of major and minor keys of the West. In the traditional pentatonic mode, because of the lack of minor seconds and augmented and diminished intervals, the music is more likely to express elegance, lyricism, or deep, peaceful, stable emotions than dramatic conflict. However, the simple pentatonic scale is rarely used in *Tibetan Sketches*, most of the music uses hexatonic or heptatonic scales. Once the missing interval relationship is added, the music can express intense emotion, more similar to what can be accomplished in the diatonic scale of Western music. Diatonic scales in *Tibetan Sketches* are mainly used in broken chords or long scales, such as the melody of the first movement. This also simulates the long-line expression of Tibetan folk songs.

Cui also uses multi-tonality in many places, and even intentionally blurs the tonality. Especially in the second movement, the blurred tonality and rhythm make the timbre sound much like Debussy's music. Chinese music was mainly composed of monophonic, change of mode being accomplished by the melody's reversal of up and down intervals. In the minds of traditional Chinese composers, the rhythm and tone color of music to express emotions are more important than a rational tonal layout. However, contemporary Chinese music has been enhanced by the fullness of multi-voiced texture and diversity of content, composers add Western theory based on Chinese national modes, creating more complex musical form and harmony.

Similar to the research experience of the ethnologist Bartók, the composer Cui learned the composition techniques of Western music in a music college, then later focused on collecting folk music and creating works reflecting ethnic customs. Bartók was committed to using simple and pure rhythm and melody, but also liked to explore the percussive properties of the piano, just as Prokofiev was. Bartók's music is sharp and wild, often with a single motive consisting of just a few notes that can cycle through an entire composition. This kind of composition style can also

be felt in *Tibetan Sketches*. Although the simple ternary forms of the work lead to contrast, the endless repetition of the thematic motive of each piece within the sections is still notable. At the same time, Cui has a good understanding of the style of Tibetan music. He uses simple and straightforward techniques to depict local characteristic melody, rhythm, and instruments that belong to the nation. But he has a compositional concept that follows close to present society, not only meeting traditional national music but having a wider field of vision.

Cui frequently uses contemporary composing techniques such as progressions of semitones, whole-tone melodies, rhythmic repetition and overlapping of dissonant intervals, and even the twelve-tone series. The using the interval of a second is also an essential part of Tibetan music, and the twelve-tone series like the *Angdie* in Tibetan folk songs. Because of the limitations of the vocal cords, the range of *Angdie* is not as wide as the overtone series, but the form is similar to that series. The composer planned a highly improvisational *Angdie*, showing his skilled blending of folk music and Western music. In some places, Cui also uses the polymodal chromaticism of Bartók, such as the first measure in the first movement, where C-*Gong*, F-*Gong*, and G-*Gong* are developed in three parts at the same time. Similarly, in the second movement, there is contrast between the F-*Yu* and Bb-*Yu* modes. However, in the third movement, the modal transformation between D-*Yu* and D-*Shang* within the contrasting section belongs to different modes with the same tonic, D. The G-*Zhi* and D-*Shang* of the exposition, recapitulation, and contrasting parts of this movement shift between different tonalities of the same *Gong* note, C-*Gong* mode.

Throughout *Tibetan Sketches*, in passages depicting joy, excitement, momentum, and even ethereal wandering, tritones appear, although they are rarely found in traditional Chinese folk music. In addition to the use of national modes, Western harmony is used in the work. For

example, the basic dominant-to-tonic chord progression occurs in the contrasting section of the first movement. There are also dominant-seventh chords, transposition from dominant to tonic, and so on, which are gone in a trice, but remind performers to express different emotions.

The use of harmony is more inclined towards contemporary composition techniques in this work, which is complex and changeable, not only embodying the essence of the nation but also keeping pace with the new era. Cui challenges the conventional thinking of traditional music but does not completely abandon his inheritance. The most commonly used idea is that he processed and modified the single line of Chinese folk music to form a rich vertical three-dimensional harmony and polyphonic melody, which also enhances and deepens the Tibetan elements in the work.

Musical Structure

Although there are different names for structural forms in Chinese music, the framework is basically the same as in Western music. Because Chinese music has been deeply influenced by philosophy, it prefers unity over the contrast in Western composing techniques. In order to seek changes within unity, there is a special "fuzziness" to Chinese music. This ambiguity exists not only in sound, but also in harmony and rhythmic texture. As the musical structure, common folk music uses the arrangement of *adagio–moderato–allegro*, sometimes with the term *San-ban* before and after the beginning and at the end, marked "廿", the same as the musical term *A bene placito* marked at the beginning of the first movement of *Tibetan Sketches* and also similar to *ad libitum*. However, instead of following the five parts of a traditional structure with *San-ban*, Cui used only three movements.

This suite in fact incorporates both the form structure of folk music and the typical three-movement sonata structure. The first movement has a complete exposition, contrast, and recapitulation sections, as well as a very short coda. The second movement is similar to the *adagio* second movement that is common in sonatas. The third movement, whether in Chinese music or Western music, often ends with *allegro*. In the last movement, the composer creates the "blurred" tonality and character again. The whole sounds like a variation on the motivic material of the theme, and even the coda also develops from the theme motive. In this way, through the overall use of the Western sonata structure, coupled with the composer's intentional ambiguity of harmony and other aspects, a sonata with Chinese characteristics is created.

In *Tibetan Sketches*, to obtain enough emotional expression, three lines of music are used to a great degree, reflecting Western characteristics. In relation to detail, the function of melody repetition, variation, and sequence in the work is basically the same as that of Western tonal techniques. For example, canon and sequence, called "fishes biting the tail" in Chinese folk music, appear at the end of the third movement, creating connection between the beginning and end of different voices and phrases in the process.

Chinese traditional national modes usually begin directly on the downbeat. However, in *Tibetan Sketches*, the main and secondary themes of the first movement and the secondary theme of the second movement both enter with an upbeat. Duple meter without pick-up is founded in general Chinese national modes, like the third movement. Just as in a Chopin Mazurka, the first movement of *Tibetan Sketches* abandons the conventional dignified and disciplined dance posture, notating the melody and rhythm with unique marks such as accents, grace notes, staccato notes, and legato notes under the unique *San-ban* of Chinese music. Not only does this create an auditory experience where the breath seems to be infinitely elongated and the direction

is unknown, it gives the music a sense of freedom although still within the framework of rhythm. This feeling is also present in the second movement.

The changes of rhythm and tempo of the work are also noteworthy. From triplets to septuplets, from accelerando sixteenth notes to whole notes and fermatas, these rhythms span a wide range. In Western music, although contemporary music is no longer restricted to relatively regular rhythms, rhythmic patterns are played strictly in time, to avoid unstable internal rhythm disturbing the whole structure. In Chinese folk music, however, triplets are often accompanied by "freedom". Compared with Western classical music, which returns to the original tempo after an acceleration, a large accelerando section like the climax of the coda in the third movement is a technique used to express excitement in Chinese music.

Classical music often adds cadenzas or several notes to fill the music amid single notes of long duration. However, the "fuzziness" of Chinese folk music led to a large number of fermata notes in *adagio*, such as in the second movement of the suite. Cui labels each part of the ternary structure with different terms, as well as suggestive terms such as sweetly, freely, and slowly. In Chinese music, in addition to the tempo marking at the beginning, there are rare other markings, changes relying more on performers' own feeling. The formal structure of Western music often develops from small musical ideas. The overall structure is logical, rich, and profound. The expression of emotion is carried out from the initial premise of a rigorous and rational composition. Chinese works such as this suite, however, pay more attention to beauty and expression. In order to express sensitivity, some regulations can be abandoned.[53]

[53] Jessi Wang, "Analysis and Artistic Value of Piano Suite Tibetan Sketches" *Song of the Prairie*, 02 (2012): 61-66.

Sound Features

Tibetan Sketches uses a lot of simulation of sounds related to human beings, such as folk instrumental music, vocal music, and dance, as well as natural sounds such as wind and animals. Using the piano, a Western musical instrument, with its broad and rich tone color, paradoxically reveals the mysteries of Tibet. The emotions of Western music are rich and changeable. We can think of the rigor of Baroque period, elegance of Classicism, the romance of Romanticism, the obscurity of Impressionism, and the rebellion of Modernism. But traditional Chinese music is more introverted, which prefers the description of unity and common people's life. As the minority in China, however, Tibetan music can be more like totemic music with a primitive flavor. The wild and piercing sounds are full of bold coloratura, ornamental notes, irregular patterns, and dynamic conflicts, just like the intense parts of *Tibetan Sketches*.

In *Tibetan Sketches*, Cui uses many ways to realize changes of timbre and the simulation of sounds. The rhythm patterns, such as accents and triplets, do not change the basic rhythm, but give listeners an illusion of tempo change. The irregular accents blur the original meter, focusing on notes that would normally be weak. It not only breaks regular rhythm but disturbs listeners' psychology of inertia. This is a technique often used in folk music to change the musical character, which is somewhat similar to the frequent use of syncopation. There are many places in the work with offbeat accents; especially in the third movement, there appear many accents at the end of the phrases. This intentionally strong ending is typical of Tibetan music, as seen in many Tibetan folk songs and even dance movements.

Besides the rhythm patterns, the use of ornaments is also the reason for the timbre of the Tibetan style depicted so vividly in the work. The appoggiaturas and acciaccaturas imitate *Hua-yin* on Chinese string instruments, while the glissando is commonly used on plucked instruments.

The use of glissando is similar to the use of rapid scales in Western music, the use of *Hua-yin* is more to shape the changing of mood. Grace notes and glissandos are frequent in Chinese works, which also provide enough space to express freedom. Different works and styles will be played in different ways. Therefore, in decorations, especially the changes in strength, range, speed, and direction of the appoggiatura will directly affect the expression of a piece of music.

Most Tibetan instruments are string and brass instruments. Unlike the piano, which has a wide range and fixed pitch, these kinds of instruments rarely use arpeggios. Therefore, the repeated arpeggios in the first movement of *Tibetan Sketches* are not the imitation of any Tibetan technique, but a way of shaping the environment. In addition to the exploration of its own timbre, piano music often appears to imitate other sounds. In the first movement of *Tibetan Sketches*, Cui employs melody to represent the alternation of different songs, and the changes in texture and range indicate different personalities. In the second movement, the broad tone of the piano imitates various Tibetan religious instruments, and the tight accompaniment represents the chanting monks. The theme of the third movement depicts joyful dance, while the secondary theme is like a relaxed dance or sweet song. Each movement presents a completely different sound with different techniques in accordance with its title, creating a variety of sound effects and combining them with rich and interesting compositional techniques.

In general, *Tibetan Sketches* is based on contemporary composition techniques, and also combines both Western and Chinese music theory. Cui shows the ears of those familiar with Chinese folk music a new direction, trying to find a balance between Eastern and Western music. Finally, this suite shows unlimited imagination in a limited range, using the piano, a Western instrument, to perfectly simulate the Eastern timbres and create a new Tibetan sound.

CHAPTER VII

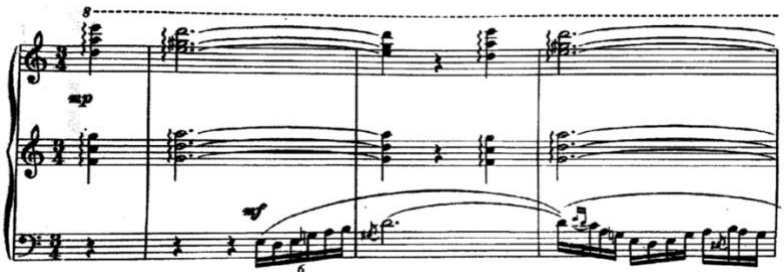
GUIDE FOR PERFORMANCE

The composer presented three sketches of the snowy plateau with three titles, recording the life of the Tibetan people in music. Although the three movements are different in style, they are not completely independent. If performers want to play this suite better, they need an understanding of the Tibetan music and culture mentioned in the paper. With this knowledge as a foundation, one can begin to truly understand the work.

Xie—Pastoral and Antiphon

The exposition of the first movement can be divided into two layers (see Ex. 37). The upper arpeggio shows the long distance of the sky on the Tibetan plateau and the freedom of the wind in the mountains. The second-interval melody of the soprano under the basic dynamic *mezzo piano* needs to be highlighted, while the other voices with a deep touch remain *piano* but not weak. The arpeggios in the two voices proceed from bottom to top; imagining the leisurely nature, the tempo should not be too fast, and the force needs to be even and balanced with other voices. The melody in the bass voice should be played as smoothly as a vocal piece. The long note at the end of each phrase should have an aftertaste feeling of a song. At the same time, not only the diminished fifth here but the whole piece must highlight the dissonant intervals as if "out of tune," a characteristic of Tibetan folk songs. When the left hand finishes the long note to reach the next arpeggio in the middle voice, the sostenuto pedal can be used to prolong the duration of the long note. The alternate use of sostenuto pedal and damper pedal also avoids the breaking of the bass line caused by changing the sustaining pedal in the arpeggio chord change.

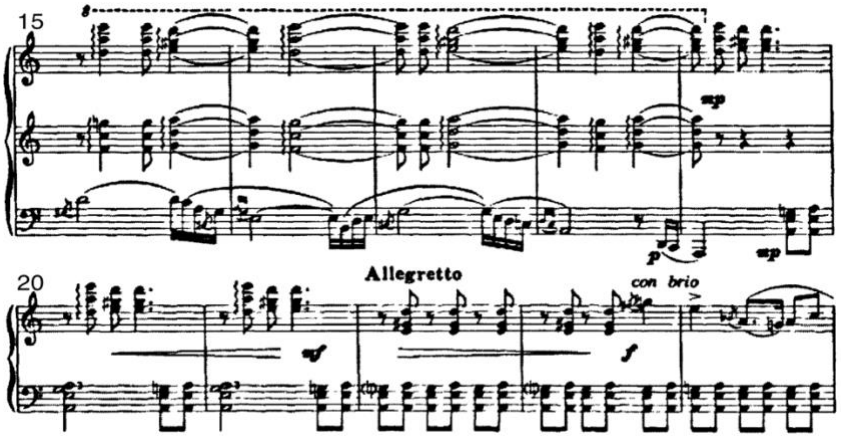
Instead of the fingertips, it is best to touch the keys with the finger pad, and move with a flexible wrist. Despite the distance between the upper and lower voices, the slow tempo allows pianists to play each note to the full value without worrying about finding the next one.



Example 37. *Tibetan Sketches*, I, mm. 1–4

In order to achieve the effect of *Angdie*, the tension of melody should sound tight (long notes) on the whole phrase and loose (sixteenth notes) on the inside structure. In other words, the tempo of each group of sixteenth notes is fine-tuned according to the music, while each beat should be strictly controlled with a steady tempo.

Starting from m. 15 in the last part of section A, the contraction of rhythmic pattern and the texture of soprano and bass voices echo each other in the connecting part in m. 19, all the changes are preparing for the alternation of left- and right-hand melodies and contrast of character in section B (see Ex. 38). Unlike the previous section, in which there is sufficient time between the melody and the arpeggio, the tempo of the transition section gradually becomes compact and regular, so that more attention should be paid to the control of the left-hand movement distance, especially the big jumps. While playing, performers should prepare the next note in advance with eyes before hands and complete the processing of the melodies in different directions without affecting the smooth connection between phrases.

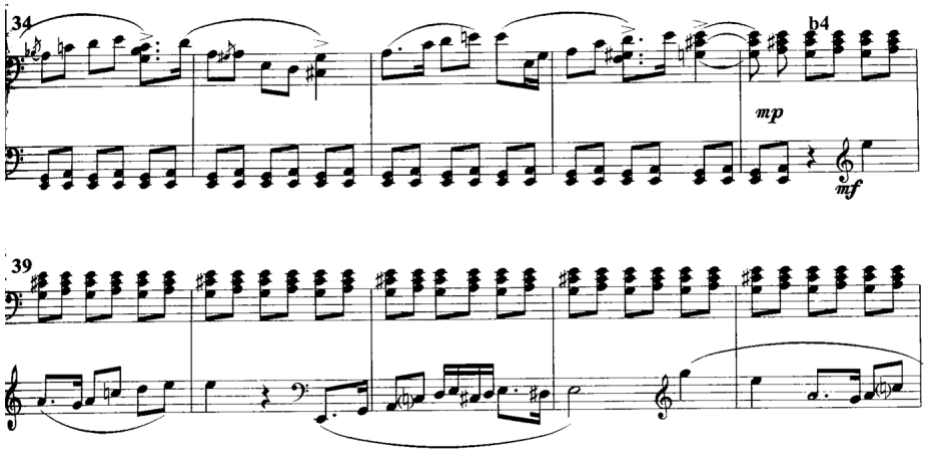


Example 38. *Tibetan Sketches*, I, mm. 15–25

Starting from m. 19, the horizontal melody gradually changes into vertical harmony, which also represents a more positive musical character. In all sections of the work, it is beneficial to use metronome practice, to prevent the tempo changing along with the different dynamics and rhythm patterns. The appearance of the melody in section B makes the style of the movement brighter, forming a sharp contrast with section A, and the overall rhythm will be correspondingly faster than in A.

The contrasting section points to the "Antiphon" of the title, and the strong contrast with the gentle character of the previous section creates some difficulty in playing. In the first half of the section, performers need to pay attention to every accent on the right hand, especially at the end of each phrase, and the chords should highlight the top note and the whole chord be bright without hushing. The short appoggiaturas in this part must be played as clearly and cleanly as possible. The accompaniment that always serves as a background to the melody should be light, steady in rhythm and even in volume. Use the pedal as little as possible while appropriately highlighting the top notes of the left hand, so as to reduce the feeling of dragging and not to completely lose the focus in the repetitions of a large number of chords.

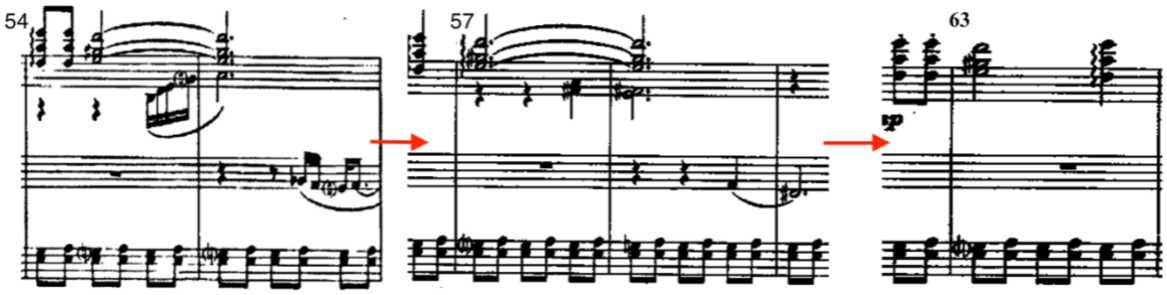
The melody of the right hand, which is constantly changing registers, switches roles with the left-hand accompaniment in the second half (see Ex. 39). The melody of the left hand back and forth across the right hand requires pianists to find the correct position quickly, but also to consider the singing quality and fluency, creating a sense of duet. Although the repeated accompaniment is only the background, each note in the chord must be played very clearly at the same time without affecting the melody. Therefore, the accompaniment of this section, whether left or right hand, needs a lot of slow practice and improvement of auditory sensitivity. The performance of this section should express the liveliness and excitement of antiphonal singing. The interpretation of accents and grace notes should have a lively character, the change of melody reflect the title, and the continuous accompaniment present the repetition of interval of a second with Tibetan characteristics, all full of vigor.



Example 39. *Tibetan Sketches,* I, mm. 34–43

The melody of the recapitulation is also interesting in its notation, theme, phrases and character; pianists need to pay careful attention to its changes when reading the music (see Ex. 40). At the beginning, the notation changes back to three lines, and the music is divided into three layers rather than the two layers of the exposition. The top layer is still the representation of

the theme, far away and ethereal. The middle layer changes into an antiphonal song, like the melody of Section B. But the long note at the end of the phrase makes the character settle down from the original liveliness, becoming softer and distant, corresponding to the character of the theme. In this way, after the first two phrases of the recapitulation, m. 57 changes from a duet to a response, with two single notes echoing over the bass clef. The bottom layer continues the accompaniment of the contrasting section, and its light and steady progress gives the calm recapitulation the illusion of being in the lively scene of section B.



Example 40. *Tibetan Sketches*, I, mm. 54, 57, and 63

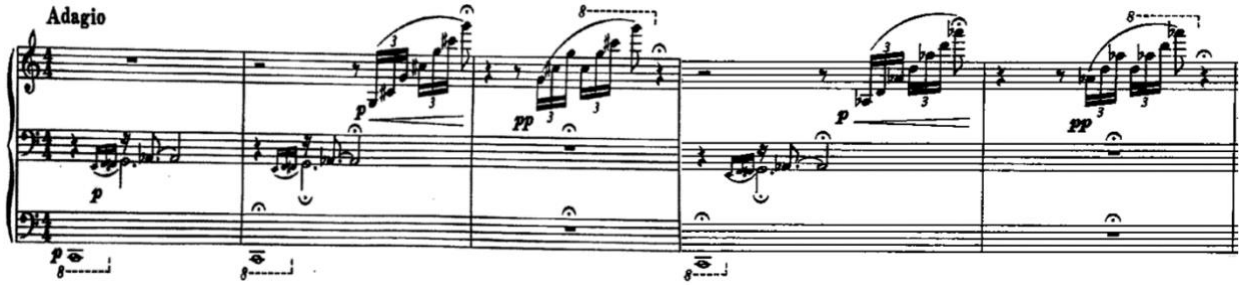
As the music slows down and the middle part drops out at m. 63, the music gradually decrescendos from a question-and-answer response to a distant echo of people singing away, and finally disappears at the end of the prairie. When the movement gradually diminishes and slows down, we might expect it to end here. But the crescendo of the last phrase is exactly the same as the melody at the beginning of the movement. Therefore, the performance should gradually die away, rise again after the long descent and then stop on the fermata, as if it had ended. But in fact, it just takes a rest and continues ascending, so pianists should play the last bright and distant long note with the thumb, leaving the listener with a feeling of suspense.

The exposition of the first movement is divided into two kinds of sounds, the voice of nature and the pastoral song. The contrasting section changes frequently in both high and low

registers, which need to be given different characteristics. The recapitulation is based on the superposition of all the previous materials. Although the movement has a clear melody and moderate tempo, the complexity of its content demands that pianists create several characters at once. Pianists should simultaneously consider all kinds of different emotions and characters, promptly match change to content, and bring out the relaxation and freedom of the music, at the same time also considering the proper use of pedals, clear touch, rhythmic grasp and other technical problems of this movement.

Qiao—Buddhist Activities in the Temple

The second movement is permeated by a strong sense of religion, and special attention should be paid to the imagination and understanding of the sounds of the various religious instruments. The motive of the introduction of the exposition, repetition, a sequential progression, and an ascent of six octaves occurs in just five measures (see Ex. 41). For this part, which lays the foundation of the whole movement, handling the sound during the performance determines whether the character of the whole piece is accurate.



Example 41. *Tibetan Sketches*, II, mm. 1–5

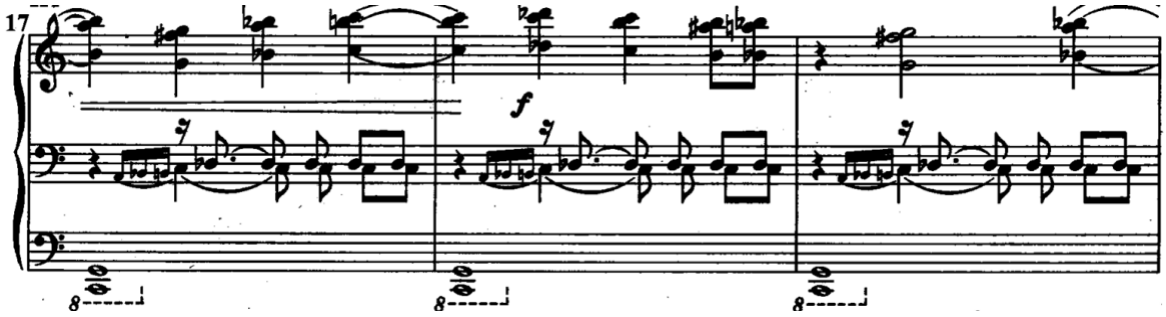
First, this part is also divided into three layers. The C in the bass voice should be played stably and firmly, like the root of a tree. In order to imitate the temple bell's heavy voice, it is

better to touch the key deeply with the third and fourth fingers together, to feel the solid power down through from the shoulder to the fingertip. Because of the switching of fermatas between notes and rests, it is necessary to change the right pedal after the fingers keep the long notes, to ensure fullness of the sound and the sound effect that the composer wants to achieve.

Second, the middle layer imitates the sound of *Tong-qin*. In addition to depicting the deep and solemn voice, the classic minor-interval of a second is still the melody that needs to be highlighted. The top voice is much lighter than the lower parts, sounds like little bells under the eaves when the wind blows. Soprano should be played with a smooth sense of breathing, and fermata notes should not be held too long. Also pay attention to the dynamic changes: the second phrase after the first period crescendo should return to piano quickly, then crescendo to maybe *mezzo forte*, and then back to *pianissimo*, creating the feeling of a distant echo. The triplets need use flexible wrist movement, left hand crossing over the right hand, sounding consistent and smooth as if being played by one hand, especially to avoid imbalance of force when changing hands. Because this section has many long notes and rests under *adagio,* to avoid the music dragging from too much blank space, do not prolong where there is no fermata.

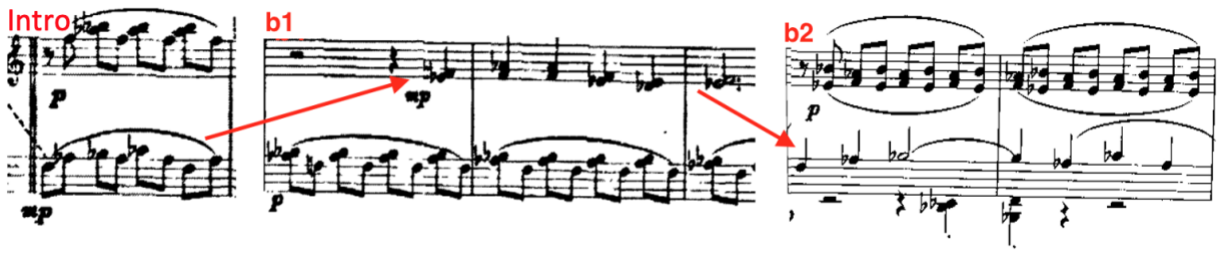
It is not until a1 that the soprano voice appears with a clear theme melody. Imagine the sound is played by several *suona* tutti, loud and sonorous. While highlighting the bright and steady soprano voice, also be sure to keep the mystery of the middle and bass voices. The bass continues the material of the motive in the introduction, and the groups with three sixteenth notes should be played smoothly without hurry. The acciaccaturas in the melody should be more flexible and clearer, highlighting the principal note while playing clean sounds that imitate little bells. In m. 18 of a2, the first small climax and the first *forte* of the movement appear (see Ex. 42). It is necessary to highlight fingers 5 and 4 of the right hand, to strengthen the discomfort and

contradiction brought by this harsh sound. Measure 21 returns to the mysterious motive as the music decrescendos, and the descending crescendo of the tritone hints at the arrival of the contrasting section. Therefore, it is difficult to control the changes of sound and emotions when playing the exposition. In particular, attention should be paid to the different treatment of the grace notes among three voices, as well as the use of pedals and fingerings.



Example 42. *Tibetan Sketches*, II, mm. 17–19

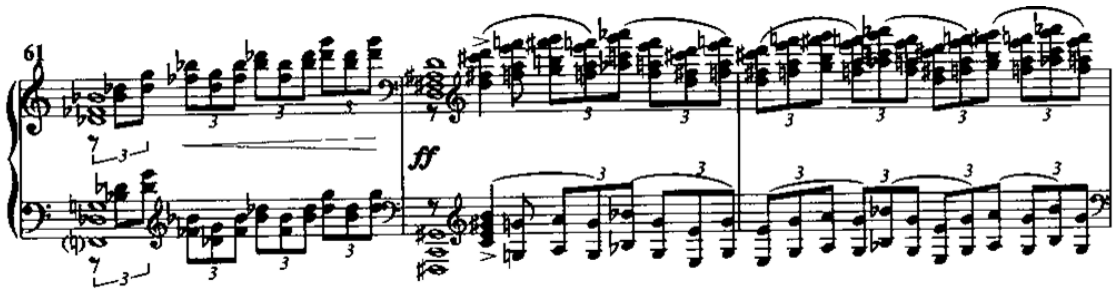
The overall texture of section B is in great contrast to that of section A, and the tempo changes from *adagio* to *andantino*. The following melodies are variations of the introduction, especially in b2, where we find that the melody is foreshadowed by the introduction (see Ex. 43). So, for the melody here in the left hand, be careful not just to stress the top notes, but to play the whole introduction with emotion.



Example 43. *Tibetan Sketches*, II, mm. 27, 31–32, 44–45

The contrasting section is dominated by an eighth-note accompaniment, every eight notes as a group in each measure. Therefore, the eighth notes should be played with a smooth sense of breathing, controlling the strength of fingers, using wrists to make the hands slightly sway to reduce the stiffness. This section is like a monk chanting scriptures without stopping to turn the Tibetan prayer wheels, with a sense of piety and eternity. Pedal can be vibrative changed, to not only avoid the volume increase of the long pedaling, but also help to continue the mysterious sense of infinite repetition. When the music has a clear melody, pianists should imagine the scene where a master leads the sutra, while the accompaniment should depict other monks led by the master and going forward. Therefore, the melody here is slow and clear, but also pay attention to the different treatment of the phrases. As the highest and lowest registers echo in the middle section, there is a need to play with a mysterious and faraway sense.

After the crescendo of the bridge, the music finally pushes to the climax, and the first *fortissimo* of the whole work appears (see Ex. 44). It is no longer slow and mysterious as before, imagine Tibetan religious ceremonies. Whereas previous parts require detail and finger control, here requires the use of the arm, with the entire arm and even body power through the fingers. The music should sound solid, thick, and penetrating. It is more like a heated discussion about the scriptures among the monks in the temple after chanting the sutras in chorus. And the long note at the beginning of each period is a clap of hands that monks will have when debating sutras, so it needs to be played firmly and simply. Cui divides the triplets with a strong pushing feeling into four groups, which make the sound suddenly change to a more regular rhythm, and the breath between phrases also becomes longer. Instead of keeping the harmony clear, I prefer to change the pedal at each end of the line and use the reverb of the pedal to make the atmosphere more authentic.



Example 44. *Tibetan Sketches*, II, mm. 61–63

The climax with a very strong color finally stops on bass C1, indicating the atmosphere and materials are all back to the beginning. The thirty-second notes before the fermata still need a lot of momentum, imagining that the sound of timpani and cymbals in an orchestra can linger in the hall after the end. So let the note linger a little, with the mood completely calm and ready to begin the samsara-like recapitulation. Both the melody and accompaniment of recapitulation revolve around the word "repetition," which makes more mystery of the whole atmosphere, and again a sense of infinity. The last chord ends with a very far and very light sound; imagine the ancient temple bell heard in the distance. Play the *ppp* in sharp contrast with previous *fortissimo* and stay on the ending chord until the sound completely dissipates.

Zhuo—Villagers' Dance

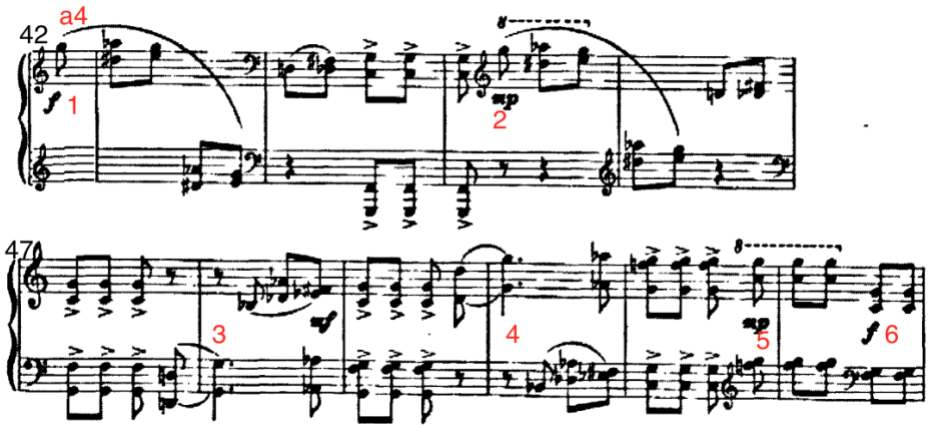
The third movement should form a sharp contrast with the character of the first two movements. The overall performance is lively and cheerful, and there are more requirements for clarity and the technique of fingers touching. The whole motivic material can be imagined as the freedom and uncertainty of Tibetan folk dance. The minor second here should be played clearly and have the feel of swaying as in dancing. The whole exposition is developed with variations

based on materials from a1, so that the organization of the first part is very important (see Ex. 45). At first, pianists need to imagine the Tibetan dance, especially the movements of the feet. Use flexible wrists and clear fingers to keep each phrase moving forward and create a sense of swing. After the first two measures are played clearly, each of the following long lines is more persistent than the previous one, each phrase should have a different feeling at the end. There is an unsolved searching feeling at the end with the dominant, the subdominant ending of the next period is a little more urgent, and the last phrase that stops on the tonic needs more emphasis. In order to clearly express the rhythm of Tibetan dance, it is better to touch the keys in a bouncy way with the fingertips and play without the damper pedal.

Example 45. *Tibetan Sketches*, III, mm. 1–6

The second part changes from solo dance to duet when the same melody is added to the left hand. This part needs be played lighter with a sense of naughty hiding but remain a lively theme. The fingertips need to touch the key quickly; pull the fingers back to the side of the body slightly after touching and lift the wrist slightly. Then a decisive glissando connects a2 to a3, the male joins in the dance, playing with greater certainty as the overall volume increases. The staccato and syncopation accompaniment added at this part make the character more vivacious and the keys touching need to be bouncier. The accompaniment is a male stomping, decisively powerful. It is best to play the two notes in same volume, feel the strangeness of the intervals of a seventh, and weaken the accompaniment, not intentionally highlighting any part.

When moving to a4, variations of the theme appear. Play with a little pedaling to prolong the phrases and emphasize the three notes at the end (see Ex. 46). The three consecutive accents at the end of phrases are like function words with no practical meaning in Tibetan words, each sound forceful and elastic moving forward. An arch-like melody should be highlighted in the middle part, while paying attention to the singing of the syncopation. The frequent changes of materials add to the humor of the music, and the increasingly intense atmosphere abandons the steady rhythm of the dance. Finally, it slows down with more and more stomping-like eighth notes and stays on the last fermata chord until the sound is almost gone. Performers should focus more on emotional expression and imitation of dance movements.

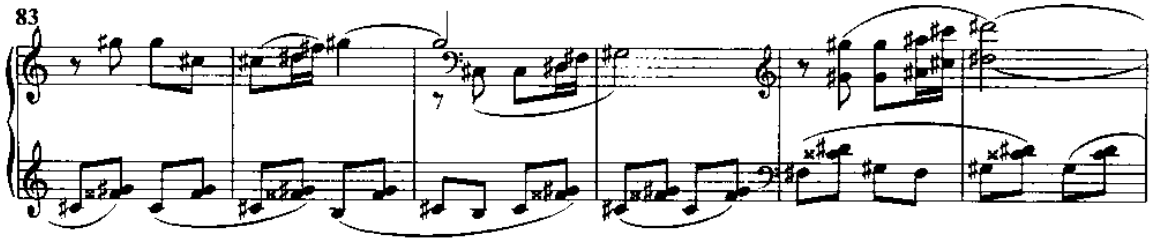


Example 46. *Tibetan Sketches*, III, mm. 43–52

The content of section A is mainly a lively and cheerful dance, which requires the power of the fingertips to clearly depict a flexible dance posture. Section B is presented slowly in the sweet song and a graceful Tibetan dance named *Ba-tang Xian-zi*. The point of force changes from the fingertips to the fingers driven by the wrist, played in a singable manner with a long breath. The eighth-note accompaniment is repeated all the time, but the alternation between single note and intervals of minor-second breaks the balance and brings out the dance-like swing

again. In typical Tibetan song and dance music, the repetition of the phrase ending often occurs, just like the repetition of m. 85. So that remember to play softly and express a feeling of echo or distant response (see Ex. 47).

The second phrase is the octave ascending sequence of the first phrase, highlighting the top-notes melody and slightly louder than the first phrase. Because there are not as many long notes as in b1, this part has a stronger fluency than b1 and should be played in a more smoothly singing manner. The accompaniment in the soprano voice starts with two notes, then three notes, and then four notes together; the performer needs to feel the excitement of this process. Although it is not marked in the music, Cui specifically told me during our interview that the end of b2 starting from m. 115 needs to be slowed down and go on to the next part, b3, with fully tension and stretching.[54]

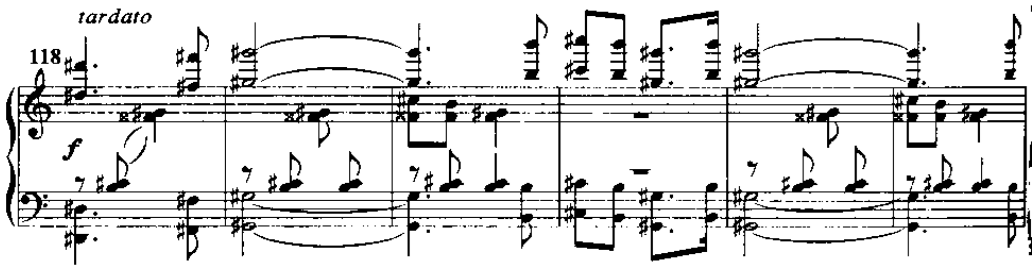


Example 47. *Tibetan Sketches*, III, mm. 83–88

In b3, accompaniment is in the middle part, melody is on both sides. It is necessary to control the contrast of character and the relationship between primary and secondary materials (see Ex. 48). The *tardato* ritardando and crescendo marked at the beginning of this part are also a reminder that the mood here is more open and stretching. The top and bass should go deep with the strength of the upper arms, to play the open and bright singing of folk songs. The middle part

[54] The interview between Cui and the author happened on July 20, 2021.

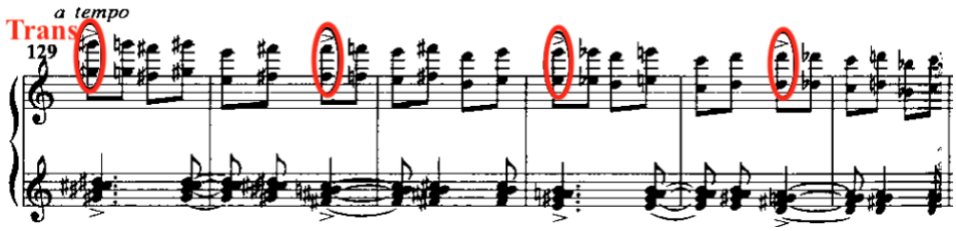
requires both hands to play in one voice, highlighting the top notes of the accompaniment that foreshadows the later melody. The accompaniment and melody need to change precisely in time, and fingers need to be ready to go to the next position. Because of the complexity of technique and character in this section, it is recommended to practice slowly on each layer and find the positions correctly and quickly. Because of the overall cheerful character, the tempo of this part should not be too much slower than the previous part, even though it is marked *tardato*.



Example 48. *Tibetan Sketches*, III, mm. 118–23

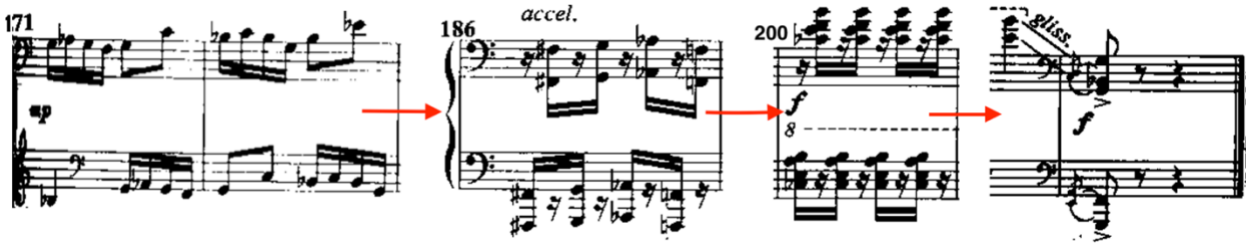
Before returning to the recapitulation, there is a five-line transition, which pushes the music up layer by layer and then slowly withdraws (see Ex. 49). Although it is marked *a tempo*, Cui requires performers to play boldly as fast as possible for their technical status until m. 155. This section should focus on the emotional changes and irregular accents, highlighting the soprano conjunct-motion melody. From m. 157, theme is still played in the same way as before with the right hand, while the left hand needs to be split into the singing melody of section B. At the same time, the three-part polyphony requires not only to highlight the lyricism of the soprano of the left hand, but also to consider the singing melody of the bass and the balance between various voices. The recapitulation is clearly arranged, form a contrast of strength and character in three voices at the same time, and pay attention to the different lengths of phrases among the different parts. Two hands touch the keys in different ways: the right hand should be played

clearly, the left hand touch the keys deeply with finger pads, and the two voices should have different strengths, practicing each voice separately is necessary.



Example 49. *Tibetan Sketches*, III, mm. 129–34

The last section, coda, is the climax of the whole work, and divided into three parts. Each part develops a higher emotion than the previous one after a slight overlapping at the beginning (see Ex. 50).



Example 50. *Tibetan Sketches*, III, mm. 171–72, 186, 200, and 208

The first part, c1, uses a canonic ascending sequence to continue the *mezzo piano* of the previous section, and gradually becomes louder in the sequence. At the beginning of the coda, there is still a shadow of the thematic motive, lively and happy, but the music gradually becomes excited, pushing and going up all the way. Although there is no accent mark in the first line of c1, pianists could put a little emphasis on the first note of both voices, while playing the last line with a little rubato to stretch it out before playing the last group of notes and the accent that changes from G to G-sharp. Appropriate hesitation can reinforce the sense of anticipation.

The second part, c2, begins with a real climax and gives performers more space because of the term *ad lib*. At the beginning of this part, the feeling of hesitancy and expectation of the previous phrase is still followed, the tempo is somewhat restrained in the bass area, and the music is very strong but not so fast. However, with the *accelerando*, pianists have to keep the fierce speed going forward with no hesitation. With the music continuously ascending, the pedal is changed once per measure. Finally, the music stops and repeats at a certain height, but the height here is also the highest point of the whole piece. Instead of changing the pedal completely clean at each measure, pianists could shake the pedal and change just a half, using tone colors, patterns, and pedaling reverb to help create more power at a fast speed. More and more rests make the excitement gradually calm down. Pianists have to keep the mood, playing with a feeling of disturbance and searching.

The last unexpected, gorgeous glissando suddenly appears. With the thumb of the right hand and the fingers 3 and 4 of the left hand, the music is transferred to the bass register again, and the clear ending should be done with a reverse contrast and a sense of naughtiness and surprise. The whole coda needs to display a brilliant and passionate group dance momentum, assisted by pedaling reverberation and whole-body power. During practice, performers need to pay attention to the clarity of each sound, become accustomed to the crowded position of both hands, enhance the precision of the position of big jumps, and the control the tempo and strength, so as to complete this passionate climax of the whole work.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

Bingyuan Cui uses contemporary composition techniques, draws lessons from the essence of both Eastern and Western music, and presents the essence of Tibetan music in his piano work *Tibetan Sketches*, making a significant contribution to the promotion and development of Chinese national piano music. He uses a large number of Tibetan elements in the work, which is closely related to the local Tibetan music style in melody, grace notes, harmony, tone-color changes, and performance techniques. At the same time, the work also shows the rich life of Tibetan people, with three clear titles about pastoral life, Buddhism, and dance to express the core of the work. From graceful folk songs to solemn temples, and then to the happy and free dances on the grassland, listeners, regardless of whether or not they have been to Tibet, can gain some idea of the area after listening to the work. Cui gives a comprehensive introduction to mysterious Tibet with colorful themes, and greatly improves the audibility, transmissibility, and possibility of worldwide study of the work through the fusion of art music and folk music.

Although there are many Chinese composers who focus on creating works related to ethnic minorities, piano works with a pure Tibetan local flavor are still rare. As one of the few pieces of Tibetan piano music, this work is suitable for the concert hall in dramatic sound effect and interesting thematic content. Although technically it lacks the challenging and dazzling techniques of traditional piano works, the musical complexity is not to be underestimated. Most of the difficulty lies in the precision of the big jumps, good control of the sound balance, use of the pedals, and the crowded and dense climax. Moreover, in music content, the slightest slackness may lead to the deviation from the style of the work. The multiple changes of

character, mastery of different characters divided into several layers in same phrase, imitation of various timbres, as well as emotional expression affected by the different treatment of details such as rhythm and acciaccaturas—all of these aspects need to be carefully studied by the performer so that the listener can understand the content, too. Therefore, it takes more time to think about the content than practice at the piano. But once the work is understood, both pianists and listeners can enjoy it. In public concerts for a wide range of ages, this work makes a good choice.

To understand and perform the work thoroughly, it is necessary not only to learn a basic knowledge of Chinese and Western music theory, but also to have a comprehensive understanding of the place where Tibetans live and the source of this wonderful music. Few people have the opportunity to experience Tibetan culture or live there for months as Cui did, or their bodies may not allow them to experience life at an altitude of more than 4,000 meters. I have done my best to share my understanding and analysis of *Tibetan Sketches* and some Tibetan music and cultural background based on my family inheritance, experience, and reading, combined with my knowledge of the language.

I would also like to thank Bingyuan Cui, the composer, for his generous advice. He shared with me a lot of interesting stories about his field trips in Tibet, his own understanding of the Tibetan people, analysis of his works, performance suggestions, and so on, which enabled me to have a deeper understanding of *Tibetan Sketches*. The Internet already has some writing about this work, but I have preferred to analyze and study it myself from a relatively new perspective, to broaden thinking about the work and enhance people's love and understanding of Chinese folk music. Finally, as a Tibetan musician, I would like to deeply thank Mr. Cui for his contribution to the promotion of Tibetan music. I have been honored to perform and analyze this work.

Tibetan culture has a long history. To play Tibetan music, we need to go far beyond the notation. I hope to have made more people interested in and understand Tibetan music and culture: that the Western analysis, and the introduction of ethnic and folk instrumental music and traditions will help to popularize Tibetan music and bring it to a larger platform and even the whole world.

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