A STUDY ON HYBRID STYLE AND ORCHESTRATION IN

BRIGHT SHENG’S POSTCARDS

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Bright Sheng (b. 1955) has won international acclaim for successfully fusing disparate musical elements in his works. Listeners can trace Chinese pentatonic scales and instrumental effects mixed with Western classical structures. *Postcards* (1997) is a well-received orchestral work that successfully merges diverse musical styles and compositional techniques. Sheng based *Postcards* on material from his *Four Movements for Piano Trio* (1990). He applies masterful and distinctive orchestration to transform the chamber work into a multi-layered and colorful orchestral canvas. He fuses polyrhythm and post-tonal compositional techniques such as polytonality with Chinese musical elements, including folk song quotations, pentatonic scales and extended instrumental effects. The resulting hybrid is an outstanding artistic work that warrants further discussion and analysis for deeper understanding.

This study provides an overview of Sheng’s life experience and educational background in Chapter 1. Chapter 2 and 3 present a detailed analysis of the important compositional attributes and orchestration techniques Sheng applies in *Postcards*. Chapter 4 provides important performance considerations for conductors to enhance preparation. With an understanding of Sheng’s hybrid style, it is hoped that conductors will have a better interpretative grasp to lead an informed performance and scholars will have a better context for Sheng’s orchestral compositions.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF MUSICAL EXAMPLES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Bright Sheng</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 State of Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Introduction to <em>Postcards</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 2 COMPOSITIONAL ATTRIBUTES IN <em>POSTCARDS</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Rhythm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Use of Chinese Folk Songs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Superimposition of Multiple Pentatonic Scales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 3 ORCHESTRATION TECHNIQUES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Chinese Instrumental Influences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 The Role of Wind Instruments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 The Role of Brass Instruments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 The Role of Percussion Instruments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 The Role of Keyboard Instruments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6 The Role of String Instruments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7 Stratification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 4 PERFORMANCE CONSIDERATIONS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Rhythmic Complexity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1  Percussion instruments employed in Sheng’s Postcards ........................................... 29
# LIST OF MUSICAL EXAMPLES

All musical examples are reproduced with permissions from G. Schirmer, Inc. and Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.

| Example 1 | Illustration of the echo effect achieved by rhythmic discrepancy. Bright Sheng. *Postcards*, first movement, mm. 1-5 | 8 |
| Example 2 | Illustration of polyrhythm applied in the heterophony section. Bright Sheng. *Postcards*, first movement, mm. 6-10 | 9 |
| Example 3 | Illustration of rhythmic units to form an *ostinato* effect in the third movement. | 10 |
| Example 4 | Illustration of the use of rhythmic units in Four Movements for Piano Trio. Bright Sheng. Four Movements for Piano Trio, third movement, mm. 1-5 | 11 |
| Example 5 | Illustration of the use of rhythmic units in *Postcards*. Bright Sheng. *Postcards*, third movement, mm. 1-6 | 11 |
| Example 7 | Illustration of the use of extra pulse-units by Stravinsky. Igor Stravinsky. *The Rite of Spring*, Flute part, rehearsal number 42 to 44 | 13 |
| Example 8 | Illustration of the Chinese folk song intervallic relationship. Bright Sheng. *Postcards*, first movement, mm. 1-5 | 15 |
| Example 9 | Illustration of the Chinese folk song intervallic relationship in the next phrase. Bright Sheng. *Postcards*, first movement, mm. 6-10 | 15 |
| Example 10 | Illustration of the Chinese pentatonic scales on A-flat and B | 17 |
| Example 11 | Illustration of the quartal chord formed from the pentatonic scale on A-flat | 17 |
| Example 12 | Illustration of two superimposed pentatonic scales. Bright Sheng. *Postcards*, second movement, mm. 64-66 | 18 |
| Example 13 | Illustration of the instrumentation of the first statement in the first movement. Bright Sheng. *Postcards*, first movement, mm. 1-5 | 21 |
| Example 14 | Illustration of the use of the bass clarinet doubled with piano and solo bass to play the foreground material. Bright Sheng. *Postcards*, first movement, mm. 53-59 | 23 |
Example 15  Illustration of the wind solo instrument to produce the heterophony effect. Bright Sheng. Postcards, first movement, mm. 21-25. .................................................. 24

Example 16  Illustration of the high register range for oboe at the beginning of the work. Bright Sheng. Postcards, first movement, mm. 1-6. ................................................................. 25

Example 17  Illustration of the use of the clarinet to play at the low register. Bright Sheng. Postcards, second movement, mm. 10-12. ....................................................................... 25

Example 18  Illustration of the use of “stopped” sound for the first horn. Bright Sheng. Postcards, first movement, mm. 37-41. ................................................................. 26

Example 19  Illustration of the use of solotone mute for the trumpet as the solo role. Bright Sheng. Postcards, fourth movement, mm. 1-8. ............................................................. 27

Example 20  Illustration of glissandi effects from brass section. Bright Sheng. Postcards, second movement, mm. 58-60. ............................................................................ 28

Example 21  Illustration of the use of the low brake drum. Bright Sheng. Postcards, third movement, mm. 119-124. .................................................................................. 31

Example 22  Illustration of the use of the bongos. Bright Sheng. Postcards, third movement, mm. 125-131. ....................................................................................... 31

Example 23  Illustration of the use of piano for the percussive effect by Stravinsky. Igor Stravinsky. Pétrouchka, First Tableau, Russian Dance, mm. 1-6 ....... 33

Example 24  Illustration of the percussive color from the piano. Bright Sheng. Postcards, first movement, mm. 1-5 ................................................................. 34

Example 25  Illustration of the percussive color from the celesta. Bright Sheng. Postcards, first movement, mm. 42-47. ............................................................................. 35

Example 26  Illustration of the string harmonic as background. Bright Sheng. Postcards, first movement, mm. 53-59.............................................................................. 36

Example 27  Illustration of the string pizzicato. Bright Sheng. Postcards, second movement, mm. 23-27. ..................................................................................... 37

Example 28  Illustration of the use of strumming pizzicato by Bartók. Béla Bartók. Concerto for Orchestra, fifth movement, mm. 1-9. ..................................................... 38

Example 29  Illustration of the strumming pizzicato. Bright Sheng. Postcards, second movement, mm. 23-27. ..................................................................................... 38
Example 30  Illustration of the snap pizzicato. Bright Sheng. *Postcards*, third movement, mm. 132-139...............................................................39

Example 31  Illustration of the bow placement instruction and string unison passage Bright Sheng. *Postcards*, second movement, mm. 64-66.................................40

Example 32  Illustration of the stratification technique Bright Sheng. *Postcards*, third movement, mm. 72-77.................................................................41

Example 33  Illustration of the swing rhythm in the third movement. Bright Sheng. *Postcards*, third movement, mm. 1-6............................................................43

Example 34  Illustration of the cross-rhythm in the third movement. Bright Sheng. *Postcards*, third movement, mm. 106-111......................................................44

Example 35  Illustration of the string artificial harmonics in the fourth movement. Bright Sheng. *Postcards*, fourth movement, mm. 25-32........................................45

Example 36  Illustration of the high register required for the wind players Bright Sheng. *Postcards*, second movement, mm. 34-39................................................46
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Bright Sheng (b. 1955) has won international acclaim for successfully fusing disparate musical elements in his works. Listeners can trace Chinese pentatonic scales and instrumental effects mixed with Western classical structures. *Postcards* (1997) is a well-received orchestral work that successfully merges diverse musical styles and compositional techniques. Sheng based *Postcards* on material from his Four Movements for Piano Trio (1990). He applies masterful and distinctive orchestration to transform the chamber work into a multi-layered and colorful orchestral canvas. He fuses polyrhythm and post-tonal compositional techniques such as polytonality with Chinese musical elements, including folk song quotations, pentatonic scales and extended instrumental effects. The resulting hybrid is an outstanding artistic work that warrants further discussion and analysis for deeper understanding.

This study provides a detailed analysis of the important compositional attributes and orchestration techniques Sheng applies in *Postcards*. With an understanding of Sheng’s hybrid style, it is hoped that conductors will have a better interpretative grasp to lead an informed and persuasive performance.

1.1 Bright Sheng

Life experience and education affected the development of Sheng’s hybrid style in a profound way. He was born in Shanghai, China on December 6, 1955. He studied piano with his mother during his early childhood. In 1970, when he was fifteen years old, because of the Cultural Revolution, he was forced to stop his studies and was sent to the remote Qinghai province, which is near the Tibetan border in China.¹ During that time, Sheng later told *the New York Times*...

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York Times reporter Lindsley Cameron that he “studied and collected Tibetan folk songs while working for eight years as pianist and percussionist for a folk music and dance troupe.” Sheng studied the music of the rural area diligently and was influenced by the local folkloric music tradition. Sheng also had the opportunity to perform in a traditional Chinese orchestra and was exposed to the sound effects and unique timbres of traditional Chinese instruments. These cultural experiences all shaped Sheng’s compositional style in later years.

In 1978, when the Cultural Revolution ended because of Mao Zedong’s death, Sheng was able to resume his study of composition at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. Sheng received formal training in Western classical music there while simultaneously continuing his study of Chinese music. He later recalled, “there was a feeling there that only Western music was real music. Frankly, the Chinese division was for students who couldn't get into the Western one. But I sat in on Chinese-music courses. Everyone thought I was crazy.” His combined efforts in both Western and Chinese music resulted in mastery of both traditions.

After Sheng graduated in 1982, he went abroad to further his study of composition in America. At Queens College in New York City, he studied with two contemporary American masters, George Perle and Hugo Weisgall. He also studied Schenkerian analysis with Carl Schachter. Sheng has acknowledged the importance of Schenkerian analysis in his compositions, specifically with respect to utilizing the motions of the bass voice to form musical structure.

He later earned his Doctor of Musical Arts in composition at Columbia University and studied with Chou Wen-Chung. Chou is recognized as a master teacher. He has taught many Chinese-American composers who have gone on to significant careers. His protégés include

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2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 Bright Sheng, interview with author, 31 December 2014.
Bright Sheng, Tan Dun, Zhou Long and Chen Yi, who are “characterized for transcending cultural boundaries and bringing Chinese and Western traditions together.”⁵ All four have established international reputations.

In 1985, Sheng met another influential teacher, Leonard Bernstein, at the Tanglewood Music Center. Sheng studied composition and conducting privately with Bernstein until his death. Bernstein encouraged Sheng’s compositional approach of musical cross-fertilization.⁶ After years of searching for his own language, Sheng was gradually able to synthesize both traditions through his deep understanding of Western classical music and Chinese music culture.⁷

Sheng’s artistic achievements have been recognized by the international musical world. By President Clinton’s invitation, the world renowned cellist Yo-Yo Ma and pipa virtuoso Wu Man premiered Sheng’s work *Three Songs for Pipa and Cello* (1999). He received both a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship and an American Award in Music from the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 2001. Many professional orchestras around the world have performed his orchestral works, such as New York Philharmonic and Danish National Radio Symphony Orchestra. Since 1995, Sheng has taught composition at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. In addition to his orchestral works, Sheng has written many theater, ballet, chamber, and other instrumental works.

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⁵ Alvin Wong, “Fusing Chinese and Western Traditions: Hybridity in Bright Sheng’s Seven Tunes Heard In China and Chen Yi’s Ning,” Academia.Edu, https://www.academia.edu/5058570/Fusing_Chinese_and_Western_Traditions_Hybridity_in_Bright_Shengs_Seven_Tunes_Heard_In_China_and_Chen_Yis_Ning (accessed March 7, 2015).
⁷ Ibid.
1.2 State of Research

Numerous studies have focused on how Bright Sheng fuses Chinese and Western elements together. Yi Zhang gives a clear analysis about how Sheng utilizes the pentatonic collections with the technique of juxtaposition in the piano work *My Song*.\(^8\) She mentions several specific features, including the use of irregular meter change and the harmonic tension and release in Sheng’s early style in his piano work.\(^9\) In Peter Chang’s review, “The Music of Bright Sheng: Expression of Cross Cultural Experience,” Chang illustrates Sheng’s composition styles with detailed background information and describes Sheng’s fusing style from an ethnomusicological point of view.\(^10\) Alvin Wong’s research discusses Sheng’s solo cello work *Seven Tunes Heard in China* and uses ethnomusicologist Sarah Weiss’s point to describe Sheng’s fusing style as an “intentional hybridity,” which defines the composition process as being very similar to the acquisition of language learning.\(^11\) Most of this scholarship, however, centers on Sheng’s theater, chamber or instrumental works. Though Sheng has written many orchestral works, there is limited research focused on them. It is also difficult to find studies concerning performance issues a conductor might need to consider while preparing Sheng’s orchestral works. Therefore, this study will fill in this gap in Sheng research and will allow the reader to gain a deeper understanding of Sheng’s orchestral writing style.

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\(^9\) Ibid., 34-35.
\(^11\) Alvin Wong, “Fusing Chinese and Western Traditions.”
1.3 Introduction to *Postcards*

Bright Sheng wrote *Postcards* in 1997. Each of its four movements describes a different landscape in China. The piece has won recognition from reviewers and the audiences alike because of its compelling sound effects and its mixture of idioms from Eastern and Western musical traditions. For example, critic Richard Dyer, reviewing a July 2001 performance by the Boston Symphony Orchestra, described the movements of *Postcards* as “glimpses of diverse landscapes translated first into music and then transcribed for the Western symphony orchestra, which filtered through Sheng's ear and his craftsman like hands, can sound like an authentic Chinese ensemble.”

Sheng’s composer’s note, which appears on his personal website describes the genesis of the composition in detail. Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra patron, Ruth and John Huss asked for a musical piece to celebrate their silver wedding anniversary. The orchestra selected ten candidates for further consideration. Because Sheng’s music reminds Ruth and John Huss of their trip to China a few years prior, they selected Sheng as the composer.

Sheng provides programmatic elements via descriptive titles at the beginning of each movement. In the first movement, “From the Mountains,” Sheng uses Western wind instruments to imitate the Chinese instruments’ sound effects. Subtle rhythmic differences among the woodwind voices portray the echo effects that occur in nature. Throughout the first movement, the use of the Eastern heterophony effects plays a major role in creating a polyphonic texture. Sheng also applies a polyrhythmic gesture in the movement to create conflicts between voices.

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14 Ibid.
15 For a definition of heterophony, please see page 27 in Chapter 3 of this study.
The careful use of orchestration techniques, such as his arrangement of registers for individual instruments, also enhances the sonic contrast of the material. These subjects are discussed in detail in Chapters 2 and 3.

The beginning of the second movement, “From the River Valley,” includes a quote from a folksong from Si-Chuan province in China. By using the Western technique of motivic development, Sheng modifies elements from this theme. Listeners can hear the recurrence of this motive in different instrumental combinations. The use of instrumental techniques such as pizzicato and artificial harmonics in the strings, roaring effects from brass instruments’ glissandi, and arpeggiated patterns in the piano all suggest the lively imagery of the title.

In the third movement, “From the Savage Land,” Sheng applies more dissonant vocabulary in the music. Polytonal gestures based on Chinese pentatonic scales provide a frequently clashing sound. Rapid changes of rhythmic meter and recurring ostinato create energy and uncertainty for the listener. The use of “stratification” is also employed and is similar to Stravinsky’s use of orchestral layering in the musical texture.

Sheng entitled his finale “Wish You Were Here.” The composer employs wind and brass instruments in leading roles to deliver the folk-song melodies from the Shan-Xi province. The conversational interactions create tone-color contrasts with each entrance. The orchestration gesture of solotone mute for trumpet and high-register playing for the bass clarinet at the beginning of the movement create unusual sound effects. Specific features of these gestures are discussed further in the following chapters.

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16 For a definition of solotone mute, please see page 30 in Chapter 3.
CHAPTER 2
COMPOSITIONAL ATTRIBUTES IN *POSTCARDS*

2.1 Rhythm

Sheng’s creativity in utilizing rhythmic aspects to develop the sound effects in *Postcards* is the one of the major reasons it warrants more extensive study. This chapter investigates Sheng’s principal rhythmic designs in the hope of providing conductors with an informed understanding of these distinctive rhythmic gestures.

2.1.1 Use of Rhythmic Discrepancy as a Programmatic Element

At the beginning of the first movement, Sheng presents the first theme with a detailed rhythmic design in order to achieve the programmatic element suggested by the subtitle “From the Mountains.” This theme is based on a folkloric style called *Hua’er* (Flowers), which are love songs from the Qinghai province in China.17 Sheng carefully delays the timing of the motive among the voices in order to create an echo effect. We first hear this motive in cellos and basses in measure 2 (see Example 1). Subsequently piccolo, English horn, and violins present the same motive again in measure 3. This motive is based on G and A flat and the interval is a minor second upward progression. Different instrumental groups play the motive with a small discrepancy in rhythm. Sheng thereby evokes an image of Chinese people singing folk songs in the mountains, producing a momentary echo effect.

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17 Bright Sheng, interview with author, 30 December 2014.
Example 1: Illustration of the echo effect achieved by rhythmic discrepancy. Bright Sheng. *Postcards*, first movement, mm. 1-5.
2.1.2 Polyrhythm

Sheng applies the polyrhythmic technique to enhance the heterophony effect and programmatic element in the first movement. For example, in measure 9 (seen in Example 2), the triplet rhythm played by the second violins is superimposed together with the sixteenth notes in the first violins and the syncopated figure in the cellos. With the use of polyrhythm, Sheng provides an independent and improvisational feeling for the music.

According to Sheng, in this passage, other people join in the singing of a love song, with each voice entering in a different measure. Using the Western polyrhythmic technique fused with the Chinese folkloric style in each voice, the composer depicts the scene and figuratively transports listeners to the Chinese tableau.

Example 2: Illustration of polyrhythm applied in the heterophony section. Bright Sheng. Postcards, first movement, mm. 6-10.

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\(^{18}\) Bright Sheng, interview with author, 30 December 2014.
2.1.3 Rhythmic Unit

Sheng uses small rhythmic units as a continuing ostinato to construct Postcards’ entire third movement. These small rhythmic figures may be analyzed in the following three sets:

Example 3: Illustration of rhythmic units to form an ostinato effect in the third movement.

A.

\[ \text{Example A} \]

B.

\[ \text{Example B} \]

C.

\[ \text{Example C} \]

Wendy Wan-Ki Lee has analyzed and found the identical three rhythmic units in Sheng’s earlier work My Song (1989). Angela On Yee Wong also identified the same units in Sheng’s chamber work, Four Movements for Piano Trio (1990). In Postcards, Sheng applied the same rhythmic unites but in this instance, he changed the time signature at the beginning. Shifting

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20 Angela On Yee Wong, “Songs Form A Distant Memory: A Study of Bright Sheng’s Four Movements for Piano Trio and Tibetan Dance” (DMA diss., The University of Memphis, 2011), 60.
from the original 3/8 meter to the revised 3/4 meter not only aids the players to count the rhythm more easily, but also helps them to perform more efficiently together as a section (see Examples 4 and 5). By using these three rhythmic units as building blocks to construct his phrases, Sheng provides unity to the movement’s architecture. Repeating syncopations within the ostinato pattern create a driving sense of forward momentum.

Example 4: Illustration of the use of rhythmic units in Four Movements for Piano Trio. Bright Sheng. Four Movements for Piano Trio, third movement, mm. 1-5.

2.1.4 Chinese Sequences

Sheng applies his own technique of “Chinese sequences” in the third movement of Postcards. He invented the term “Chinese sequences.” As early as 1989, he explained the term in his composer’s note for My Song:

The third movement is a savage dance in which the melody grows through a series of Chinese sequences. This is a term of my own invention that describes a type of melodic development in Chinese folk music in which each repetition of the initial motive increases the number of notes, duration, and tessitura.21

Example 6 illustrates how Sheng manipulates the way of adding eighth notes by sequences. He elongates the motive by adding the duration of the melodic line with each successive statement.


There is a similarity between this gesture and the use of certain rhythmic units by Igor Stravinsky. Peter Chang noted that Sheng’s style is influenced by Stravinsky for the “contrast between rhythmic drive and stasis and orchestration style.”22 Here in the third movement of Postcards, one can find an example of the resemblance to Stravinsky with regard to rhythm.

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22 Chang, 620-621.
Stravinsky’s treatment of certain rhythmic gestures in *The Rite of Spring* uses an analogous sequential technique. For example, in “Ritual of Abduction,” he adds an extra eighth note to the end of the melodic line after the repetition of the previous measure and creates an unexpected new line from the original melody. As biographer Francis Routh noted, “the method Stravinsky uses to achieve this rhythmic subtlety is by the addition of extra pulse-units”23 (see Example 7).

Example 7: Illustration of the use of extra pulse-units by Stravinsky. Igor Stravinsky. *The Rite of Spring*, Flute part, rehearsal number 43 to 44.

Comparing Sheng’s and Stravinsky’s two rhythmic gestures suggests that Sheng was not only influenced by Western contemporary masters, but also that he carefully fused certain modern compositional techniques with Chinese flavor. The hybrid thus results in a new possibility and sound effect based on his original material in Example 6.

2.2 Use of Chinese Folk Songs

Similar to Béla Bartók’s and Zoltán Kodály’s use of Central and Eastern European folk song for their own compositions, Bright Sheng has used Chinese folk material. He does so both through the use of direct quotation and in stylistic references in *Postcards*. For example, in the

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first and fourth movements, Sheng employs the Chinese folk song “Happy Sunrise” and “San Shih Li Pu”\(^{24}\) respectively. He also writes the beginning theme of the first movement based on the style of the Chinese folk song *Hua’er* (“Flowers”, a love song sung by young people in the mountains). Sheng blends the character of these folk songs with the Western tonal and post-tonal techniques to create his own unique language.

The intervallic distances and movement between notes form the character of most traditional Chinese folk songs. In Alvin Wong’s study on Sheng’s solo cello work *Seven Tunes Heard In China*, Wong states that the folk song materials used by Sheng are often fragmented.\(^{25}\) He claims: “The fragments are repeated, doubled, transposed, altered, contracted, shuffled ….These techniques Sheng consciously engages resemble procedures that Western composers use on thematic materials.”\(^{26}\)

Sheng applies similar fragmented gestures in *Postcards*. He uses the widely spaced interval of *Hua’er* to form the first statement. He then uses the Western tonal motivic development technique to build the later passage from it. In Example 8, the intervals within the first statement are the perfect fourth, major second, minor second, minor third and octave. Sheng retains most of these intervallic relationships in the strings’ passage in Example 9. By changing the order of these intervals and mixing them with a polyrhythmic gesture and heterophony effect as discussed above, the new statement is developed but is still recognizable to listeners.

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\(^{24}\) This title is sometimes translated as “The Shop from Thirty Miles Away.”

\(^{25}\) Alvin Wong, “Fusing Chinese and Western Traditions.”

\(^{26}\) Ibid., 5.

2.3 Superimposition of Multiple Pentatonic Scales

Although the pentatonic scale in Western culture is traditionally associated with the black keys on the piano, in practice, important variants exist in Asian music. Chinese pentatonic scales have a pitch-centricity inclination. This pitch-centricity tendency is analogous to the tonic-center inclination in Western classical music. As Miguel A. Roig-Francolí has observed, “Because there are no half-step tendencies in this [pentatonic] scale, however, it is tonally ambiguous: any of its pitches can function as a tonal center.” Therefore, because of the flexibility available as a result of the mode-center uncertainty, Sheng is able to change the mode rapidly and even superimpose two or three pentatonic modes simultaneously to create bitonality or polytonality in *Postcards*.

Yi Zhang described the polytonality gesture in her study about Sheng’s earlier solo piano work *My Song* (1989). She claimed that since there are no minor seconds or tritones, which are often used as cadential material in Western tonal music, it is hard to create tension and release in music built from Chinese pentatonic scales. In order to solve this issue, Sheng uses what Yi Zhang calls “the juxtaposition of two pentatonic collections” to achieve the needed tension and release into the music.

Sheng retains this technique in *Postcards*. The effect of multiple pentatonic scales superimposed together is even enhanced and strengthened by different combinations of instrumental colors. For instance, from measures 65 to 66 in the second movement, the entire passage is based on an A-flat pentatonic scale and B pentatonic scale (see Example 10). The sustaining harmonic background played by the violas and the piano is a quartal chord comprised

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29 Ibid.
of C, F, B-flat and E-flat taken from the A-flat pentatonic scale (see Example 11). These two scales are superimposed, producing frequent clashes of minor seconds (see Example 12). By assigning the strings to play the melodic material on the B pentatonic scale and brass to play the contrasting middle-ground material on the A-flat pentatonic scale, the coloristic contrast from these two instrumental groups emphasizes and strengthens the modal differences and clashing dissonances.

Example 10: Illustration of the Chinese pentatonic scales on A-flat and B.

A. Pentatonic Scale on A-flat:

B. Pentatonic Scale on B:

Example 11: Illustration of the quartal chord formed from the pentatonic scale on A-flat.
CHAPTER 3

ORCHESTRATION TECHNIQUES

Sheng began *Postcards* using existing material from Four Movements for Piano Trio. He specifies that *Postcards* is not a transcription of the earlier work since he added several new musical ideas and expanded the whole for *Postcards*.³⁰ Using a traditional Western symphony orchestra with triple woodwinds and expanded percussion as a medium, Sheng enlarged the original color palette in the chamber work utilizing its specific character of each instrument to strengthen his sound effects. This chapter shows the orchestration techniques Sheng applies in *Postcards*.

Sheng scored *Postcards* with one flute (doubling piccolo), two oboes (second doubling English horn), one B-flat clarinet (doubling E-flat and bass clarinets), two bassoons, two F horns, one C trumpet, percussion³¹, piano (doubling celesta) and strings. The orchestra is a medium-size chamber ensemble format with a few auxiliary instruments added. Upon score study, the winds are not doubled in every section and there are no trombones or tuba required. With careful instrumental combinations and orchestration technique, Sheng is able to make huge dynamic contrasts to approximate the intensity created by a full size, late romantic orchestra. His melodic lines are also very clear within his orchestral textures.

3.1 Chinese Instrumental Influences

“Sheng served as the pianist and percussionist in the Chinese provincial music and dance theater for seven years.”³² It was in this period that Sheng acquired a thorough understanding about Chinese musical tradition and the coloristic possibilities of the Chinese orchestra. In

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³⁰ Bright Sheng, interview with author, 30 December 2014.
³¹ For full percussion complement, please see Table 1 at page 33.
Postcards, Sheng frequently employs Western instruments to emulate the Chinese orchestra. Sheng fuses the two musical traditions harmoniously giving Western listeners an unusual experience.

For example, at the beginning of the first movement in Postcards, Sheng uses piccolo, oboe, English horn and piano to present the first statement (see Example 13). As stated above, this statement is based on the style of Qinghai folk song Hua’er (Love Songs). Sheng described the characteristics of these folk songs in detail in his essay Love Songs of Qinghai, China. He said, “For male singers, falsetto singing is a required and prized technique presumably because singing in the high register carries the voice farther in open fields and mountain valleys. Thus one of the vocal abilities for both male and female singers is the virtuoso command of the high register.”

Sheng applies this high register character into his orchestral writing. Along with other eminent authorities on orchestration, Samuel Adler states that the optimal range for wind instruments is in the middle ranges. Bright Sheng writes using this optimal range in the first three measures and then to the higher range of the register in the fourth measure. The register produces a “thin and pinched sound effect.”

The sound produced by the instrumentation is similar to the effects of several Chinese instruments playing in a traditional Chinese orchestra, including Bandi (bamboo flute), Souna (Chinese trumpet) and Yangquin (Chinese zither). According to another orchestration expert Gardner Read, the French composer Arthur Honeggers used a similar combination by having flute, oboe, and English horn play as a group in his Mouvement Symphonique No.3 pour

35 Ibid., 189-199.
As Read points out, “This creates an even more penetrating foundation for the passage.” Although Sheng’s instrumental grouping is similar to Honegger’s, he chooses piccolo instead of flute to bring more piercing, penetrating tone quality at the beginning. The resulting sound is remarkably close to traditional Chinese instruments.

Example 13: Illustration of the instrumentation in the first statement. Bright Sheng. Postcards, first movement, mm. 1-5.

3.2 The Role of Wind Instruments

Woodwind instruments fill an important role in Postcards. Since each wind instrument has a distinctive timbre, character, and range, Sheng employs one or several of them either as the solo or in a wind choir to present contrast and color change.

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37 Ibid.
3.2.1 The Use of Auxiliary Instruments

Among wind instruments, the most common auxiliary instruments are piccolo, English horn, E-flat Clarinet and B-flat Bass clarinet. Sheng uses all four extensively in Postcards. Adler describes the functions of these instruments:

Each of the four main woodwind instruments—flute, oboe, clarinet and bassoon—has at least one auxiliary instrument that extends its range and, in many cases, provides intensified coloristic effects at one or both ends of the registral spectrum. In the modern orchestra, these instruments in many cases have become full-fledged extensions of the principal woodwinds and are used as a matter of course.38

The use of these auxiliary instruments helps Sheng create specific timbres with other instruments together in various musical passages. For example, at the ending of the first movement, Sheng uses bass clarinet doubling the piano and solo string bass to present the foreground material in his final phrase (see Example 14). According to Adler, the bass clarinet is playing in its chalumeau register,39 which can sound mysterious, shadowy, or sinister.40 With this coloristic effect, Sheng closes “From the Mountains” with an aura of mystery.

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38 Ibid., 189.
39 *Chalumeau* often refers to the lowest range of clarinet-playing register. The name is originally a single reed woodwind instrument in late Baroque and early Classical eras. It is considered the predecessor of the modern clarinet.
40 Ibid., 213.
Arnold Whittall defines heterophony as “the simultaneous sounding of a melody with an elaborated variant of it, and also the quasi-canonic presentation of the same or similar melodies.
in two or more vocal or instrumental lines.” 41 Earlier in the first movement, Sheng uses piccolo, oboe, English horn, E-flat clarinet and bassoon to produce the heterophony effect (see Example 15). In Example 15, each voice plays independent material. With the diverse color projected by each instrument, this polyphonic effect is presented clearly.

Example 15: Illustration of the wind solo instrument to produce the heterophony effect. Bright Sheng. *Postcards*, first movement, mm. 21-25.

3.2.2 High and Low Register for the Winds

As noted above, Sheng frequently writes for wind players to play at the extreme range of their respective registers in *Postcards*. In the first movement, the oboe part is written in an extremely high register, which produces a penetrating sound quality (see Example 16). In the second movement, Sheng asks the B-flat clarinet to play in the lower *chalumeau* register. Sheng utilizes this color to contrast with the bright and warm colors of the strings. This clarinet register also provides a softer and darker background to support the main melody played by the strings (see Example 17).

This use of the high and low register range by Sheng provides *Postcards* with a direct and straightforward sound quality. Many composers in the early twentieth century, especially Igor Stravinsky and Béla Bartók also favored these extremes of register in their orchestral works. Sheng’s achievement in *Postcards* and subsequent compositions suggests that one respect of their ongoing legacy of Stravinsky and Bartok extends to the end of the twentieth century and even into the twenty-first century.

Example 16: Illustration of the high register range for the oboe at the beginning of the work. Bright Sheng. *Postcards*, first movement, mm. 1-6.

Example 17: Illustration of the use of the clarinet to play at the low register. Bright Sheng. *Postcards*, second movement, mm. 10-12.
3.3 The Role of Brass Instruments

Sheng uses the brass instruments as a way to provide color and atmosphere in addition to giving dynamic power in *Postcards*. Sheng only uses two horns and one trumpet in the work. Unlike late romantic and contemporary composers, who often employ an expanded brass section, Sheng limits himself to the three brass instruments and focuses on the realization of individual character and specific sound color.

In the first movement, Sheng asks the first horn to play with the “stopped” sound technique (see Example 18). This indication adds a nasal and brassy color to the passage and sharpens the clash of the dissonant minor second. This subtle nasal color attracts listeners immediately.


Sheng also assigns a solo role to the trumpet in the fourth movement (see Example 19). The trumpet is required to play with a solotone mute here and in many other spots in *Postcards*. Adler describes the character of the sound produced by the solotone mute. He points out, “The tone is centered and well focused by a megaphone-shaped cone as it leaves the tube, and has a nasal character, as if it were coming through an old fashioned radio or telephone.”

Sheng also

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42 Ibid.,309.
doubles one cello and one viola playing pizzicato with the trumpet. The resulting color is pinched, nasal, and dim. Collectively, these devices evoke a nostalgic feeling.

Example 19: Illustration of the use of solotone mute for the trumpet as the solo role. Bright Sheng. Postcards, fourth movement, mm. 1-8.

3.3.1 Glissandi

Sheng asks frequently for glissando effects from horns and trumpet in Postcards. Stravinsky also uses glissando in The Rite of Spring. Here again, Stravinsky was a seminal

\[^{43}\text{Ibid.,324.}\]
model, influencing many subsequent composers, including Sheng. By using glissando in

Postcards, Sheng creates a roaring sound in the horns and trumpet (see Example 20). Compared
with the strings’ sound, it not only provides a direct and earthy character to the melodic theme but also imitates the singing style of the folkloric materials.

Sheng also uses glissandi extensively in the winds, keyboard and strings in Postcards. Obviously, the specific way of glissando is executed and the way it sounds is different for each of these instruments. This broadens his vocabulary. It not only imitates the fluctuation of Chinese language but also imitates the human voice. Sheng has defined this device as follows:

There are certain features that is [sic] distinctive and sound Chinese, so called Chinese sounding, because it came from the language. It is not because of the instrument. Actually that distinctive feature which all the Chinese instruments have is the glissando. They can bend the pitches and I think that is because of the Chinese language. As you know, it is a tonal language. You have “ma, ma, ma, ma,” like Yo-Yo Ma’s last name. If you pronounce different tone, it means complete different things. So of course the best instrumental players always imitate the human voice. Nothing is more powerful and touching than the human voice.44

By using glissando in every section of the orchestra, Sheng provides a different layer of unity in the orchestration style of each movement in Postcards.

Example 20: Illustration of glissandi from brass section. Bright Sheng. Postcards, second movement, mm. 58-60.

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3.4 The Role of Percussion Instruments

Percussion instruments play an important role in *Postcards*. Since Chinese music incorporates percussion instruments as an integral part of the music, Sheng was influenced by the sounds of these instruments in his early years. In *Postcards*, using primarily Western percussion instruments, Sheng makes each one of them serve different functions.

Adler has summarized the major functions of using percussion in classical music as: “(1) to give an ethnic flavor (2) to emphasize accents and general rhythmic activity (3) to build a climax (4) to create a dramatic beginning to a work (5) to color certain pitches or entire passages by doubling other instruments in the orchestra.” Using Adler’s numbers and classification, Table 1 categorizes the specific function of each percussion instrument Sheng employs in *Postcards*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Percussion instruments employed in Sheng’s <em>Postcards</em></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instrument used</td>
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<tr>
<td>mm. 44, movement I</td>
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<tr>
<td>mm. 58</td>
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<tr>
<td>mm. 1, movement II</td>
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<td>mm. 6-9</td>
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<td>mm. 74</td>
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<tr>
<td>mm. 3-15, movement III</td>
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<td>mm. 20</td>
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<td>mm. 25</td>
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<td>mm. 26-27</td>
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</table>

45 Ibid., 497.
As the table shows, the major function for the percussion instruments is to color or
double the melodic instruments. When Sheng’s music is focused on rhythmic activity, the
percussion is used to emphasize irregular accents.

The percussion instruments also serve to delineate the formal structure. As in Examples
21 and 22, the punctuation provided by the low brake drum is sustained for six measures. When
the next phrase starts, Sheng employs bongos instead to change the timbre of the phrase and
thereby make the phrase structure clearer by the contrast between the two drums.

3.5 The Role of Keyboard Instruments

Sheng uses keyboard instruments extensively in *Postcards*. Stravinsky, like Sheng, has used similar instrumentation in his ballet score to *Pétrouchka*. In reference to the use of piano in *Pétrouchka*, Adler points out, “Stravinsky writes a striking piano part that doubles the woodwinds to give that section an extra ping and the entire passage a very fresh articulation” (see Example 23). In terms of the use of piano in the orchestral setting more generally, Kent Kennan also observes that the use of piano is for “getting colors or special effect.”

Sheng employs the characteristics of keyboard instrument in several ways. Sometimes, he uses them to double with the winds or strings in order to get a percussive effect. For example, at the beginning of the first movement, the piano doubles the winds to play the folkloric material (see Example 24). When the recapitulation of the movement starts, Sheng uses the celesta instead to match the higher register of the piccolo sound area. This gesture creates a different coloristic contrast (see Example 25). It also provides the passage with a transparent color and quality of sound more delicate with the celesta.

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46 Ibid., 471.
Example 24: Illustration of the percussive color from the piano. Bright Sheng. *Postcards*, first movement, mm. 1-5.

**POSTCARDS**
I. From the Mountains

Bright Sheng
Example 25: Illustration of the percussive color from the celesta. Bright Sheng. Postcards, first movement, mm. 42-47.

3.6 The Role of String Instruments

Sheng uses string instruments not only in the foreground in melodic roles, but also for lighter textures as background material, for special effects, and for dynamic changes. At the end of the first movement, Sheng explores using artificial harmonics in the strings as a background to the woodwind trio discussed above. The long harmonics played by the strings are similar to the piano’s pedal effect. This background provides the winds with a lighter supporting texture and it is easier for the listener to focus on the folkloric melody played by the winds (see Example 26).
Example 26: Illustration of the string harmonic as background. Bright Sheng. *Postcards*, first movement, mm. 53-59.

Sheng also specifies certain techniques from the strings to create percussive effects. The strings are assigned to play pizzicato extensively in *Postcards*. For example, in the second movement, the composer creates a dovetailing effect by pizzicato from the strings (see Example 27). Sheng makes the contrast between the strings’ short plucking effects with the winds’ long
and connected melodic line. Example 27 shows Sheng’s ability to sharpen the contrast by different articulations between sections in the orchestra.

Sheng was deeply influenced by Bartók regarding the use of pizzicato effects. Bartók was very important in bringing these extended techniques into the mainstream for string players.

There is an example in his *Concerto for Orchestra* that is directly related to *Postcards*. Bartók used the strumming pizzicato chords effects (see Example 28). Sheng applies the same pizzicato in the third movement of *Postcards* and creates a strong percussive sound and what Adler calls an “arpeggiated effect”\(^48\) in the strings (see Example 29).

Example 28: Illustration of the use of strumming pizzicato by Bartók. Béla Bartók. *Concerto for Orchestra*, fifth movement, mm. 1-9

![Example 28: Illustration of the use of strumming pizzicato by Bartók. Béla Bartók. *Concerto for Orchestra*, fifth movement, mm. 1-9](image1)


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\(^{48}\) Ibid., 37.
The use of the snap pizzicato, often called “Bartók pizzicato,” can also be found in the string writing in several spots. At the end of the third movement, Sheng assigned the strings except the double basses to play the snap pizzicatos in unison (see Example 30). This gesture gives a striking effect to the music and intensifies the energy produced by the rhythmic element. Bartók’s influence is clear.

Example 30: Illustration of the snap pizzicato. Bright Sheng. Postcards, third movement, mm. 132-139.

Sheng demonstrates his understanding and knowledge of string instruments in other ways as well. He often specifies placement of the bow to execute the desired sound. In the second movement, the violins and cellos are required to play at the bottom of the bow (al tallone). With the natural weightiness of the bow structure, the strings can produce a strong core sound. This al tallone gesture is striking and effective (see Example 31). In the same passage, the strings play in unison. Adler pointed out that using unison strings “builds in dynamic to create great tension.”

Therefore, the melodic material played by the strings here is powerful and may be heard above the dense texture.

\(^{49}\) Ibid., 130.
Example 31: Illustration of the bow placement instruction and string unison passage. Bright Sheng. Postcards, second movement, mm. 64-66.

3.7 Stratification

Stratification is the term derived from the layering style of Stravinsky’s orchestral music. This technique is clearly presented in The Rite of Spring. Roig-Francolí describes stratification as “different lines or textural elements… presented as clearly audible, simultaneous, but separate elements.”

In Postcards, Sheng employs the same technique. In Example 32, Sheng presents three elements at the same time during the progression of the music. The wind section plays a slurred figure in unison as the first element while the brass section presents the folkloric material as the second element. The piano, percussion, and the strings present the third element together to provide the passage with highly percussive and rhythmic gestures. By playing in octave unison, the effect is penetrating and striking. All three elements deliver their independent materials with equal importance and unique character. In Example 32, Sheng’s stratification depicts the

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programmatic elements of the subtitle “The Savage Land” and illustrates his mastery and skill in orchestration.

CHAPTER 4
PERFORMANCE CONSIDERATIONS

Sheng endows Postcards with a detailed design of rhythmic complexity. His diverse orchestration techniques, such as the use of string artificial harmonics and wide extreme ranges add to its performance difficulty. In order to lead Postcards, a conductor needs to have a thorough grasp of these related challenges, which are likely to occur during rehearsals. With the research material provided in this study, it is hoped that a conductor will have improved resources to enhance preparation. The three primary concerns for a conductor preparing Postcards are, (1) rhythmic complexity (2) orchestration idioms and (3) atmosphere and long phrase.

4.1 Rhythmic Complexity

According to Sheng, the most challenging part for preforming Postcards will be the rhythm.51 He singled out the swing rhythm and cross-rhythm in the third movement. Regarding the swing rhythm, Sheng said, “The third movement is a piece that you have to swing. You could take the tempo a little bit slower. It does not have to be really in tempo. It is important that everybody kind of grooves together and you then get some kind of swing.”52 This swing rhythm forms the ostinato throughout the third movement. (see Example 33). It is important that a conductor coordinates this swing rhythm and the orchestra members will thereby play with the swing feeling but without forfeiting good ensemble.

51 Bright Sheng, interview with author, 30 December 2014.
52 Ibid.

Sheng also mentioned his cross-rhythm in the third movement (see Example 34). Cross-rhythm means “the regular shift of some of the beats in a metric pattern to points ahead of or behind their normal positions in that pattern, for instance the division of 4/4 into 3+3+2 [eighth notes], or 9/8 into 2+2+2+3 [eighth notes].”

About the use of this technique, Sheng said, “In the middle of the piece, the cross-rhythm from the brass and string sections, those are very difficult. You have to work with those rhythms to get it right.” Since Sheng writes each section of the orchestra with different melodic material and articulations by the use of stratification, it is even more challenging for the orchestra members to achieve a cohesive ensemble when they have mastered the cross-rhythm within the passage. Therefore, a conductor needs to carefully rehearse each section of the orchestra with rhythmic precision and make sure the conducting gestures of the changing meter patterns are clear and precise in order for the orchestra members to follow easily.

53 “Cross-rhythm,” Grove Music Online
54 Bright Sheng, interview with author, 30 December 2014.
4.2 Orchestration Idioms

Sheng employs string harmonics extensively in *Postcards*. These harmonics are mainly artificial harmonics in order to get the desired pitch for a specific effect (see Example 35). A conductor needs to be aware of the executions of these artificial harmonics in order to help orchestra members achieve the sounding pitch and needed effects in the passage. Sheng asks the strings to execute the artificial harmonics either as long notes as harmonic background or as a glissando effect. These gestures provide a transparent quality to the texture and a conductor will need to the know how to achieve these effects beforehand.

Example 35: Illustration of the string artificial harmonics in the fourth movement. Bright Sheng. *Postcards*, fourth movement, mm. 25-32.

As noted earlier, Sheng requires the wind players to play at wide extreme ranges in order to get a penetrating sound. In Example 36, the clarinet plays at a high register but within the soft volume at the first entrance. Also, the oboe plays at the high extreme of its register in order to bring out the direct sound quality. These registrations are very challenging for wind players to achieve. The conductor needs to be aware of these issues in order to better communicate with the players during the rehearsals.

4.3 Atmosphere and Long Phrase

Sheng also mentioned the importance of atmosphere in *Postcards*. He said, “It is more about atmosphere. You have to get to the right mood and the right character.” Therefore, a conductor should emphasize the characters and articulations during the preparations with the orchestra. Sheng also said that “*Postcards* is a work influenced by the Chinese orchestra, but players should still try to [sustain] the long phrases in music, like a Western orchestra does. One of the things that I try very hard is to [achieve] long phrases in music” Therefore, by understanding the composer’s wish, a conductor should sustain the melodic line during the rehearsals and make sure the orchestra is sustaining long phrases to approximate the human voice singing.

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55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Sheng successfully fuses Chinese music elements with Western musical traditions in *Postcards*. He mixes his ingredients with care and imagination, giving them equal importance. By utilizing polyrhythm, rhythmic units as *ostinato* and polytonality, he weaves Chinese folkloric elements into Western classical structures. With the masterful skills of orchestration employed in *Postcards*, the composer displays a palette of coloristic sound effects by using percussive articulations and extended techniques, such as extreme ranges of playing areas, glissandi, and string harmonics.

The final artistic work beautifully depicts different landscapes of China and transcends musical boundaries. This study hopes to help fill the gap in Sheng research and to call for further study of his other orchestral works. By understanding the composer’s hybrid style and orchestration, it is hoped that future conductors of *Postcards* will thereby have a better interpretive grasp in rehearsals and performances. It is also hoped that scholars of Bright Sheng’s music will have a better context for his orchestral compositions as a result of this in-depth study of *Postcards*. 
APPENDIX

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH BRIGHT SHENG
Lee:

What was your reason for composing Postcards?

Sheng:

Leon Kirchner was originally commissioned to write a piece for Yo-Yo Ma for Ruth and John Huss’s 20th wedding anniversary. So the patrons, Ruth and John Huss, read about me. And they were inspired by my music. They were on the board of the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra. So they called the manager of the orchestra. And the manager said, “Could we have lunch? And I will have a proposal.” So they had lunch.

The Husses asked if they could commission a piece for the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra. And the manager said, “That is a good idea. Whom do you have in mind as the composer?” They said, “Well, we have no idea. But we [emphasis added] want to choose the composer.” Because in the way Yo-Yo Ma tells the story, it was Yo-Yo who chose the composer and Yo-Yo chose his teacher at Harvard, Leon Kirchner. So that was a very awkward situation. But the manager said, “Okay, let me think about it and I will get back to you and see how we can deal with this.”

A few days later, the manager said to the Husses, “Yes, you can choose the composer. But you have to choose the composer from our list.” There were ten composers on the list, and the Husses chose me. I was flattered. I asked [the manager], “Why do you choose me?” The manager said, “It is because they took a first trip in 1970 to China and stayed in the same suite where Nixon had stayed. Your music reminds them of China, just like postcards, you know, descriptive of different parts of places. They had a great time there and had wonderful memories of the trip.” That is how Postcards came about.
Lee:

Did the special musical effects of *My Song* give you the desire to write *Postcards*?

Sheng:

I was interested in how at that time one piece could essentially be the same piece but in different versions. A lot of composers [have done] the same thing. I made *My Song* into a piano trio, and then [into] a work for the orchestra. Each of these versions is a different matter [writing for chamber ensemble as opposed to large orchestral ensemble]. So I did that. There are some really complicated rhythms in the third movement. [First I recomposed *My Song* into a piano trio and then expanded the work for full orchestra].

Lee:

Which of these three versions best describes your mood and your feelings?

Sheng:

I don’t know. I think they all have their own virtues and problems. But one thing for all three is that they are all very difficult. I haven’t learned the piano solo. I only learned the first two movements. I haven’t got the time to learn the third and the fourth movements. I have performed the piano trio many times and have recorded it. I have also conducted the orchestral version.

[Do] you compose? You should compose. Because I have a music program in Hong Kong and I am dealing with that. One of the problems nowadays is that most composers don’t perform and most performers don’t compose. It is ok if you compose even if you are not the best
composer. Certainly, what you compose might not be the repertoire that you conduct. But it doesn’t matter. The experience will help you to understand the mindset of the composer. The same thing applies to composers. And it is very important [that each profession understand the other’s work.]

Lee:

I just read your article about what Leonard Bernstein told you: that being a conductor on the podium, he is always composing at the same time. I think that is a very good saying.

Sheng:

Well, that is my interpretation of his words. He was the last individual to be both a first-rate composer and a first–rate conductor at the same time. And since Mahler, there weren’t any others.

Lee:

So can we say Postcards is a transcription of My Song? Could I put that into writing?

Sheng:

I would say it is an orchestral version rather than a transcription. It is quite different. You know, I have made transcriptions for other people’s music, like Brahms and Bernstein. That is quite a different process. I will not add notes or add lines to others’ music. My Song and Postcards are my own music. [I see things like] I need to add two bars here. I need to add
counterpoint or take it out. That is the freedom in my head. So I would not say that [the resulting newer work] is a transcription.

Lee:

I know that the second and fourth movements are based on Chinese folk songs. Is this true of the first or the third movement?

Sheng:

No, they are not based on Chinese folk songs, but they [derive from] the Chinese folk song style. The folk song style is Hua’er.\(^{57}\) I wrote an article about Hua’er. It is on my website.\(^{58}\) You can read about this. It describes some of the features of the Chinese folk song style.

Lee:

So how about the third movement?

Sheng:

The third movement is a savage dance. I wrote the tune. Actually, you can read my article Bartók, the Chinese Composer.\(^{59}\) You know, there are different ways of treating folk elements and essentially there are three major categories.\(^{60}\) And I think that is quite interesting. And this

\(^{57}\) He is referring to the first movement.
\(^{60}\) He writes: “the first category as to write an accompaniment to a folk melody unchanged or slight modified, though the accompaniment should be of secondary importance and should only serve as an ornamental setting for the precious stone: the peasant melody. The next level is the opposite: the folk melody only serves as a motto on which the work is built. The third level refers to the composer creates his own imitation of folk music, or
piece has two of those three categories. The first and third movements are kind of the second or third level. The second and fourth movements are motives that I took and developed from the Chinese folk songs. I learned a lot from Bartók. Now I am writing an opera, called *Dream of the Red Chamber*. [In the middle of the opera], there is a wild dance passage that is very exotic. I also got inspiration from Bartók on how to write that passage, especially from his orchestral work *The Miraculous Mandarin*.

**Sheng:**

One thing that you can also look into is the harmonic arrangement of the second movement. For example, at the beginning, you have these four notes, E-flat, F, B-flat and C. And that is how the piece ends with these same four notes. And what happened is that the climax, which is the loud part, goes to the end and everything else is half step up. Do you know Schenkerian analysis? When one reduces this [movement] to Schenkerian analysis, it is like an appoggiatura or suspension. So the bass voice has already reached the tonic, so to speak, but the upper voices do not resolve until the very end. It is very classical kind of thinking, you know. The same thing happens in the third movement. Harmonically, you have the motive, the two notes, you end with those two notes, but then everything else is on the other key, the black keys, so to speak, and then eventually, all resolved to this. You know this is actually my most extensive piece [to date] in terms of working with bitonality and different key areas. You know, essentially, after *H’un* (1988), do you know the piece? You should know that piece. That is the piece which put me on the map. It is very dissonant and very emotional. *H’un* (1988) is about the

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61 This example is at measure 56 in the second movement of *Postcards*. 

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Cultural Revolution. This was the first time I wanted to deal with these consonant and dissonant effects. And now I make a lot more extensive [use of different kinds of harmonic vocabularies.] I could almost do anything. Basically, harmonically, I feel a lot freer.

Lee:

Since we are on this subject, I find it fascinating how you can superimpose two pentatonic scales. What is the process for you to design this feature?

Sheng:

You know it is practice. If you keep composing, you learn how to do that. You could use pentatonic, or non-pentatonic scales. You have to work hard, try things you have not done. The dream scene in the opera which I am writing now, is using the harmonic language, which is quite dissonant from the rest of my opera works but also related. It is related on the surface but it is quite different. It is kind of stretching out. In terms of dreamland, the music has a kind of flow. It is not just merely atonal. It is not just a matter of making it dissonant or atonal. That is not the point. It flows. And dreaming is not grounded. That is very important to work on it. Because I have never done it, I have to create my new harmonic language just for those five minutes. And it is hard.

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62 Prior to the Dream of the Red Chamber (2015), Sheng’s opera includes The Song of Majnun (1992), May I Feel –An Opera In Seven Minutes (1996), The Silver River (1997), and Madame Mao (2003).
Lee:

Bartók has a concept of superimposing different modes that he called polymodal chromaticism. Has that idea ever influenced you?

Sheng:

You know we all studied Bartók’s music. Bartók had his own ideas. I am from a generation of composers who are all thinking about systems. A lot of composers had invented a system that works for them. Then they write music to fit that system which is the wrong approach. I think it is the wrong approach to invent a system and then to write the music to fit within that system. I think that is part of the problem [with] Schoenberg’s twelve-tone system. You see Stravinsky also had a system and Bartók also had a system. If you ever analyze their music of all the great minds of the twentieth century, you could never figure out a unified system for all of Stravinsky’s music or all Bartók’s music. You might figure out one section in one short piece. But you cannot have one system to fit them all. So my music is a little bit like that. I am a very theory-conscious person. So I worry about my pitches and every note. I am very conscious about pitch but I don’t think I have a system if you want me to talk about how I write the music harmonically. I could talk forever about these things. It doesn’t mean it will apply to my next piece. Because all my ideas are from my understanding about classical music.

Lee:

What is your orchestration style in Postcards?

Sheng:
In this piece, particularly, there is a lot that draws upon styles within a Chinese orchestra. [To Western ears], it might seem a little bit out of tune, like a Chinese orchestra. Sometimes I don’t realize things until they happen. For example, I wrote a piece, called *Shanghai Overture* (2007), based on Shanghai classical music. That music of course is Chinese music, and played by Chinese instruments. So when I orchestrated it, I have two piccolos above and one flute doubling which is unusual. Normally we would just use one flute and one piccolo. When you have two piccolos, the sound is out of tune. And I did not know that until we recorded the piece. I kept saying that the piccolo was out of tune. And the conductor had recorded with me a few times. He said, “Well, if you have two flutes and two piccolos [playing at the same time], it will get easily out of tune. If we try one piccolo, that will be in tune.” And we did that. But I think it did bother me, because it would sound like a Western symphony orchestra. With two piccolos, the balance is gone and it sounds more like a Chinese orchestra, which is more exotic. I did not realize that until that moment. We went with two piccolos, because that it how I heard it.

Lee:

At the beginning of *Postcards*’ first movement, I think it sounds really like a Chinese bamboo flute.

Sheng:

Yes, you know. This orchestration has some influences from a Chinese orchestra.

Lee:

Are there any rehearsal issues conductors need to be aware of in preparing *Postcards*?
Sheng:

I think one of the problems is rhythm. You know, there are some really tricky rhythms in the third movement. The third movement is a piece that you have to swing. You could take the tempo a little bit slower. It does not have to be really in tempo. It is important that everybody kind of grooves together and you then get some kind of swing. In the middle of the piece, the cross-rhythm from the brass and string sections, those are very difficult.\footnote{The specific example is at measure 106 in the third movement of \textit{Postcards}.}\footnote{The specific example is at measure 106 in the third movement of \textit{Postcards}.} You have to work with those rhythms to get it right. The rest of it, it is more about atmosphere. You have to get to the right mood and the right character. \textit{Postcards} is a work influenced by the Chinese orchestra, but players should still try to [sustain] the long phrases in music, like a Western orchestra does. One of the things that I try very hard is to [achieve] long phrases in music.

Lee:

Are there any balance issues because of the many wind solos in the piece?

Sheng:

It has very few wind and brass instruments. If the string sections are too large, you should probably cut down to a chamber orchestra. I think six or seven stands of violins will be enough.
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